COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS AND HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Slatkin is a Police and Criminal Psychologist with the Kentucky Department of Corrections and the Louisville Metro Police Department. He has served for fifteen years as mental health consultant and trainer with the Louisville Police Hostage Negotiating Team. He has trained at the FBI Academy, and with Frank Bolz and Harvey Schlossberg. He is a retired United States Army Reserve military intelligence officer.

Dr. Slatkin received his doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Louisville. He has worked extensively with Vietnam combat veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMT), and corrections officers as team leader on Critical Incident Stress Debriefing teams (CISD). Debriefings have been conducted for SWAT, patrol officers, firefighters, EMTs involved in shootings and other line of duty fatalities.

Dr. Slatkin grew up in Brooklyn, New York and has lived in Louisville, Kentucky for over thirty years. He lives with wife and dog while his adult sons and their families live far and wide.

He is the author of numerous articles on hostage and crisis negotiations:

Slatkin, A. (Summer, 2004). "Structured role-play." Tactical Response.

Slatkin, A. (April, 2003). "Suicide risk and hostage/barricade situations involving older persons." FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin.

Slatkin, A. (July, 2002). "Intelligence in crisis and hostage negotiation." Law and Order.

Slatkin, A. (September, 2002). "The use of stratagems in crisis and hostage negotiation." Law and Order.

Slatkin, A. (March, 2001). "Structured role-play for negotiators." Law and Order.

Slatkin, A. (July, 2000). "The role of the mental health consultant in hostage negotiations: The incident phase." The Police Chief

Slatkin, A. (April, 2000). "Negotiating skills: Dealing with an alcohol-impaired hostage taker or barricaded Subject." Law and Order.

Slatkin, A. (1997). The Stockholm Syndrome and situational factors related to its' development (Doctoral dissertation, University of Louisville, 1997).

Slatkin, A. (May, 1996). "Enhancing negotiator skills: Therapeutic communication." FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin.

Slatkin, A. The HNT Game: A communication roleplay for hostage and crisis negotiation teams (copyright-1994).

COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS AND HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS

Practical Communication Techniques, Stratagems, and Strategies for Law Enforcement, Corrections and Emergency Service Personnel in Managing Critical Incidents

By

ARTHUR A. SLATKIN, ED.D.

Psychological Consultant
Louisville Division of Police
Louisville, Kentucky

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

ISBN 0-398-07581-6 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004066069

With THOMAS BOOKS *careful attention is given to all details of manufacturing and design. It is the Publisher's desire to present books that are satisfactory as to their physical qualities and artistic possibilities and appropriate for their particular use.* THOMAS BOOKS *will be true to those laws of quality that assure a good name and good will.*

Printed in the United States of America
MM-R-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Slatkin, Arthur A.

Communication in crisis and hostage negotiations : practical communication techniques, strategems, and strategies for law enforcement, corrections, and emergency service personnel in managing critical incidents / by Arthur A. Slatkin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-398-07581-6 (spiral)

1. Hostage negotiations. 2. Crisis management. 3. Communication in law enforcement. I. Title.

HV6595.S53 2005
363.2'32–dc22

2004066069

To Paula, for all that you are. To Matthew, Chen-I, and Zoe and to Robert, Judy, and Ava for being in my life. I love you all more than I ever thought myself capable.

FOREWORD

Art has made countless contributions to the Hostage Negotiating Team. He volunteers untold hours, not only in our monthly training sessions, but during the times the team is called upon to negotiate in hostage situations, barricaded persons, and threatened suicides. Art's expertise and down-to-earth approach to crisis intervention have proved invaluable.

Art writes in a common sense approach in the handling of crises by law enforcement negotiators. He gives practical examples to assist both the new and seasoned negotiator. His chapter on Negotiating With Subject Types describes various personality disorders in everyday language and how to negotiate with each of them.

His inclusion of The HNT Game makes this book a "must have" for any law enforcement crisis negotiator to sharpen their skills or to train new negotiators. I highly recommend it.

LT. JOHN C. MILLS, COMMANDER
Hostage Negotiating Team
Louisville Metro Police Department
Louisville, KY

INTRODUCTION

Crisis negotiation has always been part of a patrol officer's, correctional officer's, or emergency services officer's job. In the course of a career an officer will encounter troubled people in troubled circumstances, often of their own making, in very public crises. Untrained police officers, and others, have managed these incidents with varying degrees of skill and success long before the emergence of what has become the field and the art and science of crisis and hostage negotiation. Officers with a natural talent, sincerity , and a gift of gab may have fared better than their less gifted co-workers.

