

Hostage Negotiation: Psychological Principles and Practices

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ABSTRACT: *Resolution of hostage crises may take hours or days of intensely focused and stressful negotiation, requiring the use of virtually every crisis intervention strategy known to psychology and law enforcement. This article describes the nature of hostage crises and the factors that contribute to prospects for a successful resolution. Outlined are basic strategies of hostage negotiation and crisis management culled from the psychological and law enforcement literature. Recommendations are offered to civilians for surviving a hostage crisis. Finally, the article emphasizes the collaborative working relationship between mental health and law enforcement professionals that can have a lifesaving impact for citizens in peril. [International Journal of Emergency Mental Health, 2005, 7(4), pp. 277-298].*

KEY WORDS: *hostage negotiation, crisis intervention, police psychology, negotiation psychology, emergency mental health*

In the world of emergency mental health, there are few emergencies as critical as a hostage crisis. Lives are at imminent risk of violent death, often at the hands of an unstable and desperate perpetrator, in the midst of a chaotic and uncontrolled environment. Most hostage crises combine elements of suicidal despair and homicidal rage, often aggravated by a serious mental disorder and fueled by drugs or alcohol. In other cases, hostages are at the mercy of a cold-blooded criminal who has no qualms about killing his victims if he thinks that will get him what he wants. Resolution of hostage crises may take hours or days of incredibly focused and intense negotiation, requiring the use of virtually every crisis intervention strategy in the psychology and law enforcement repertoire of skills.

Along with homicide investigation and undercover operations, hostage negotiation has achieved iconic status in

the world of popular drama. This article describes the nature of real-life hostage crises and the factors that contribute to both greater risk and prospects for a successful resolution. It then outlines basic strategies of hostage negotiation and crisis management culled from the psychological and law enforcement literature. While no printed text can substitute for adequate training and experience, a solid foundation of academic knowledge is a crucial first step in mastering any complex skill domain in psychology, law enforcement, or other area of professional expertise (Hedlund et al, 2003; Klein, 1998; Spaulding, 2005).

This article has a dual audience – both mental health and law enforcement professionals – because the author believes that a collaborative relationship between these two disciplines is crucial in handling the complex duties of policing and criminal justice in modern society, including the life-and-death responsibilities of crisis intervention. More broadly, the psychological principles and practices of hostage negotiation may be productively applied to the resolution of interpersonal crises of almost every type, from school and

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workplace violence, to crime victim trauma and domestic violence, to terrorism and political crises (Boltz, Dudonis, & Schultz, 1996; Dattilio & Freeman, 2000; Flin, 1996; Gilliland & James, 1993; Greenstone & Leviton, 2001; Kleepsies, 1998; Miller, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2005).

Finally, present space limitations permit only a description of the basic techniques and protocols for hostage negotiation. For further information on formation of a hostage and crisis negotiation team and the broader role of police psychologists within the crisis negotiation and in law enforcement fields generally, the reader is referred to several sources (Blau, 1994; Greenstone, 2005; Miller, 2006; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Russell & Beigel, 1990).

Hostage Crises: Facts and Stats

Some basic background information will provide an appropriate context for discussing the collaboration of psychology and law enforcement in successful hostage negotiation (Borum & Strentz, 1992; Hammer & Rogan, 1997; Hare, 1997; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Rogan, 1997; Russell & Biegel, 1990).

Fewer than 20 percent of law enforcement critical incidents deal with actual hostage taking, and most crises are successfully resolved without loss of life. In fact, containment and negotiation strategies have been shown to yield a 95 percent success rate in terms of resolving a hostage crisis without fatalities to either hostages or hostage-takers (HTs), a remarkable statistic for any form of lifesaving crisis intervention strategy.

There are three especially dangerous periods during a hostage crisis. The first is the initial 15-45 minutes when confusion and panic are likely to be greatest. The second is during the surrender of HTs, when hair-trigger emotions, ambivalence, and lack of coordination among HTs and crisis team members can cause an otherwise successful resolution to go bad. Finally, tactical assault (“going in”) to rescue the hostages carries the highest casualty rate, probably for two interrelated reasons. First, the very fact that tactical intervention is necessary indicates that all reasonable attempts to resolve the crisis by negotiation have failed, and that violence against the hostages has already taken place or is imminent. Second, if a firefight ensues, the resulting panic and confusion may result in hostages being inadvertently injured or killed.

For a variety of reasons, psychologists rarely serve as hostage negotiators themselves, but they perform a range of important functions on a law enforcement crisis management team (Greenstone, 2005; McMains, 1988a, 1988b; McMains & Mullins, 1996). In general, crisis teams that include a mental health consultant are rated as more effective than those that do not have a mental health professional. There may be a number of reasons for a mental health consultant to be on a crisis team. Certainly, a qualified mental health consultant can provide valuable services in both training and on-scene support that can enhance the overall effectiveness of the team. Another important difference, however, may relate to departmental attitude. A law enforcement agency that is willing to allocate resources for a mental health consultant is also probably more likely to have a greater investment and commitment to performance excellence in general, and so may take special care in the training and provisioning of *all* units, including mental health, weapons and tactics, communications, and so on. In this regard, police department crisis team members generally rate communications training as the most valuable skills utilized by negotiators. It is here that psychologists can make some of their most valuable contributions.

Types Of Hostage Crises

Every situation is different, but there appear to be some general categories of hostage crisis (Boltz et al, 1996; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Rogan, 1997; Russell & Biegel, 1990), although the subtypes may overlap.

In one scenario, criminals actually plan to use hostages as part of a robbery attempt. Inasmuch as the presence of hostages, or of any other unwanted third parties, usually complicates a criminal heist, robbers will include this drastic planning only when the stakes are comparatively high, and when escape is deemed to be virtually impossible without the insurance of hostages. Usually, these are one-time, big-score robberies by ruthless perpetrators who plan to disappear with the loot. These types of crimes sometimes overlap with political motives.

Much more common is the ordinary bank or store robbery gone sour. In this scenario, the perpetrators plan for a quick in-and-out, but law enforcement appears on the scene sooner than predicted, and now the robbers are trapped in the building with unwitting employees and customers who have become de facto hostages. Seeking to exploit the situ-

ation, the robbers may then attempt to use the hostages as bargaining chips to effect their escape.

Another common scenario that may create inadvertent hostages is a domestic crisis that spins out of control. Here, what begins as a fight between the couple escalates to the point where one of the combatants, usually the male, effectively barricades his mate inside the dwelling and refuses to let her leave. When law enforcement arrives, the perpetrator then makes demands for her release and for that of any other family members present, as well as for his own escape. In another version of this scenario, an estranged spouse or lover shows up at the worksite of the mate, often prepared for a confrontation, and sometimes armed (Miller, 1999, 2001, 2005). As a result, this situation becomes a *de facto* workplace violence/hostage event when the subject refuses to let the other employees leave, threatens their safety, and makes demands for their release.

Overlapping the above category is the mentally disordered subject who stages an action involving hostages in order to make a point or press demands related to his delusional ideas. He may be frankly psychotic and his demands clearly out of bounds with reality (“Release all the political prisoners of the great capitalist conspiracy”), or there may be a plausible-sounding, tightly paranoid delusional agenda that drives his actions (“Let my brother out of prison before the guards are bribed to kill him”). The sheer unpredictability of mentally disordered behavior makes this type of hostage situation one of the most dangerous, and it is here that the crisis team psychologist can make an important contribution in determining the most effective negotiating strategy.

The political or religiously-motivated HT typically has a clear ideological agenda for his actions, although it may include petty robbery to finance his cause. This may overlap with the classic definition of a terrorist (Boltz et al, 1996; Miller, 2002a, 2003, Schlesinger & Miller, 2003), and is likely one of the most dangerous hostage situations, because many of these perpetrators are quite willing to die for their cause and to kill others with impunity.

Prisoners planning an escape may deliberately include hostages in their plans, since they know that there is virtually no other leverage they have in getting out. These situations may be especially dangerous for hostages (usually guards or other prison personnel, but also sometimes fellow inmates) because such would-be escapees feel they have nothing to lose. In other situations, the prison uprising may involve demands for better conditions or other conces-

sions – or a thwarted escape may develop into such a protest action by default – in which case the hostages still provide some leverage, but are apt to be treated more humanely in order to generate maximum sympathy for the inmates’ cause.

High-Risk Factors In Hostage Crises

Certain factors make some hostage crises more dangerous than others (Fuselier, Van Zant & Lanceley, 1991; Greenstone, 1995, 2005). Some of these factors are related to the general context in which the crisis unfolds, life circumstances of the HT, and so on. Other high-risk factors relate to the specific moment-to-moment situation of the particular crisis.

One especially dangerous risk factor is whether the hostage is known to and/or deliberately selected by the HT. This is consistent with the general finding that most interpersonal violence is perpetrated on people known to the aggressor. Unlike the accidental bank robbery HT, a HT who purposefully selects his hostage is usually on a mission to make a statement or “teach them a lesson.” Common examples include romantic quarrels or workplace beefs. The goal often involves at least frightening or intimidating the intended hostages, if not actually injuring or killing them. Particularly dangerous is a situation where the HT intends to commit a murder-suicide (Hillbrand, 2001). In fact, such situations often inadvertently become hostage crises when police arrive and surround the area.

