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CRISIS INTERVENTION SECTION **NEWS**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CRISIS INTERVENTION SECTION

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[“How Do They Do That?”
The Role of Mental Health Professionals in
Law Enforcement Specialty Teams](#)

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American society today is inundated with various crime shows and movies that popularize and even romanticize crisis and hostage situations. These situations on television are often managed to a successful resolution by a well-trained and extraordinarily calm hostage negotiator. While many would never question how the negotiator was able to talk an individual out of suicide or homicide, I found myself asking, “How do they do that?” I can now say that, through asking this question, my true interest began in understanding how mental health professionals can effectively provide training and assistance to law enforcement crisis intervention and/or hostage negotiation teams. More importantly, as a licensed mental health professional myself, I wondered how I could help and if somehow I had the knowledge and training that could benefit a team. Through experience, I now know that although television and the movies make this process appear so flawless at times, the truth is that it requires a great deal of expertise, courage, and focus on the part of all of the team members who respond to types of crisis situations.

The role of mental health professionals has become more significant in

both the training and developmental aspects of these types of law enforcement specialty teams. Given the very nature of the law enforcement work, police officers come face-to-face with crisis and potentially dangerous situations on nearly a daily basis. Some of these situations escalate or have already escalated into suicide calls, barricaded subject(s), or a hostage(s) taking. The majority of law enforcement departments have now established specialty teams which include officers trained in crisis intervention and hostage negotiation. For some smaller departments, these are combined as one team and are comprised of officers who have many additional duties as well. Although large police departments generally have either a mental health consultant or police psychologist on staff to offer ongoing trainings, many small departments do not necessarily have this additional benefit.

Although law enforcement crisis and hostage negotiators receive comprehensive training in how to approach and defuse potentially deadly situations through effective communication skills, one area in which mental health professionals can offer further insight is in psychopathology issues and the creation of training scenarios and role plays. Mental health professionals are trained to understand the underlying psychological disorders and family dynamics which can interact with crisis responses and thus they can provide specific information on various approaches in communication and conflict de-escalation. Given that mental health

disorders, domestic violence, and substance abuse are often a catalyst in many suicide threats and/or hostage takings, it becomes absolutely essential for negotiators to stay updated on these issues. In addition, mental health professionals can organize and provide role plays for the team to practice potential crisis scenarios. Although some crisis negotiators can make the process appear seamless, in reality, it takes much practice and preparation.

It is important, however, to differentiate the boundaries and responsibilities between the role of the crisis negotiator and the mental health professional on a specialty team. Although licensed mental health professionals often have extensive training in managing individual crisis responses, the trained law enforcement negotiator holds sole responsibility for negotiating directly with the subject(s). The crisis negotiator, as a law enforcement officer, has the support and influence of the SWAT team, if the situation escalates to the point of needed physical intervention. Mental health professionals can assist the team much more effectively through the provision of additional trainings and in providing further insight into human behavior.

From the perspective of a non-law enforcement officer, I would like to offer several suggestions which I believe are essential for other mental health professionals interested in providing training and consultation in this field:

- Take time to approach, get acquainted, and build trust effectively with a law enforcement department crisis and/or hostage negotiation team. Be patient as the police culture in general is not often immediately open to training provided by mental health professionals who are non-law enforcement officers. Begin with understanding the community and work involved from the police perspective. Many departments have ride-a-long programs, which can allow excellent opportunities to gain insight into daily issues encountered by police officers.

- Attend specialized trainings in crisis intervention and negotiation offered by local, regional, and national conferences. Specific topics generally offered are critical incident response, psychopathology for negotiators, negotiator stress and crisis intervention and communication skills.

- Read the research and practical literature which exists on crisis and hostage negotiations to learn more about the field in general. The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin is one excellent resource.

- Consider approaching smaller law enforcement agencies which do not have a police psychologist or mental health consultant for their specialty teams and provide trainings initially on a voluntary basis. This will allow you to provide a much needed service, gain an understanding of the agency structure and expectations, and begin to build a relationship with the team members.

- If you plan on specializing in this field, consider taking courses in criminal justice at an accredited local college or university or online program, or attend the local police academy. Although you may not necessarily need to become a full-time officer, you can serve as a reservist and this will be a valuable experience.