With the early successes of the NYPD and the FBI in hostage situations it came to be recognized that there were less lethal alternatives to tactical assault and better ways of communicating with people in crisis versus worse ways, and that those ways could be studied and taught to others. Training for negotiators became more widespread and today it is not only widespread but universal. Crisis and hostage negotiators speak a common language. That language comes largely from the fields of psychology and counseling where effective communication is at the heart of treatment. Negotiation has come in to its own–today negotiation almost always precedes tactical assault–and the culture has been changed forever.

At the heart of negotiation and negotiator trained skills is "active listening," a way in which a listener communicates demonstrably that he is listening–no, more than listening–that he acknowledges the other person, is taking in what is being said, is trying to understand what is being said, and cares about the person saying it. By listening actively the listener acknowledges the speaker's existence and that he or she is indeed being heard. We all need to be acknowledged and heard.

Active listening began as a treatment modality in the guidance and counseling field. It is still the principal means by which a counselor

gathers information, conveys caring, and seeks to influence desirable changes in the client. It is not an exaggeration to say that active listening is the principal means and mode of effective communication in all human transactions. Every negotiator training course pays homage to active listening, but little else.

Active listening is presented to novice negotiators as of principal importance but, there is a mixed message there in that instructors or curriculum writers allow insufficient time for skills practice, or they themselves are insufficiently knowledgeable or skilled to teach the subject *in-depth.* Officers are introduced to the subject but are not trained to proficiency nor encouraged to keep up their practice. Or, is it that, while embraced by law enforcement trainers, active listening is still considered too alien ("psychobabble") to be embraced fully. Any and all of these flaws can be fixed by employing instructors who are thoroughly knowledgeable and trained to a high degree of proficiency, unambiguous valuing (no mixed messages or a wink and a nod), fearless modeling, sufficient trainee practice time, training to proficiency criterion, and ongoing reinforcement of active listening. *Communication in Crisis and Hostage Negotiations* meets these compelling requirements.

Active listening is presented here in an enhanced form[1] with several important innovations: basic communication techniques are taught in depth with an eye to fully explain its purpose, rationale, and application; advanced techniques are introduced; the training is geared specifically to police, corrections, and emergency service officers; several means of skills practice are made available to the trainer or reader; advanced strategies and stratagems drawn from psychology, law, and business extend the effectiveness of communication and negotiation.

Communications In Crisis and Hostage Negotiations was written as a practical guide for law enforcement, corrections, and emergency service officers who frequently encounter people in public crises. Material is drawn from over thirty years of practical experience in psychological counseling, crisis intervention, and hostage negotiations. It is intended as a sourcebook for basic and advanced communication techniques and negotiation strategies. It is not intended as a comprehensive text of crisis and hostage negotiation as there are already sev-

1. Thanks to the work of Nancy Cunningham, PhD, teacher and mentor extraordinaire.

eral such books in publication. The focus here is more narrowly on the approaches, stratagems, and techniques that can be employed by crisis negotiators on the front lines in approaching and managing difficult persons in difficult circumstances. It is a guide, resource, workbook, handbook, and companion reference for trainers and trainees. While much of this material was originally developed for hostage negotiators, hostage taking is but one critical incident that a law enforcement negotiator is likely to encounter. In recent years a policy shift in the field has taken place–hostage negotiation has come to be called crisis negotiation in recognition of its' wider applicability and use. Statistically, relatively few incidents today involve actual hostage taking. Most negotiable public crises are barricade situations (e.g., emotionally overwrought or mentally ill persons, domestic partners in conflict, and felons resisting warrants or submission to legal authority) and dramatic public suicide threats.

The symbol **S** for "subject" has been used throughout because of its familiarity to law enforcement personnel. It should be understood to be inclusive, that is, to stand for any of the above persons in a high profile public crisis. Similarly, **N** for "negotiator" has been used as the symbol for any crisis negotiator. An exception to this is in the section on The HNT Game® where the abbreviations **PN** (Primary Negotiator), **SN** (Secondary Negotiator), **O** (Observer), and **HT** (Hostage Taker) have been maintained for clarity.

The term "crisis negotiation" is preferred by this author over "crisis intervention." While a crisis negotiator "intervenes" (steps in) in a crisis, what he or she does after is to negotiate–that is, make a connection with the **S**, move him/her to a more rational and/or hopeful state, and bring the crisis to a just conclusion while preserving some measure of the **S**'s self-respect.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This handbook is dedicated to the officers of the Louisville Division of Police (now the Louisville Metro Police) Hostage Negotiating Team with whom I have had the honor and pleasure of serving for nearly fifteen years. Special appreciation is owed to Lt. Fred Browder (ret.), Major Mike Dossett, Lieutenant John Mills, and Sergeant Chuck Cooper for their generosity, openness, acceptance and comradeship over the years. Drs. Roger Bell and Nancy Cunningham, of the University of Louisville, my mentors, have inspired me with their kindness, wisdom, and challenge.