In many such cases, there has been a history of problems between HT and victim, most commonly domestic battery calls, that have required a police response in the past, and the couple may be well-known to local police. This time, however, the incident has escalated to a hostage and barricade situation, and the stakes are higher. Often associated with this is a past history of generally impulsive and aggressive acts on the part of the HT. As the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, someone who has a track record of using threats or force to get his way will be especially likely to do so in a high-tension hostage situation, and he may correspondingly be more dangerous and unstable during the crisis. A diagnosed major mental disorder is another general risk factor for violence.

Although stress, by itself, rarely makes an otherwise peaceful person turn violent, the cumulative build-up of multiple stressors over time is a general risk factor for violent acting-out, especially in persons already predisposed to impulsivity and low frustration tolerance. This is commonly

associated with a lack of family grounding or social support, itself a general risk factor for dysfunctional behavior. A sense of isolation can fuel paranoid thinking, leading to an impulse to “do something about it.” Correspondingly, obnoxious, intimidating people tend to alienate those around them, often leading to self-fulfilling prophecies of mutual recrimination, mistrust, and animosity, setting the stage for violence.

Certain cultures condemn any show of weakness or loss of face. The crossover point between a common domestic dispute or convenience store holdup and escalation to a full-blown hostage-barricade crisis often comes when police arrive and order the surrender of the suspect, who then feels compelled not to back down at any cost. This may bode ill for negotiations if the HT feels that making concessions, releasing hostages, or settling for anything less than his full demands is “punking out.”

Conversely, expressions of hopelessness and helplessness are a sign of clinical depression and may be a risk factor for suicide. Anything that indicates that the HT has already decided not to live through the crisis is a bad sign, inasmuch as a person with no hope or regard for his own life will typically have little regard for the lives of others. Of course, some HTs will explicitly declare that they are going to die by their own hand, and some will deliberately provoke suicide-by-cop confrontations (Homant, Kennedy & Hupp, 2000; Hutson et al, 1998; Kennedy, Homant, & Hupp, 1998; Lord, 2000; Mohandie & Meloy, 2000; Pinizzotto, Davis & Miller, 2005). A fair number of suicides during a hostage crisis actually spare the hostages – perhaps the HT’s last noble gesture – but this certainly cannot be counted on, and such situations must be treated as extremely dangerous.

Making a verbal will, or “setting affairs in order” is a somewhat less direct but nevertheless ominous way of indicating that the end is near. Often, this is done precisely for dramatic effect in front of the hostages, especially in a domestic situation, to show them how badly the HT has been hurt by the family members. In some cases, this may actually be a good sign, as the intent of the suicidal HT is to have the family live on and suffer with the memory of “what they drove me to.” Again, however, always err on the side of caution. Also, where there are no substantive demands for escape, this usually indicates that the HT knows he’s not coming out alive.

Sometimes, HTs will make direct threats to hostages. These may only be a desperate ploy to manipulate authorities into granting demands, but they may also represent a

clear and present danger to the hostages by a HT who is growing increasingly desperate. As with suicidal threats, saying they’re going to do it is, more often than not, a signal that they *are* going to do it.

In between the first few confusing minutes of the hostage crisis and the end-point surrender or tactical entry (where unavoidable), most HTs do not deliberately and gratuitously abuse their hostages during the prolonged negotiation phase. The HTs are usually more focused on their demands for escape or validation, and realize that unnecessary harm to hostages will only further antagonize the authorities. HTs who abuse their charges are usually mentally disturbed, have a past history of abusive or contentious interactions with the hostages, such as in family settings or workplace beefs, may be religious or political terrorists who single out certain hostages to make a point, or the HT may simply be a sadistic psychopath on a power trip.

Test-firing or threat-firing of a weapon, or other deliberately provocative action may be a sign of impulsivity, poor judgment, or a tendency toward especially violent behavior. Such *display behavior* only serves to heighten the unpredictability and dangerous of the situation as a whole. It may also represent a suicide-by-cop gesture.

Hostage Crisis Response: Basic Protocol

Expertise and innovation are best played out on the framework of a basic procedural structure for managing hostage episodes. While most life-and-death crises rarely go by the numbers, there does appear to be a certain regularity that guides the evolution of the crisis and the measures used to contain it, although not always in same order. The following should be thought of as an overall outline protocol for the psychological principles and practices of hostage and crisis negotiation (Greenstone, 1995, 2005; Lanceley, 1999; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Wind, 1995).

Secure the perimeter. The first priority is to isolate and contain the HT and to secure the perimeter. You don’t want an armed HT roaming throughout a busy office building, or fleeing onto a bank or grocery store parking lot, where he has access to vehicles and other civilians. As a general rule, the perimeter should be large enough to allow freedom of movement of the tactical and negotiating teams, and small enough to be kept under observation and control by the authorities. More than one perimeter (e.g., inner and outer) may be necessary.

Provide for Scene control. The world hasn't stopped just because you're trying to manage a crisis situation. You now have the dual task of working around the realities of the surrounding community and, where possible, getting the surrounding community to work around your needs. This includes marshalling medical services, controlling local traffic, dealing with the media, and keeping the surrounding community sufficiently informed to protect their safety.

Obviously, some form of communication needs to be established with the HT because the function of the negotiating team is to negotiate. As a rule, the sooner you begin a dialog with the HT, the less time he has to stew and consider drastic options.

While face-to-face contact between the negotiator and the HT is categorically discouraged because of the potential danger involved, any safe means of communication – line phone, cell phone, bullhorn, or even digital pager or e-mail – should be established as soon as possible. Although less relied upon in this age of cell phones, a *throw phone* (as in thrown through the window) is a telephone specifically designed for the HT to plug into a jack in order to establish a direct, dedicated line to the negotiating team. During prolonged negotiations, this apparatus may become necessary if the HT's cell battery dies or if structural impediments interfere with the cell signal.

General Communication Strategies In Hostage Negotiations

While always striving to customize the communications approach, depending on your understanding of the HT's motives and personality, there are a number of general recommendations for dealing with crisis situations that can be applied to hostage negotiations (Call, 2003; Greenstone, 1995, 2005; Lanceley, 1999; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Misino, 2002; Noesner, 1999; Noesner & Dolan, 1992).

Although law enforcement agencies always strive for prompt response times by their crisis teams, sometimes the realities of the situation dictate that the first officer on the scene must begin communication with the HT – a kind of “psychological CPR” – until the full crisis team can be mobilized and take over. In such cases, the first responder's job is to keep basic lines of communication open until the crisis team negotiator can assume the primary communication task. Whether involving the first-responding officer or the official departmental negotiator, there are several important principles

to keep in mind when beginning negotiations.

As much as is within your control, minimize background distractions. This applies both to yourself and the HT. Distractions include more than one person speaking at a time, background radio chatter, road noise, etc. If there is noise at the HT's end, ask him if he can go to a quieter part of the room, speak up a little, or otherwise enhance the clarity of the communication channel.

Open your dialog with an introduction and statement of purpose: “This is Sgt. Bruce McGill of the Metropolitan Police Department Crisis Unit. I'm here to listen to you and to try to make sure everybody stays safe.” Keep the introduction as simple as possible, and always strive for honesty and credibility. Keep your voice firm but calm, and convey your confidence in the fact that this is a temporary crisis that will be resolved safely. Everybody at the scene – including the HT – knows that the negotiator's and hostage team's first and foremost priority is to ensure the hostages' safety. At the same time, it is still possible to evince a sincere concern for everybody's well-being, including the HT's by communicating with respect, directness, lack of deception, and integrity. From a practical standpoint, if the HT feels he's being duped, patronized, or manipulated from the outset, he's not going to want to cooperate with you, which only serves to put everybody in greater danger.

To build rapport, ask what the HT likes to be called. When in doubt, address him respectfully. As much as possible, you want to address the HT by a name that is familiar to him. At the same time, you want to avoid phony camaraderie, so try to find out what he likes to be called. If not sure, don't automatically assume that William will respond favorably to “Bill” or “Willy.” If no first name is available, use respectful titles, like “Mr. Smith.” If the name is unknown, use “sir,” rather than “pal” or “buddy.”

Speak slowly and calmly. People's speech patterns often mirror the tone of the dominant conversation, so provide a model of slow, calm, clear communication from the outset. This doesn't mean speaking in a mechanical, droning monotone, but avoid letting your pitch rise or your speech rate quicken excessively in response to frustration, irritation, or provocation. Set the standard of mature, adult conversation from the outset.

Adapt your conversation to HT's vocabulary level. You want to avoid either talking over the head of the HT, which most people find irritating, or patronizing him by talking down

to him or trying to mimic his pattern or level of speech too closely. A few minutes of conversation should allow you to adapt your own speech to his style and rhythm. Of course, if the HT's native language is not English, a negotiator fluent in his language would be ideal, but if this is not possible, at least a skilled interpreter should be available.