- Network with other mental health professionals or police psychologists in the field. Consider the possibility of a mentor through professional organizations such as the Association of Conflict Resolution.

- Join professional organizations and associations that specialize in crisis and hostage negotiations, such as the Florida Association of Hostage Negotiators or an applicable regional or national group.

- Identify and understand your own motives for wanting to provide these types of trainings. It is important to know that this type of work requires excellent boundaries and the ability to regulate your own stress.

Who Wants to Know?

Q: How can I find good trainings in the area of crisis intervention?

A: Dr. James Greenstone invites you to look at www.emotionalfirstaid.com or to call him at 817-882-9415 if you would like to discuss both crisis intervention certification and training or hostage negotiation training.

Co-Chair Tina Jaeckle also can provide you with information on board certification in this area. Professor of International Relations at American University Dr. Mitch Hammer has several excellent trainings. Please visit his website at www.hammerconsulting.org/index.html. More training information will be listed on the Crisis Intervention Section website at <http://www.mediate.com/acrcrisisnegotiation/> in the coming months.

Q: As a Norwegian, and as the chairman of the Norwegian Conflict Resolution Association, I would be curious on a lot of topics with regards to US ways of crisis intervention (if there are general US ways...). For instance, how are urban street gang conflicts handled? Are there ways other than police intervention? How are the police trained to handle these?

A: Although there are cases when an individual or individuals try to intervene immediately in a street gang conflict, these are high-risk interventions. Some of the most successful approaches begin long before a gang fight breaks out. These approaches usually contain two elements: on one end, they are proactive and involve a coordinated social support system in the community; on the other end, law enforcement personnel receive special gang training, while prosecutors make every effort to convict gang members who are violent offenders to the fullest extent that the law allows. In some cases, gang members can be deported.

There are some spectacular examples of gang intervention efforts in the United States.

- S.T.R.O.N.G. Youth (Struggling to Reunite Our New Generation), established by former gang member Sergio Argueta;
- Tookie's Corner, created by Stan Tookie Williams, founder of the Crips. Mr. Williams, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee who is now on death row, authored the famous "Peace Protocol," created "to address the social state of emergency regarding urban violence -- a comprehensive strategy for peace and reconstruction within the community";
- Operation Impact, Operation Cease Fire, and the G.R.E.A.T. program (Gang Resistance Education and Training) three of the successful law enforcement programs in the United States.

Please go to the Crisis Intervention Section website at <http://www.mediate.com/acrcrisisnegotiation/> for links to and more information about these programs

Special training for police:

Law enforcement gang prevention training typically includes these elements:

- Training in identifying gang members
- Training in criminal investigations
- Training in handling large-scale disturbances such as riots and large gang fights
- Members of the Gang Unit attend a monthly "roundtable" with representatives from other units and agencies such as Probation, Sheriffs, Criminal Intelligence and Parole, where they keep current with what is going on in the local gangs and share intelligence.

Q: What helps you stay alert and sharp during an extremely long intervention?

Gregory Vecchi, founding Co-Chair of ACR's Crisis Intervention Section, sent us this:

A: It's very important for negotiators to take care of themselves. Oftentimes they run themselves ragged because they want to be successful. It is critical to factor in rest and decompression for negotiators on long jobs:

- Stick to shifts of no more than 12 hours.
- Stay away from a lot of sweets and caffeine (donuts and coffee), drink lots of water.
- Encourage the subject to take breaks so you get a break.
- Use your time wisely when you have an opportunity to power nap.
- Factor in "hand offs" time which allows you to take breaks with little effect on the progress you have made. This is done by having another negotiator listen to what is going on and then introduce him or her. For example, "Bob (subject), you said you wanted to speak with your brother. I'm going to go work on that while Fred (other negotiator) continues to talk with you. Fred has been listening the whole time so you won't have to repeat what you said to me."
- Ensure that if there is something major that happens during the negotiation, all negotiators are notified immediately so they feel you have not forgotten to include them. This builds confidence in the negotiators' belief that they won't "miss anything."

