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Military leaders plan, resource, and execute combat patrols and administrative directives on a daily basis and are well prepared and trained to do so. In contrast, one task that most subordinate leaders are undertrained for is hosting a Distinguished Visitor (DV). DVs range from senior military commanders, congressional delegations (CODELs), staff delegation (STAFFDELS), or higher headquarters' staff members.

All visits are the same, but different. Planning and resourcing a DV visit is the same, but each visit's execution should be tailored appropriately for the specific audience. Higher headquarters within the Department of Defense have protocol offices with a robust staff that are charged with planning, coordinating, and executing [DV visits](#), complete with established

standard operating procedures outlined in official documents such as the [Air Force Pamphlet 34-1202](#) and [TRADOC Memorandum 1-16](#). However, these resources do not help tactical formations coordinate and host a DV at their headquarters or outstations.

Lessons listed below come from hosting numerous DVs in various environments and are aimed at educating decision makers, leveraging additional resources, and showcasing our people. The opportunities DV events provide for tactical units require staffs and commanders to diligently plan, resource, and execute such visits.

Before the Event

Mindset: Everybody Freaks Out. Overthinking a DV visit is usually what stresses people out more than the actual visit. If a DV is considered “high threat,” do not feel like you can micromanage every aspect of how he or she will feel. Have a sense of conviction in what you say and you just may be a breath of fresh air.

Know Your Audience. Contact the DV’s personal staff, chief of staff, or executive assistant well before the visit. Confirm their intent, goals, expectations, timeline, and any pet peeves. Verify which medium - written, verbal, or graphic - they prefer. More importantly, know their background and understand how your operations fit into their priorities. For all DVs, read their biography and priorities. For CODELs, study relevant Congressional Research Service reports. For Country Teams (Ambassador, Chief of Station, Defense Attaches), review the Integrated Country Strategy. The purpose is to understand your audience and produce a program that is nested with their intent and interests.

Predictability. Coordinate all details such as timeline, uniform, and meeting location and publish a detailed schedule through the DV’s staff ahead of time. Doing so provides them time to prepare an engagement strategy and talking points. When things inevitably change, simply update the DV upon initial contact. Plan for a structured and controlled visit - no surprises. Finally, rehearse the visit. The schedule will always veer off course, so ensure you

rehearse the scheme of maneuver with all participants so it is professionally executed.

Hosting the Visit

Prioritize and Be Flexible. Much like all missions, your plan will not survive first contact. The DV will show up with a different timeline, more people, or their own vision for the visit. Stay flexible and focus on their priorities for the visit. Through research, you know why they are visiting. Prioritize and be deliberate in addressing concerns and providing candid feedback to support their decision making process. It is the reason for their visit, so deliver. Ensure your peers and subordinate leaders know the priorities and have a plan to conduct the visit in split teams if needed to meet the timeline and accommodate the audience. For example, it might be a better use of time to have a subordinate leader take the senior NCO, J3, etc. on a site tour and talk through your unit's needs while you take the DV through your more formal brief and agenda.

You're Not the Smartest Guy in the Room. Have the humility to know what you cannot and should not speak about. It will speak volumes of your influence as a leader if you heed to the expertise of your subordinates. If you do not have a subject matter expert in your ranks...find one. If you know your organization lacks expert knowledge, find someone who has it and include him or her in the program. This will showcase that you are resourceful in creating linkages and networks amongst individuals who make great teams.

Keep the Discussion Conversational. PowerPoints are monotonous and boring. Keep it short and go with bullet points that facilitate a discussion. Breaking out a map to brief off of will showcase a tangible understanding of the subject. DVs, especially commanders or people who are in charge of budgets, usually want to know opportunity costs and why? The quicker you address costs to the organization with a simple justification, the more likely the DV will 1) remember you, 2) agree and 3) dedicate a staff member to follow up with you.

They Want to Help. Invariably, at the engagement's conclusion, you will be asked what your organization needs. Be honest and tell them what you need (from their level) to be successful. This is your opportunity to get resources otherwise inaccessible through normal means. Write down 2-3 things the DV can do for your organization on a 3×5 card and keep it in your shoulder pocket for quick access. Ensure your chain of command is aware of these issues so they are not blind-sided.

After the Event

Follow-Up. So you think the visit went well... You are not done yet. Oftentimes follow up is a crucial, yet overlooked, step and should be a top priority in the following days. You and your subordinate leaders should have a post visit meeting immediately after to compare notes and discuss due outs and any noted friction points. You owe your supervisor/commander an immediate follow-up to provide highlights and specifically any friction points or issues so they are not blind-sided. If the DV had an action officer or aide with them, he/she needs to be your next follow-up to ensure a shared understanding of due-outs and requirements. Follow-up via e-mail so all points are recorded in writing and include all necessary parties as well as your supervisor for awareness.

Share Your Experience. Regardless of how the visit went, you owe it to your unit to share your experience. Type up an informal document or e-mail discussing highlights and specifics of the DV's personality, pet peeves, approach, priorities and interests, and disseminate it to your supervisor and peers. This is very relevant in a deployed environment as oftentimes that DV will visit multiple units within your organization.

In conclusion, every visit is different. Every DV is different. Conditions change on your end between visits. Bottom line: it starts with knowing the visitor(s) intent and YOUR commander's intent. Understanding your audience and executing a program that answers their questions is the overarching purpose when hosting a DV. If you are about to host a DV, do your research to identify the problem statement by talking to those who recently hosted

the DV, their personal staff, or your immediate commander. The visit is your opportunity to directly educate decision makers from the bottom-up and, more importantly, is an opportunity to showcase your organization and its people.

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