Even with foul-mouthed HT's, avoid unnecessary profanity. Negotiators sometimes confuse the active listening technique of mirroring (see below) with matching the HT, epithet-for-epithet. People under stress are more likely to use profanity. If you respond in kind – even in a well-meaning attempt to “speak the guy's language” – you may end up only with an unproductive back-and-forth stream of “shit-this/fuck-that” invective. Remember, you're trying to model mature, adult speech and behavior in order to calm the situation. So just as you modulate your voice tone in the direction of greater control and rationality, do so as well with your speech content, which should always be less inflammatory than the HT's. This doesn't mean you have to orate like a schoolteacher or church pastor, just use a bit of verbal decorum, which, incidentally, is also a sign of respect.

Your communication may be met with anything from stony silence, to explosive cursing, to psychotic ranting, to confused rambling, to intoxicated mumbling. Allow productive venting, but deflect dangerous escalation of speech tone and content. In many instances, the whole rationale for the hostage situation is for the HT to “make a point” or “tell his story.” Good. If that's what he wants, allow him to freely express his frustrations and disappointments, but don't let venting become ranting, which can lead to further loss of control. The goal of emotional expression should always be to blow off steam, not to further stoke the boiler. When the HT's ventings seem to be bubbling over, use appropriate de-escalation techniques, as described below.

If you're not sure what the HT is saying, ask for clarification. Clarity is a general principle of negotiation and in all forms of crisis intervention. Don't respond to, or act on, a HT's statement unless you're reasonably sure you know what he means. A basic principle of negotiation is to listen twice as much as you talk. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification: asking someone to help you understand what they're saying is a sign of interest, concern, and respect.

Focus your conversation on the HT, not the hostages. In most circumstances, the less the HT thinks about the hostages, the better. This is especially true where the hostages are not neutral, i.e. family members or coworkers who have

been targeted to make a statement. Remember that hostages represent power and control to the hostage taker, so try not to do anything that will remind him of this point.

Inquire about the welfare of all parties, but focus on the HT first, and then weave in concern for the other people: “Are you okay? Are you injured? Does anyone need medical attention? Is everybody safe for now?” This is an exception to the general rule of not soliciting demands, because you want to firmly establish your concern for *everyone's* welfare, including the HT's, from the outset. Also, if someone really does require emergency medical attention, you don't want to overlook the opportunity to provide it early on.

Be supportive and encouraging about the outcome. Downplay the HT's actions so far: “Right now, it's only an attempted robbery, nobody's been hurt,” or if there has already been an injury or fatality: “...nobody else has been hurt.” Remember, the goal is to keep violence from escalating from *this point on*. If there is a chance of saving lives, then spin the situation any credible way you can. If shots have been fired, point out that no one has yet been hurt. If injuries have occurred, emphasize the lack of fatalities so far. If a hostage has died, focus on saving the rest. The emphasis should always be on what the HT can *still do* to save his own life and create a favorable impression that will score him points later on. The basic message is that whatever the HT has done so far, the situation is still salvageable and the HT can still earn credit for doing the right thing:

“William, I want you to know that, even though the guy got shot [passive tense: *it wasn't completely your fault*] in the foot [*not a critical wound*] at the beginning of this thing [*everybody was confused*], all kinds of unexpected stuff can happen in a panic situation. But you've done a good job of keeping things cool from that point on [*you're still in control, but in a positive way*], and no one else has been hurt [*you're now part of the solution, not the problem*]. That counts for a lot, and everybody here knows it [*there's still hope of avoiding dire consequences*]. Let's see if we can keep on keeping the peace for now so we can all come out of this safely, okay? [*we want you to be safe, too, not just the hostages*]”

Along with the above, compliment the HT for any positive actions he's taken. If the HT does something constructive, reinforce it. This applies whether the action is a major thing, like release of one or more hostages, or a seemingly minor thing like allowing the hostages to eat or go to the bathroom, or keeping the phone line open. The aim here is to

establish a pattern of constructive actions that allow the HT to reap repeated positive reinforcement, leading ultimately to the “big score” of surrender with no further injuries to anyone.

Throughout the communication process, you should be attempting to gather information about the HT’s background, criminal history, mental health and/or substance abuse history, family structure, employment status, and so on. Psychologists can aid the crisis team by providing practical guidance as to the nature of any diagnoses or personality patterns observed, and their implications for approaches to negotiation strategy. It may also be important to know something about the hostages as well, as this may have implications for their response to the crisis and their safety. Such intelligence-gathering also includes basic tactical information such as the physical layout of the hostage scene, surrounding community, and access to support services.

Verbal Communications Tactics in Hostage Negotiation

Aside from general communication strategies, certain specific verbal communication tactics may prove useful in hostage crises (McMains & Mullins, 1996; Noesner, 1999; Noesner & Webster, 1997). Think of these as a repertoire of roles to play during a crisis – not “roles” in a deceptive, theatrical sense, but in the manner of being what Lazarus (1993) calls an *authentic chameleon*, that is, coloring your style of communication and interaction to best fit the subject, but with the overarching goal being a sincere and honest commitment to everyone’s welfare. In that regard, always read your subjects as accurately as possible and customize your negotiating approach using one or more combinations of the following communication tactics and roles.

Reasonable problem-solver. “I know we both want this to be over with nobody getting hurt. A lot of confusing stuff’s gone down so far and I’m not sure we all understand each other. Let’s put our heads together and figure out how to solve this.”

Buddy-fellow traveler. “I hear you, man. I had my beefs with lousy bosses in my time, too. They can fry your brain and make you want to blow. But you proved your point, man. No one’s gonna forget this lesson. So let’s keep it that way. End it now and he’s the one they’re gonna blame. If you hurt someone, they’re all gonna be distracted from the main point of what he did, and then it may all fall on you. What do you say?”

Dumb-but-trying – “Detective Columbo.” This tactic may be used to buy time or deflect attention from unreasonable demands. “Let me see if I have this straight. You want food and drinks placed outside the building door, right? Is that the hall door or the outside door?” Don’t overdramatize this role, however, or the subject may quickly suspect you’re playing him and become angry.

Firm, accepting-directing. “Look, we all want to come out of this alive. You’re in there and I’m out here, so I can’t make you do anything. But if you want to live through this safely, let me suggest a few things that can help us all get this mess behind us.” This, of course, presumes that the HT is not suicidal or psychotic and has a personal stake in surviving the crisis.

Nonjudgmental and helpful. “Hey, you can’t help what you feel, right? But let’s see if we can keep things as safe as possible here, okay?”

Compassionate but competent. “I understand that what your boss did to you was way out of line. That kind of unfairness can drive someone up a wall. Before you know it, things get out of control. That’s why I’m trying to help us all take things down a notch and get through this all right.”

Reinforce appropriate behavior. This applies not only to big concessions, like releasing a hostage, but to even small steps in the right direction. “I’m glad you called back when you said you would. That shows me I’m dealing with a straight-up guy.”

“Authentic chameleon” – flexibility. This requires being familiar enough and comfortable enough with a range of conversational idioms and interpersonal styles, in order to gear your speech style to that of the subject. This only works if it sounds natural, so don’t force it. If you’re not fluent in “street language,” for example, just use your own style. Remember, the less anxious you are, the more real you’ll sound, and the better are the chances for a successful negotiation.

Verbal Strategies to Avoid

These may seem obvious, but in the heat of the moment, it is easy to slide back into casual styles of interpersonal banter which may be okay with your poker buddies, but can dangerously derail a hostage negotiation. These include the following.

Arguments. You need not be overly ingratiating, but don't outright argue with the HT, especially with regard to the content of his complaint: "Well, what did you expect your boss to do – you were caught stealing, weren't you?"

Power plays. Any statement along the lines of "Do what I say because I'm in charge here."

Moralizing. This can be blatant: "What kind of person does something like this?" Or subtle: "C'mon, what are your kids going to think if this turns out bad?" Remember, many HTs may already be depressed and/or enraged, and the last thing you want to do is further inflame or demoralize them and give them an excuse to get violent. So avoid being judgmental, and remind yourself that your only priority is to resolve the situation safely for everyone.

Diagnosing. For most people, any suggestion of a "mental problem" amounts to an insult. Again, this can be overt, as in, "Look, it's obvious you're laboring under some kind of delusion" (alternatively, try: "I'm not sure I get it yet, but I'm trying to understand where you're coming from"); or subtle, as in "Hey, buddy, you sound a little depressed" (instead, try: "You seem down about something; want to tell me about it?").

Active Listening Skills

Active listening techniques comprise the fundamental skills set for any kind of crisis intervention. They are multi-purpose communication tools that can be effectively applied to hostage negotiations (Call, 2003; Lanceley, 1999; McMains, 2002; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Noesner, 1999; Noesner & Webster, 1997; Slatkin, 1996, 2005).

Emotion Labeling. Emotion labeling helps the subject clarify what he's feeling. It contributes to a state of calmness by reducing internal confusion. Sometimes, just giving an intense feeling a name shows that the emotion is understood and that the subject is less out of control than he may think. Also, by focusing on the HT's emotions, you allow a break from discussing demands and issues, and at the same time let the HT know you're interested in how he feels about things, not just in what he's currently complaining about or what he and you may want from each other.