Q: I would be very interested in a way to consider ADR approaches to couples in crisis where one is seeking a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO). Many statistics give rise to the inciting rather than protective effect of a TRO in domestic violence cases, where the filing spouse is in even greater danger with a TRO than without. Could intervention by another means be more effective?

A: High conflict relationships pose some of the most troubling and potentially dangerous situations for ADR professionals. Any attempts at mediation should be deferred until the safety of all parties, the disputing parties as well as the mediator can be clearly established. Although even filing for a protective order may escalate violence between the parties, especially if the abusive party fits the profile discussed above, not seeking such protection continues to send the message that the abusive behavior is acceptable.

I would strongly discourage ADR professionals from interfering with or advising a party against seeking a TRO, if that party feels the need for protection. It would be far better to allow the court process to proceed in the hopes the order may diffuse the potential for future violence. If the TRO process escalates the violence, there could be no clearer indication that the case is inappropriate for mediation.

Note: If you would like to e-mail Harriet McCollum, who provided this answer for us, and discuss further with her, contact Lynne Kinnucan at kinnucan@patriot.net.

Book Review

The Elements of Police Hostage and Crisis Negotiations

by James L. Greenstone

Reviewed by Corporal Lawrence J. McKinnon III

It did not take long after I started reading The Elements of Police Hostage and Crisis Negotiations before I discovered what a wonderful tool this book really is. Notice I said tool: this book is not just a book, it's something that should be in every negotiator's equipment bag right next to his bullhorn. Its simplistic format and informative content provided everything necessary for any negotiator or team leader, regardless of her level of experience.

All the teams around the country operate with the same basic missions and utilize similar techniques. What changes are the makeup and experience of each team and the equipment they may have available to them. This book provided information and guidelines that any size department within the country could use. It also provided many operational and training guidelines along with checklists and tables, all of which could be utilized as templates for department team protocol and SOPs.

One example in the book that I felt was extremely beneficial was the chapter "Making Contact and Beginning Negotiations." This is a critical and dangerous time in negotiations and a negotiator's first attempt to de-escalate a sometimes-hostile situation.

I firmly believe first impressions really count, especially in crisis situations, where the onset is a very volatile period of time for all involved. In this chapter the section, "Do's and Don't for Hostage and Crisis Negotiators", was right on the money and should be read by all negotiators until they have it memorized. It teaches how to engage better a subject when communicating with him/her for the first time.

This book is packed full of checklists and guidelines. I believe that every page will provide you with information that is highly useful in its practical applications.

Having served nearly 24 years as a Tampa Police Officer and 12 of the past years as a hostage negotiator, including being directly involved in hundreds of hostage/barricaded situations, I found this book extremely beneficial as a quick reference guide. It is a comprehensive training manual that covers the complete spectrum of what it takes to be a negotiator and to operate as a team. It provides the key elements needed to accomplish the task, and the hazards to avoid.

I think this book will quickly become a reference book to hostage negotiators, as the PDR has been to doctors and law enforcement personnel for years.

Corporal McKinnon is a Hostage Negotiator Team Leader with the Tampa Police and a member of the Florida Association of Hostage Negotiators.

Recommended Reading

We will update this information in each newsletter and on the Crisis Intervention website

www.mediate.com/acrcrisisnegotiation).

Between newsletters, look for new information on books, trainings and other resources on our home page.

- Negotiating Across Cultures by Raymond Cohen
- Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills by Neil Katz and John Lawyer
- Interpersonal Conflict by Wilmot and Hocker
- "World Destruction, A Cultural Analysis of a Threat Communique," by Dr. Mitch Hammer:
<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2002/sept02leb.pdf>

ACR Annual Conference: new workshop for crisis interveners!

Please plan to join us at ACR's Annual conference in Minneapolis, MN, from September 29 through October 1. We are hosting a reception (with great food!) for all of you and Tina Jaeckle, new Co-Chair of ACR's Crisis Intervention Section, is giving a workshop titled "Crisis Negotiation Skills for Conflict Resolution Professionals."

NEXT ISSUE:

- Active listening: You haven't heard this before!
- Recognizing signs of violence, and tools for early intervention
- Actual cases and lessons learned
- Becoming certified as a crisis intervenor