Indeed, with disturbed or incoherent subjects, it may not be immediately apparent what the HT wants – indeed, he may hardly be clear about this himself. In such cases, the initial step may be to clarify what he's thinking and feeling.

In general, respond first to emotion, not content. That is, address your responses to the HT's emotional state, while sidestepping any demands or arguments. But be careful to avoid giving the impression of ignoring or discounting his issues if that's what he really wants to discuss. The important thing is to demonstrate to the HT that you are tuned in, that he has your undivided attention, either by an "um-hmm"-type interjection or by encouraging him to "go on..." Utilize *emotion labeling phrases*, such as: "You sound..." "You seem..." "I hear..."

HT: "I'm getting really pissed off at everyone trying to screw me over. My boss messes with me, then my old lady gives me a hard time, and my kids do nothing but complain. I'm at the end of my rope, man."

Negotiator: "You sound like you're feeling really angry and beaten down about things."

Paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is basically rephrasing the subject's statement in your own words. This accomplishes several things. First, it reinforces empathy and rapport, (i.e. if I can restate your meaning in my own words, I must have some understanding of what you're experiencing) which conveys to the HT that "I'm really hearing you." Second, effective paraphrasing actually clarifies what the HT is saying; it is the clarification-of-content counterpoint to the clarification-of-feelings that occurs with emotion labeling. Third, it encourages the subject to slow down and listen, and may deflect any hostile action against hostages. It also promotes a verbal give-and-take that does not automatically put the subject on the defensive. Finally, just hearing one's own thoughts spoken out loud by someone else can provide clarification and a new perspective.

When paraphrasing, summarize in your own words what the subject has just told you.

HT: "I'm getting really pissed off at everyone trying to screw me over. My boss tries to mess with me, then my old lady gives me a hard time, and my kids do nothing but complain. I'm at the end of my rope, man."

Negotiator: "Seems like you're tired of people taking advantage of you."

The negotiator should be careful not to add or embellish, as in: "They just keep pushing and pushing you, don't they? They never give you any peace, do they?" This is not an effective response because it may serve to further inflame.

Remember, the overall goal of every negotiation is to calm things down, not stir them up.

Structure paraphrases in a way that solicits confirmation of the subject's thoughts and feelings. This can be explicit, like adding " – right?" at the end of your paraphrase. Or it can be more subtle, such as leaving your paraphrase dangling by the intonation of your voice, or following your re-statement with silence, creating a verbal vacuum for the subject to fill. Paraphrasing wordings can include: "Are you telling me...?" "What I hear you saying is..." "Let me see if I have this right..." "So..."

As always, if you are not sure what the HT just said or meant, ask him to repeat it: "I don't know if I got all that, William. Could you say it again, please. I want to make sure I understand exactly what you're telling me."

Reflecting/Mirroring. Here, the negotiator repeats the last word or phrase, or the key word or phrase, of the subject's statement in the form of a question, thereby soliciting more input without actually asking for it. It also allows the negotiator to buy time if he cannot immediately think of an appropriate emotional label or paraphrase, while still encouraging the HT to think about what he's just said. Early in the negotiation, it allows information to be gleaned in a nonconfrontational way, and is a generally good initial rapport-builder.

HT: I'm getting really pissed off at everyone trying to screw me over.

Negotiator: You're pissed off?

HT: Yeah, my boss, my wife, my kids. They bug me and bug me, and won't get the hell off my back.

Negotiator: They're bugging you, huh?

Minimal Encouragers. Minimal encouragers are nothing more than the little conversational speech fillers we all use to indicate that we're paying attention to someone during a conversation. In the hostage negotiation context, these consist of short utterances and questions that let the HT know that the negotiator is listening, but don't interfere with the HT's narrative flow. Indeed, the purpose is to encourage the HT to keep talking. Examples include: "Oh?" "I see." "Yeah." "Uh-huh." "When?" "And?" "Really?" "You do?" "She did?"

Silence and Pauses. Aside from just buying time, silence can be used strategically. For one thing, in a relatively

active conversation, your silence encourages the subject to fill in the gaps, which keeps him talking. Following a statement by silence is also a way of emphasizing a point you've just made. *Negotiator:* "I know this looks like it's gotten out of control, but not everything that starts bad, ends bad. It doesn't have to end bad" [pause].

You can also use silence to frame the HT's point or to encourage elaboration. *HT:* "I'm trying to think my way out of this, but what am I supposed to do, just give up?" [negotiator stays silent]. *HT:* "Is there a way to end this without me being taken out?"

Like all active listening techniques, silence and pauses are best used in combination with other techniques, and may be particularly effective when used in conjunction with minimal encouragers. Be careful about too much silence, however, because you don't want the HT to think he's being ignored or was forgotten about. Generally, subjects will indicate this by "are you still there?" statements. Again, know your subject as well as possible, and fine-tune your approach.

"I" Messages. People under extreme stress often become suspicious and defensive, and any statements that are too directive may sound like an insult or attack. In such circumstances, "maybe you ought to..." will be interpreted as "you better or else..." To keep potentially accusatory-sounding "you's" out of the conversation, I-statements clue the subject in on what effect he's having on the negotiator's perception, while at the same time allowing for some subjectivity and personalization of the negotiator. The basic model is "I feel...when you...because..."

This technique may help defuse intense emotions, and may help refocus the HT during verbal attacks.

HT: You don't give a damn about me – all you want is to get these people out of here so you can blow me away. You're a goddam liar like the rest of them.

Negotiator: When you're yelling at me like that, it's hard for me to focus on what we're talking about.

I-messages can also be used to deflect the HT's demands and manipulations, especially when used with paraphrasing and the dumb-but-trying ("Detective Columbo") approach.

HT: If you don't have that car here in 10 minutes, the bodies start piling up, you got that?

Negotiator: Give me a second to get all this, okay, 'cause

when you're talking fast like that, it's hard for me to concentrate, and I want to make sure I understand you completely. You're talking about getting transportation, is that it?

Open-Ended Questions. This technique has wide applicability in law enforcement work, from crisis negotiation to interview and interrogation. Here, the negotiator asks questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes-or-no. This encourages the subject to say more without the negotiator actually directing the conversation. This technique may be used in combination with other active listening techniques, such as minimal encouragers, reflecting/mirroring, and silence. As with interview techniques, open-ended questions can be followed or combined with closed-ended queries.

HT: Nothing ever works out for me. My whole damn life, it's been one screw-up after another.

Negotiator: Like what?

HT: What do mean, "like what?" Everything, man, everything. It's all screwed up.

Negotiator: I really want to understand this. Can you give me an example?

Demands and Deadlines

One of the defining characteristics of most hostage crises is the presence of some form of demand, which may range from the concrete and immediately practical (food, transportation) to the more grandiose and expansive (release of political prisoners, access to media) to the abstract, bizarre, or psychotic (freedom from CIA persecution; emancipation of downtrodden classes). Most demands will be of the first type, and most experts would agree with the following principles regarding such demands in hostage crises (Boltz, et al., 1996; Lanceley, 1999; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Greenstone, 1995, 2005).

Demands: Negotiating Strategies

A fundamental guiding principle of hostage negotiations is to make the HT work for everything he gets by extracting a concession in return, no matter how small, for each demand satisfied. In essence, this is the basis for all types of negotiating, whether a business contract or a crisis resolution: get your counterpart used to saying yes and making concessions. Of course, if your business associate doesn't like the

bid you put on the table, he's not likely to fly into a rage and kill innocent people. The challenge in hostage crises, then, is to maintain your bargaining position without unduly agitating the HT and triggering a violent confrontation. Also, you can use demands as a profiling and intelligence gathering tool: beyond basic physical needs, what the HT asks for in a crisis can yield clues to his personality and priorities.

Other guidelines include: don't ask the HT if there are any demands ("what do you want?"), don't offer anything not explicitly asked for, and don't deliver more than absolutely necessary to fulfill the request. The conventional wisdom is to never say "no" to a demand, but not saying no is not equivalent to saying yes. That is, deflect, postpone, and modify: "Okay, you want a helicopter out of here, right? I'll see what I can do. Meanwhile, tell me..."

Don't give anything without getting something in return: "The electricity turned on? I'll work on that, but I'll need you do something for me, okay? Can you keep the phone line open so we can keep communicating while they're hooking up the cable?"

When negotiating for release of multiple hostages, start with the most vulnerable or least desirable, from the HT's standpoint. Where the hostages are strangers to the HT, as in the case of robberies, and where the HT has specific, utilitarian demands (food, escape), many HTs will relinquish hostages that they perceive as being "too much trouble" to keep around, such as sick or injured victims, children, or overly hysterical hostages, while holding on to the more healthy and manageable ones. As in any bargaining maneuver, let the HT make the first offer, that is, how many hostages he's willing to release. If only a few, you can try upping the ante, but only to a point – remember, better to get one or two people out safely now, rather than risk having the HT change his mind because he feels you're "pushing" him.

Where there is only one or a few hostages, and where the hostages are known to the HT, as in family hostage-barricade or workplace revenge scenarios, the situation is more precarious because the hostages have a particular personal or symbolic value to the HT. Additionally, in such cases, there is a greater chance that the HT is laboring under some kind of delusional disorder and may be suicidal. He may not care about negotiating for demands because he's already resolved to kill everyone in the room, including himself. In such cases, conventional hostage negotiating strategies may overlap with suicide intervention and other crisis intervention strategies.

Negotiable and Nonnegotiable Demands

In the broadest sense, *all* demands are negotiable, but whether the authorities will agree with certain demands varies widely depending on their safety and feasibility, what is at stake if the demands are not met, and what there is to gain by meeting the demands. While there may be exceptions in individual circumstances, the following principles are generally accepted by hostage negotiation professionals.

Negotiable demands include food, drinks, cigarettes, and environmental controls, such as heat, air conditioning, electricity, plumbing, blankets, and so on.

Nonnegotiable demands include illegal drugs, weapons, release of friends or relatives in prison, or exchange of hostages.

“*Gray area*” demands that may depend on the special circumstances and judgment of the negotiating team include alcohol, money, media access, transportation, or freedom.

Demands, Deadlines, and Time

A common feature of HT demands is that they often come with a deadline: “I want that car here by 12 noon, or someone’s gonna get it.” To begin with, although deadline demands are relatively common, very few deaths have actually occurred as the direct result of a deadline not being met, especially in more common robbery or domestic dispute hostage crises. Always assess each individual situation for risk.

Although this may seem obvious, don’t set deadlines yourself. If the HT makes a deadline, log it, but don’t mention it again to the HT if he doesn’t bring it up. The goal is to ignore the deadline and let it pass by, keeping the subject engaged in conversation. If there has been no conversation with the HT for a while, initiate contact prior to the deadline and keep him engaged. Use the passage of time to expend adrenalin and let fatigue set in, but beware of total exhaustion which may lead to heightened irritability and impulsive action.

Problem-Solving Structure of Dealing With Hostage Taker’s Demands

As always, the goal is not to provide a cook-book approach to negotiation, but as with all complex, team-based activities, most authorities believe that the negotiation process runs most smoothly if there is some kind of guiding framework or structure upon which the team members can

then improvise as needed (Greenstone, 2005; Lanceley, 1999; McMains & Mullins, 1996). This is, in fact, the basic model of all crisis intervention in mental health and emergency services (Dattilio & Freeman, 2000; Flin, 1996; Gilliland & James, 1993; Greenstone & Leviton, 2001; Kleepsies, 1998; Miller, 1998). Basic elements of crisis intervention for dealing with demands in hostage scenarios include the following.

Define the problem. Question: What do we want to do here? Answer: Get everybody out safely.

Brainstorm solutions. What are some of the ways that we can achieve the goal of resolving this crisis without injury? Allow the HT to make suggestions and amend and supplement them with your own. Give the HT as much input into the problem-solving process as he is willing to provide, since people are more likely to stick with plans, the greater their initial degree of buy-in.

Eliminate unacceptable solutions. Some of the HT’s suggestions and demands may be reasonable (“If I put down my weapon and let these people go, I don’t want the crap beat out of me when I come out”), others may be clearly out of the question (“I need drugs and ammo”), and still others may be negotiable (“Give me some food and turn on the AC, and maybe we’ll talk”).

Choose the best possible solution. Try to narrow it down to one or two points that can be agreed upon for the present. “Okay, we’re going to send in some McDonald’s, and then you’re going to let the women and the guy with the chest pain go, then you’ll keep the phone line open, we’ll turn the AC on, and we’ll talk further, is that agreed?”

Plan the implementation. Whatever the choice of alternatives, make sure everybody understands exactly who’s going to do what and when. Under states of extreme emotional tension, it only takes one small glitch to foul everything up. “So let’s make sure we’re all on the same page. Someone is going to put the food in the metal can by the stairs, then go back to our line. You’re going to check the food, and if everything’s okay, you’re going to send the people out like we said. The chest pain guy is going to come out first, then the two women, one at a time. Then you’ll get back on the phone and we’ll turn the AC on. If you want to eat while we’re talking, that’s fine. By the way, is it okay if we send in a couple of extra burgers and Cokes for the other people?”

This last request can serve several purposes. Most obviously, it allows the hostages to be fed. But it also may

reassure a suspicious HT who suspects that his food might be drugged or poisoned, because he can always switch the meals around with the hostages, and he will usually assume that the authorities are not going to risk poisoning innocent civilians. Of course, overtly paranoid HTs will be reassured by nothing – but then, they are not likely to ask for potentially contaminated food in the first place.

Importantly, too, sharing a meal is a very intimate form of human interaction, and may encourage the development of the *Stockholm syndrome*, in which initially adversarial captors and hostages, bound together through crisis under extreme emotional circumstances, come to develop a feeling for, and allegiance to, one another. In its original definition, the Stockholm syndrome describes the circumstance of hostages who develop sympathy for their captors and may go so far as to try to protect them and justify their actions. Reciprocally, the HTs grow to develop a grudging admiration and affection for their unwilling charges on the basis of sharing a prolonged, intense experience (psychologists should think of the concepts of transference and countertransference in psychotherapy).

Usually, this kind of reaction is uncommon in hostage crises that last only a few hours, and almost always involves prolonged sieges lasting days or weeks, where captives and captors have the opportunity to share more and more intimate communication. For the more common hostage scenarios, negotiators can never count on such a connection taking place, but virtually all authorities agree that any positive communication or interaction, such as eating together or the HTs making provisions for the hostages' comfort and safety, will serve to humanize the hostages to the HTs, and will lessen the chance of their being injured or killed. As noted elsewhere, however, this may backfire with certain types of mentally disturbed HTs or HTs who purposefully select their victims, so always use caution and judgment.

Implement the plan. If possible, walk the HT through the steps that have been laid out in your mutual planning by keeping phone communication open at all times. “Good, I see the guy coming out. There’s the first woman. Okay, there’s number two, good. All right, you kept your word, we’ve got your AC back on, and you’ve had something to eat. Now let’s talk about you and everybody else coming out of this safely.”

Assess the outcome. Whatever the action and its outcome, big or small – release of a hostage, delivery of food, opening of a phone line – assess and log how smoothly the

deal went down, as this will provide a pretty good indicator of how subsequent negotiations will play out. If problems are identified, modify the approach accordingly.

Repeat and modify as necessary. Always be flexible. If the approach needs to be modified in light of new circumstances, do so.

Generally, the more time that has passed without injury, the more likely is a successful outcome to the crisis. The downside of time passage is the greater mental and physical exhaustion of the HT and the corresponding increased risk of impaired judgment or impulsive action. Exhaustion on the negotiator’s part is usually dealt with by having several negotiators rotate during a prolonged crisis, although sometimes this is not an option.

Signs of Progress in Negotiation

No seasoned negotiator will categorically swear by any given index sign of good or bad progress in negotiations, but most experts agree on some generally reliable prognosticators of how things are progressing (Greenstone, 1995; Lanceley, 1999; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Noesner, 1999).

Positive signs of negotiation progress include positive changes in the quality and content of the HT’s communication. As the negotiation proceeds, the HT may seem to get more used to speaking with the negotiator. He will make more frequent verbal contact with the negotiator and sustain it for longer periods of time. There will be generally less violent and threatening content to the HT’s speech, and he may begin to talk more about personal issues.

There may be signs of increased identification with, or sympathy for, the hostages (“Hell, I didn’t want these people in here; it’s not their fault these damn cops showed up”). Threats against hostages may decrease or cease, and deadlines may pass without incident. In some cases, this is because the HT is distracted from the passage of time by the negotiator’s conversation, but in other cases, the HT may deliberately choose to let the deadline pass and use “forgetting” as a face-saving excuse.

Another positive sign is the HT asking about the procedures for, and consequences of, surrendering (“I’m not making any promises, but what would I have to do to get out of here without you guys killing me?”). Generally, the longer the passage of time without injury to hostages, the better the prognosis. Of course, one important sign of progress is the

release of hostages, but this may sometimes be a bad sign for the HT himself if it is a prelude to his own suicide.

Negative signs of negotiation progress include refusal of the HT to talk and/or lack of rapport between the HT and negotiator; indeed, if this goes on for any length of time, consideration should be given to using an alternate negotiator. An overtly suicidal HT is usually a bad sign because a HT who makes deadlines for his own death may very well be planning to take hostages with him. Suicidal HTs may make final plans or verbal wills, apologize to loved ones for the harm and shame they've caused, or call for clergy to come to the scene for confessions. Alternatively, a clearly depressed HT who denies suicidality and swears everything is "fine" may be at risk for impulsive suicide and hostage killing.

HTs who insist on face-to-face negotiations may be planning to go out with an audience. Similarly, a HT who insists that particular persons be brought to the scene may be planning a similarly dramatic finale. A notable absence of substantive demands or demands that are clearly outrageous may signal that the HT really doesn't intend to leave the scene alive.

Non-suicidal HTs may also show a poor prognosis. Use of alcohol or drugs is usually a bad sign because of generally heightened excitability and lowered impulse control. HTs who repeatedly become angry and emotional during negotiations may also be at risk for impulsive violence. A weapon tied to a hostage or, in the case of more sophisticated HTs, wiring the surroundings with explosives, may signal a low regard for innocent human life on the part of the HTs. The latter cases typically involve well-planned hostage-taking activities, such as those carried out by professional criminals or organized extremist groups.

Hostage Negotiations with Mentally Disordered Subjects

Except for political terrorism or the unusual Hollywood-style "grand heist," most HTs that local police departments will have to contend with will be of the common-criminal-caught-in-a-robbery type or will have some kind of diagnosable mental disorder, the latter being more common in domestic and workplace hostage situations. Thus, to be truly effective, negotiators need to wed the art and science of crisis management to the insights on personality and psychopathology offered by mental health professionals. It is in this aspect of hostage and crisis negotiation that the police psy-

chologist can make an especially important contribution (Blau, 1994; Borum & Strenz, 1992; Corcoran & Cawood, 2003; Lanceley, 1999; McMains, 1988a, 1988b; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Rodriguez & Franklin, 1986; Rogan, 1997; Russell & Biegel, 1990; Slatkin, 2003, 2005).

Schizophrenic Hostage Takers

Schizophrenia is a major mental disorder characterized by disruption and disorganization in thinking and behavior, impaired emotional experience and expression, and the presence of delusions and hallucinations. Most schizophrenic hallucinations are auditory *persecutory hallucinations* that involve hearing voices that degrade and demean the subject. These subjects are usually in a state of extreme fear and agitation in response to these hallucinations. The second most common type of hallucination is the *command hallucination*, which orders the subject to do something.

Frequently, persecutory and command hallucinations occur together, along with corresponding delusions. For example, voices may tell the subject that he is vile and wicked, and the only way to atone for his sins is to "save" his ex-wife and children from her new boyfriend. Or the subject may interpret a TV newscast about airport security as warning him about his former boss's attempts to plant a monitoring device in his brain. If the subject is already predisposed to aggressive behavior, the response to these delusions and hallucinations may take the form of violence, from impulsive attacks on the street to well-planned, Rambo-like tactical campaigns involving weapons and hostages.

In negotiating with a schizophrenic HT, remember that the predominant underlying emotion is likely to be some combination of fear and anger, so the use of calming techniques may seem like the obvious choice. However, schizophrenic subjects tend to be less responsive to normal emotional cues, so don't expect a close correspondence between your active listening interventions and the subject's response. Often the basis for rapport in these situations comes from the subject's need to explain himself and his motives, so by all means let him talk, interjecting only when his speech tone and content reflect an extreme escalation that might lead to violence.

In dealing with the schizophrenic HT's delusions, a kind of constructive ambivalence may prove the most effective intervention. That is, neither agree nor disagree with the delusional ideas or motives. On the one hand, attempting to

falsely buy in to the subject's delusional system may come off as phony and insincere and thus erode rapport – remember, even psychotic people are not necessarily stupid, and they may know if you're playing them. On the other hand, trying to “talk some sense” into the subject will be equally ineffective, and may quickly brand you as just another treacherous enemy. A better strategy is to acknowledge the content of the delusion and try to ally yourself with the subject's perspective and perception of the situation, while keeping the focus on present reality. This is actually an application of more general rapport-building active listening skills to the specific case of a delusional subject.

Negotiator: Let me understand this. The people with you in that Workers Compensation office have been monitoring your home computer and your car and telling you to commit sex crimes so they can blackmail you and discredit your disability claim. Is that right?

HT: No, that's that's not it. You just don't get it. Why is it so hard for everybody to understand?

Negotiator: Okay, sorry, please explain it to me again slowly, because I want to make sure I understand what you're telling me.

HT: [Explains the conspiracy again and asks for confirmation:] “Okay, now do you see what I'm up against?”

Negotiator: Well to be honest with you, I don't have the electronics expertise to know how they can set up these things, but if that's what you think they're doing, it must make you feel pretty mad and scared. I wonder if there's a way to get more information on this before anyone gets hurt.

In negotiating with schizophrenic subjects, some authorities recommend avoiding the use of, or reference to, family members, as they may be part of the HT's delusional system. Again, use your judgment, based on your knowledge of the subject and the situation. Also be aware that such subjects may have had unpleasant experiences in the past with mental health professionals and the general health care system, so this is one area where the team psychologist will certainly want to take a back-seat role. In addition, schizophrenic subjects may be especially sensitive to having their belief systems – which are very real to them – dismissed as delusions by mental health “experts.” In either case, be careful about offering the schizophrenic HT any kind of psycho-

logical interpretation or help, which may only serve to further alienate and infuriate the subject. As with family members, if the HT requests to speak to a particular mental health clinician, try to ascertain the subject's agenda to avoid giving the subject a forum for violently acting out.

Paranoid Hostage Takers

This diagnostic category will often overlap with the one above in the form of paranoid schizophrenia, characterized by paranoid delusions and persecutory hallucinations. However, all levels of paranoia can be seen in psychological practice, and even subjects who are not overtly psychotic may harbor self-referential beliefs that only boil to the surface under stress. Many of these individuals are able to hold a job and maintain a semblance of a normal lifestyle, all the while possessed of an unshakable conviction about religious, political, or familial conspiracies that they must be ever vigilant and on guard about. If confronted with an overwhelming crisis, paranoid individuals may feel compelled to take drastic action in their own defense, which may include violence and hostage taking.

In negotiating with a paranoid HT, forget about changing his mind or reasoning him out of his belief. One of the characteristics of paranoid beliefs is their imperviousness to disputation. Paranoid subjects are also exquisitely sensitive to attempts to fool or manipulate them and are often quite perceptive in this regard, so stay away from tricks and stratagems as much as possible. Straightforwardness and calmness are the keys to a successful negotiation with this subject.

Open negotiations in a logical, factual, respectful, and unemotional manner: “Mr. Jones, this Sgt. Bruce McGill, a negotiator for the Municipal Police Department. I want to hear your side of this so we can keep everyone safe.” Keep your voice calm and even, but not at such a monotone that it sounds artificial. Ask for the subject's view of the situation and request clarification if necessary. If the subject gets angry, keep your cool and request further clarification of the subject's complaint. Allow productive ventilation, but beware of the subject self-escalating himself into a rage. If this starts to happen, utilize distraction techniques, again, without being too obvious about it. As with schizophrenic subjects, if frankly delusional material comes up, try to sidestep it, but without making the subject think you're dismissing or disrespecting him.

A particularly sensitive issue with paranoid HTs regards the use of rapport. For the most part, any attempt to “get close” to a paranoid subject is likely to be interpreted as an attempt to manipulate him, so negotiators need to tread a thin line between being too cold and standoffish versus trying to be too inclusive and engaging. Keep things clear and direct, and focus the negotiation on solving concrete problems.

HT: They’re all trying to destroy me, my company, my ex-wife, and now you damn cops. What do I have to do to convince you I mean business!

Negotiator: The police are here and I’m here to see that nobody gets hurt. I don’t know about those others, but once everybody’s safe, I’d bet people would be more likely to listen to your point.

Depressed Hostage Takers

Depression in HTs presents a different kind of problem for negotiators. Initially, at least, most HTs have either escape or some instrumental goal on their minds. In most cases, they want to survive. This leaves some negotiating room, because the HTs and negotiators have something to offer each other. On the other hand, depressed subjects may be despondent and suicidal and therefore especially dangerous precisely because they have “nothing to lose” by taking hostages to the grave with them. If one or more of the hostages has a bad past history with the HT, such as a hated boss or estranged family member, there may be no substantive demands, other than an audience for their act of desperate revenge. Other depressed hostages may not be overtly suicidal, but may still be relatively unresponsive to a negotiated settlement due to simple emotional and behavioral inertia, sometimes associated with older age and a feeling of “nothing left to live for.”

Without overpatronizing, the stance of a nurturant parental model or supportive authority figure may appeal to a depressed subject because it gives the impression of structure and control. Don’t verbally “rush” the subject; rather, begin the conversation at a slow pace and gradually pick up the tempo over time. Begin with open-ended questions and allow for long pauses before the answers come. If this goes nowhere, ask simple, direct, closed-ended questions. Use reflection of feelings as necessary. If the subject begins to dwell on a painful, unjust past or a bleak, purposeless future, try to keep the time perspective grounded in the present. Avoid deep religious or philosophical issues, if possible, but if the subject seems intent on discussing these, let him speak,

and use gentle verbal direction to keep things focused on the here-and-now.

If the subject brings up suicide, address it forthrightly. If he doesn’t explicitly mention it, but nevertheless seems suicidal, gently inquire. Ask what he’s thinking of doing. Usually, attempts to “talk him out of it” are of little avail, but find out what’s important to him, and try to give him a glimpse of a better future. Avoid admonishments along the lines of, “Think how your kids will feel if you kill yourself.” Remember, a suicidally depressed subject already feels worthless and hopeless – you don’t want to add to that.

A better strategy is to “postpone” the suicide, rather than attempt to dissuade: “Look, William, I know you think this is the only way out now, but give me an hour, okay? I know I can’t talk you out of what you’re gonna do, but let me understand why this is happening, okay? I really want to understand this.” If there seems to be an opening, offer the promise of immediate help, i.e. if the subject works with you to end this crisis without harm, you’ll see that he gets taken to someplace safe to talk to someone right away. Be sure to be able to back up this promise.

Finally, be careful of the depressed, suicidal subject who suddenly seems to get better, and whose mood improves without any substantive reason. He may have made his peace with death and is planning to check out imminently, perhaps taking hostages with him. This may be a good time to inquire about any unstated intentions on the HT’s part and deal with them accordingly. It is in situations like these that the incident commander’s decision to go tactical may be especially difficult, because the depressed HT’s quiet resignation may seem less overtly threatening than the loud, overtly violent paranoid or psychopathic HT, even though all three may be equally lethal.

Avoidant-Dependent Hostage Takers

Avoidant personality is a pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation or criticism. Dependent personality is a pattern of submissive and clinging behavior stemming from an excessive need for care and guidance. Often, these two personality types are combined, with the subject generally being shy and socially anxious, but latching onto one person, who becomes the psychological lifeline to the subject’s sense of identity and purpose in life. If he or she then experiences rejection or separation from that person, it will feel like the

end of the world, and he or she will do *anything* to restore that connection, including pleading, threatening, stalking, and perhaps hostage-taking to convince the rejecting person to “take me back – or else.” Many domestic violence perpetrators fit this profile, as do the more rare female HT.

In negotiating with an avoidant-dependent HT, try to provide a firm, supportive presence; in essence becoming the new, if temporary, parental figure. It is very important for the negotiator to help the insecure avoidant-dependent HT find a resolution to the crisis that doesn’t leave him feeling like he’s failed again, which may impel him to do something even more desperate “to show them I mean business.” Let the initial ideas for peaceful resolution come from the HT, expand and refine them with your own good suggestions, and as much as possible, make it seem like everything positive that happens is the subject’s idea, with your own mentor-like praise and support. It’s also a good idea to keep friends and relatives away from the scene so that the subject is not tempted to prove himself by “going out like a man.”

Antisocial/Psychopathic Hostage Takers

Antisocial personality is a pattern of consistent disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others, associated with impulsivity, criminal behavior, sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, and an exploitive parasitic, and/or predatory lifestyle. Even more than other types of criminals, the antisocial personality is distinguished by an utter lack of conscience that allows him to regard other people simply as sources of his own gratification. Antisocial personalities, sometimes referred to as *psychopaths*, are ruthless and remorseless, but can also be quite shrewd in a cunning-conning type of way, and are often geniuses at manipulating and intimidating those around them.

Forget the Stockholm syndrome. Their complete self-centeredness and paucity of any real human attachment makes it probable that hostages will represent nothing more than human bargaining chips to antisocial HTs, to enable them to achieve some utilitarian purpose, for example in robberies, police pursuits, or prison escapes. The antisocial HT won’t give a damn about your concerns for his or the hostages’ safety, and will at best be amused by your attempts to commiserate with his angst, because he doesn’t have any. If the hostage-taking wasn’t cold-bloodedly planned in advance as a means of escape, then it is likely to be a crime of impulse – but not passion. The hostages are objects, pure and simple, and he could care less whether they live or die, as long as he

gets what he wants.

What he wants, typically, is to escape. Paradoxically, the antisocial HT’s very coldbloodedness can actually facilitate negotiations if you can convince him that sparing lives is the easiest way for him to achieve his objectives. Forget touchy-feely empathy; in this type of negotiation, you are literally *negotiating*. Appeal to his self-interest: releasing at least some of the hostages leaves you with less baggage to deal with; a good-will gesture may result in a lighter penalty; don’t give the SWAT guys an excuse to move in and take you out; and so on.

Even more so than for other HTs, a key element in negotiation with antisocial subjects is the tried-and-true adage: don’t try to outbullshit a bullshitter. Antisocial personalities live by their wits and their strength, and their greatest thrill comes from conning and bullying other people. At the same time, much like the paranoid, they are exquisitely sensitive to being fooled themselves, and may react with rage if they think you’re trying to play them. Promise only what you can deliver.

Tone-wise, a reasonable, problem-solving approach probably works best – involved, but unemotional. You want to keep things somewhat bland because psychopaths are power-trippers and thrill-seekers, and the last thing you want is to egg him on; at the same time, you don’t want things to get too draggy, or the subject may feel the need to do something exciting to pump up the adrenalin quotient. Also remember that while antisocial HTs typically have utilitarian aims, occasionally revenge is the primary motive, as these individuals are notorious for holding grudges and valuing payback. To keep the HT’s mind off the hostages, keep him busy with you, the negotiator. Be as straightforward as possible, and realize that virtually nothing he says can be taken at face value.

Again, keep in mind this stark paradox: The antisocial HT is most likely to spare hostages if this achieves his goals, because he’s the least likely to be emotionally involved with them; but this very human disconnection makes him the most likely to slaughter a hostage in the blink of an eye if he thinks that’s what it takes to convince you of his determination and power. Negotiate cautiously and straightforwardly.

Borderline Hostage-Takers

Borderline personality is a pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, fragile self-image, wild emotional

swings, vengeful anger, and self-damaging impulsiveness. Such individuals may exhibit a lifelong pattern of erratic and intense relationships, alternating between over-idealization and devaluation of friends, family members, and coworkers. Signs of emotional instability include inappropriately intense anger and/or depressive mood swings and possible suicidality. Persistent identity disruption may manifest itself in disturbances in self-image, blurred interpersonal boundaries and relationships, confused professional and personal goals and values, and a chronic feeling of emptiness that may impel the quest for stimulation via substance abuse or provocation of hostile incidents. Many borderlines function well – even superbly – in the eyes of casual observers, only decompensating into minipsychotic episodes under external or self-induced stress.

The borderline hostage situation is most likely to be relationship-based, as in the case of an estranged family member or fired worker coming back to home or workplace to even the score of a real or imagined betrayal. White-hot, righteous anger is often the key motivating emotion, as borderlines' scorched-earth policies toward those that have spurned them may blot out any glint of reason or empathy. In hostage situations, such subjects may make no demands at all – they just want their victim to suffer. Or they may make unreasonable demands, such as oaths of unending loyalty, or access to unlimited material possessions of the hated party, or a media-broadcast apology by all the heads of the company that mistreated them. Indeed, it is this seemingly thin “border-line” between sanity and irrationality that gives the syndrome its name.

With borderline HTs, use the relationship factor to your advantage. Careful application of active listening techniques will help build rapport and diffuse toxic emotions. Try to show the subject that you're on his or her side by providing soothing reassurance, empathy, support, and structure. Interestingly, many borderlines are so starved for nurturant human connection, that they may be unusually susceptible to such rapport-building approaches. The downside is that their feelings can turn on a dime: when they feel you've connected with them, they completely love and trust you, but once they believe you've crossed them or let them down, they want you worse than dead.

For similar reasons, be wary of the Stockholm syndrome. Especially in domestic or workplace crises, borderline HTs are likely to *already* have superheated emotional relationships with their hostages, probably not good ones, and here

you want to keep the focus off these relationships and on the current interaction with you in resolving the situation safely. So carefully take your cue from the subject. Commiserate and try to understand. Be alert for signs of suicide or violence. Try to preclude impulsive action by gently guiding the subject to alternatives or switching the focus to the reasons for their pain and outrage. As with other types of HTs, encourage talking, but be cautious not to let venting escalate into loss of control. Be especially careful about involving family members or other third parties, who may inflame the situation.

The Surrender Ritual

Nobody likes to surrender, to give up, to capitulate, to lose. Yet, by definition, the successful resolution of a hostage crisis entails the safe release of the hostages and surrender of the HT to authorities. Thus, anything the negotiating team can do to make this easier for the HT will work in favor of saving lives. On the strength of practical experience, a basic protocol, or *surrender ritual* has evolved to guide negotiators in their efforts to safely resolve a crisis (Greenstone, 1995, 2005; Lanceley, 1999; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Russell & Biegel, 1990). As with all such guidelines, each negotiator must adapt this system to his or her particular situation and type of HT.

To begin with, realize that a HT typically has four possible options: (1) surrender, (2) escape, (3) suicide, or (4) killing of hostages. Only the first option is preferred by law enforcement, although a HT's nonviolent escape (option 2) at least spares hostages and may enable authorities to track the suspect down later. Trying to manipulate or browbeat a HT into capitulation may have the opposite effect because few people want to give up, believing it to be a sign of weakness. Rather, a successful resolution will usually involve allowing the HT to come out on his own with as much dignity preserved as possible.

Aside from release of hostages, the subject's surrender is likely to be the most crucial aspect of the negotiation, so great care and preparation should be taken for this event. Certainly, everyone on the negotiating and tactical teams needs to be on the same page, and any plan must be understood, agreed to, and followed by all. To be clear with the HT, the crisis team must be clear within itself. Work out how the HT will come out, how the arrest will be made, and what will happen next. Remember, the team's initial version of the plan

is not the last word; the plan may go back and forth between the negotiator and the HT until a mutually agreeable sequence is established. At this early phase, you need to establish with the team what are the limits of acceptable and unacceptable terms, and what are the practical constraints of the situation.

When dealing with the HT, avoid the use of words like “surrender,” “give up,” or other terms that connote weakness and loss of face. Use whatever euphemisms seem appropriate: “coming out” is a preferred term because it implies a proactive decision by the subject himself to resolve the crisis. Even amongst team members, get in the habit of using these positive terms, making it less likely that “surrender” slips out during conversations with the HT – remember, everyone is stressed and exhausted.

To begin the discussion of coming out, emphasize to the HT what he has to gain by this action at the present time. Be realistic but optimistic. Minimize any damage done so far. This is relatively easy where no one has yet been seriously harmed, but in cases where hostages have already been injured or even killed, you may have to be creative in your reassurances. The basic strategy is to emphasize what bad things have *not* happened and the subject’s role in preventing further harm: “We understand you felt you had no choice but to shoot that guard when he went for his gun – it was a split-second decision, right? But I want to thank you for keeping rest of those people in the bank safe while we talked this out. That’s going to count for a lot if we can end this now without anyone else getting hurt.”

Find out what assurances are needed by the HT and whether or not the team can accommodate them. Be sensitive to personal and cultural issues involving pride and respect. Discuss various coming-out scenarios and identify a mutually acceptable plan. Here’s where the real “negotiating” aspect comes in, which may involve some good old-fashioned horse-trading, as you go back and forth, discussing scenarios and conditions. As in any kind of negotiation, the more buy-in the subject has, the more he feels the plan is his own as well as yours, the more likely he is to comply. In planning for a successful resolution, let the subject set the pace; if he is agreeing to come out at all, this is not the time to rush things.

Once the final plan is put together, now the task becomes to make sure everybody understands what they’re supposed to do. This is superhigh-adrenalin territory; a misunderstanding or misstep could blow the whole deal and

cost lives. First, clarify the plan with the negotiating and tactical teams. Then carefully explain to the HT what will happen and what to expect. Be as explicit as possible – explain what the subject will see and hear and what he should do. When you’ve completed your account, ask the subject to repeat it back to you. Make it clear to him that this rehearsal is not because you distrust him or think he’s stupid, but for his own safety and to make sure everybody follows the agreement he and you have worked out. For example:

Negotiator: “Okay, here’s what we agreed on. You’re going to take off your jacket so everyone can see you in the tee-shirt, see that you’re not hiding anything. Don’t carry anything out or have anything in your hands or pockets. Open the front door slowly with your left hand and keep your right hand on your head. When you step out onto the front porch, slowly put your left hand on your head, too. Then drop slowly to your knees and keep your hands on your head. I know it’s raining, so if you start to slip, just ease yourself to the ground and make sure we can always see your hands. Remember, the word is slow, slow, slow – no sudden moves. When you’re on the ground, you’ll see the SWAT guys approach you. They’ll probably have their weapons drawn, and one of them will have a large black shield, so don’t move; it’s just their normal procedure. If they order you to lie down and put your hands behind your back, do it. Do whatever they tell you. They’re going to cuff you. They may seem a little rough, but they’re not trying to hurt you, they’ve just got to restrain you; that’s their procedure. After they’re sure you’re secure, they’ll either walk you or carry you to the holding area, and one of our team will meet you there. We want to make sure this goes smoothly like we planned, so tell it back to me like I just explained it.”

In some instances, a confused, delusional, ambivalent, or suicidal subject may emerge with an actual weapon in his hand and offer to surrender it to authorities. In other cases, he may have the weapon inside the structure and offer to give it to you prior to his coming out, or in lieu of surrendering, as a kind of good-will gesture. In such cases, apply the protocols and recommendations for disarming suspects. Never offer to take a loaded weapon from a subject’s hands. If he offers the weapon, ask him to unload it and to throw the weapon out the window. Alternatively, ask him to leave it unloaded in a safe place inside the dwelling and come out as planned. Sometimes, surrendering HTs want to come out with a cell phone, prized keepsake, or other seemingly harmless object. Make it clear to him that *anything* in his hand or on his person may be mistaken for a weapon and will put him

in danger of being shot: “Let’s not leave anything to chance, okay? Just come out with *nothing*. Whatever’s important in there we can always go back and get later, but it’s not worth getting yourself killed.”

While following standard procedures for control and restraint, the tactical team should avoid any unnecessary verbal or physical roughness during the arrest. In keeping with the strict division of negotiating and tactical roles, the negotiator should not be the arresting offer. During and after the arrest, the negotiator should maintain engagement, rapport, and communication with the HT. If possible, and after any necessary on-scene first aid has been applied and the subject has been read his Miranda rights, a brief informational debriefing with the HT should occur in a secure place close to the scene. This is to gather any information that might be forgotten or discarded later on, and also gives the negotiator the opportunity to praise the subject for his contribution to successfully resolving this crisis. Why?

Remember the point about “repeat customers” in the criminal justice system (Miller, 2006; Russell & Beigel, 1990). The last thing you want is for the subject to think the whole negotiation was some kind of trick to get him to give up, because this may have dire repercussions for future communications and interactions with the same or different subjects, whether they involve hostage-taking or not. In a very real sense, the negotiation is never really over, even during the arrest and informational debriefing, and throughout the trial and incarceration process. You want your team and your department to maintain the reputation of being tough, but fair and honorable throughout all your interactions with the community. Always be looking ahead to the next incident.

Recommendations for Hostages During a Crisis

So far, very little has been said about the hostages themselves. Research in the area of hostage reactions has led to some specific recommendations for those who find themselves taken hostage. Obviously, nobody can predict ahead of time when they will become a hostage, but many public and private organizations are including such training for possible future hostage scenarios in their general crisis management protocols (June, 1999; Katz & Caspi, 2003; McMains & Mullins, 1996; Miller, 1998, 1999, 2000b, 2001, 2002b, 2003, 2005, in press; Russell & Biegel, 1990).

First, remember that the first 15-45 minutes of a hostage

situation are the most dangerous. If you’re caught in a hostage crisis, stay as calm as possible until the situation has at least stabilized. Also understand that time is usually on your side: the longer you and the HT are together, the less likelihood of harm. During the initial stages, and afterward, follow any reasonable instructions by the HT that don’t endanger your life. When things seem to have calmed down, you may inform the HT of any injuries or other medical needs, but be careful of overwhelming or irritating him. Otherwise, speak only when spoken to and answer questions concisely, without rambling.

In general, be cooperative and don’t argue. Body language is also important. Don’t stare at the HT, but don’t turn your back on him either, unless he tells you to. Resist the temptation to ingratiate yourself with the HT by offering suggestions or help; if he asks a specific question, give him a specific answer to that question.

HT: Is there a back door to this place?

Hostage: Behind the bathroom.

HT: Where the hell is the bathroom?

Hostage: [points] At the end of that wall, just around the corner. First door is the bathroom, next door is the back exit.

Advice to stay calm in a life-threatening situation may seem like a contradiction in terms, but try to be patient, have faith, and get some rest. Unlike the quick wrap-ups seen on TV, many real-life hostage crises can last many hours or even days; don’t exhaust yourself. Remember, a resting or even a sleeping hostage is a less threatening target for the HT. If permitted by the HT, maintain affiliation and positive communication with the other hostages. To pass the time constructively, and to avoid emotionally corrosive rumination, utilize constructive imagery and daydreaming about loved ones and positive plans for the future. Another time-passer is observing the surrounding environment and events for later debriefing by law enforcement, but don’t be too obvious about this. If the HT lets you speak to authorities on the phone, use yes-and-no answers; the authorities will probably ask you to do this anyway.

A difficult decision sometimes involves efforts to escape, and there is no generally agreed-upon rule for this. A consensus seems to be that if you are in no immediate danger, attempts at escape may only inflame the HT and lead to retaliation, or at least more restrictive and confining conditions for you and the other hostages. However, if you are

being ordered to do something clearly dangerous, and/or the situation appears to be deteriorating into a potential for real violence, you may have to do whatever you can to save yourself. This will probably be the toughest decision you'll ever make, but remember that the overwhelming majority of hostage crises are resolved without casualties. Also recall that the second most dangerous time in a hostage crisis is during a tactical rescue attempt, so if such an action does occur, stay down and obey the instructions of the incoming tactical team.

Conclusions

Few police operations combine the features of extreme danger to life, prolonged interpersonal dialogue under stressed conditions, fatigue, and emotional swings as do hostage negotiation. The good news is that the negotiation process is effective in preventing loss of life in 95 percent of cases – I wonder how many emergency medical procedures can boast a record like that. Indeed, the success of hostage negotiation strategies may be one of the best arguments for the inclusion of the principles of practical psychology as an essential component of law enforcement training.

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