CONTENTS

COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS AND HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS

Chapter 1

HOSTAGE AND CRISIS NEGOTIATION

INTRODUCTION

Crisis negotiation is both science and art. *The science:* there is considerable research from the academic fields of psychology, medicine, and criminal justice that constitutes a body of knowledge about the nature of crises and crisis management. *The art:* there are individuals who are simply better suited and more adept at communicating. Part is native ability or talent–a gift of gab–part is the constellation of personal characteristics that complement the gifts. But, the good news is that both art and science can be learned and improved upon. Knowledge can be gained from study, discussion, observation, lessons learned, mistakes made, successful outcomes, etc. Native ability can be honed by skills practice, feedback, experience, and teaching others.

PHILOSOPHY

Crisis intervention is based on the belief that a crisis is a moment in time (although it may last considerably longer); that it is time limited; that it follows a predictable cycle or course; that it is painful and distressing to the individual; and that it can be interrupted (intervened on) from the outside with the aim of changing the trajectory and altering the outcome. When a person experiences life events that are unsettling or overwhelming they may be off-balanced and their ability to cope impaired. Doctor Harvey Schlossberg, the father of hostage negotiation, has said that hostage taking, for example, is an attempt at problem solving, albeit a maladaptive one. Typically, the person in crisis has

acted impulsively, out of desperation, or in their characteristically inept way; consequentially, they have likely made their situation worse. Where there was one problem there are now two, and it is very public.

It is under the stress of critical events that a person may rise to heroic heights or come apart and act irrationally. For most of us, our crises are less public and are managed more constructively. Many subjects who act-out in very public ways have a history of failure, ineptness, and poor problem solving. This event is yet another in a series of melodramas.

Some therapeutic constructs have application here for crisis negotiators whose primary goals are not, strictly speaking, therapeutic: crises are, at the same time, unpleasant states and opportunities for growth and change. It has been said that a crisis is like a doorway that someone may choose not to pass through–to back away from–or to pass through to the other side.

Stepping "through the doorway" means facing up to fearsome and difficult tasks, risking new and better choices, making better decisions in the moment and from that point forward. A tough job for anyone, but with the potential for great rewards. It is for someone in crisis a chance at growth, greater adequacy, self-reliance, and inner strength.

NEGOTIATION

Crisis negotiation is based upon the principles of joining with the person in crisis, earning a measure of their trust, bargaining for their safety, and, ultimately, aiding them in adaptive problem solving. The idea of "fair market value," as in a real estate transaction, is a good analogy for crisis negotiators to keep in mind. The fair market value of a house for sale is not the price the seller is asking nor the price the buyer is offering, but the price they willingly agree upon. In this way, each leaves the bargaining table feeling relatively okay about the deal–(a win-win model of negotiation).

A man who is suicidal because his wife of fifty years has died stands on a bridge high above the city contemplating jumping into the icy water. The crisis of facing life after the death of a beloved spouse highlights many issues around attachment, dependency, mortality: fears and feelings about our own mortality, worry about our ability to face life without someone with whom we have been intimate over time,

missing a familiar presence–life as we have known it. Suicide is but one "solution" amongst a number of possible solutions. Rather than jump, he can opt for another "solution" that will take him to a higher level of adaptation to life's changes, learning something about himself in the process.

A crisis can be defined simply as a personal difficulty that overwhelms, or threatens to overwhelm, a person's resources and coping ability or capacity. It arises from an obstacle in the path of a person's valued goals, stress, frustration, failed attempts at problem solving, and the perception that this obstacle is insurmountable. A person is off-balanced because he or she has tried and failed by using customary choices and behaviors and does not know what to do next.

The public crises most likely to be encountered by law enforcement include suicidal behavior, barricade situations, hostage taking, and threats of violence by persons resisting legal authority. The Ss they encounter are likely to be mentally ill, emotionally overwrought, developmentally disabled, intoxicated/impaired, antisocial/criminal, or overzealous. Often **Ss** will fit into more than one of these categories. What they share in common is poor judgment and dangerousness–(to self or others)–while in their crisis state.

Intervention has two meanings in this context. The first is that by stepping in to help, a person intervenes or inserts himself or herself in the other's critical moment. The second meaning refers to those things we say and do, the techniques we employ as we seek to interrupt the event and help the person pass through the moment.

THE SUBJECT

A person in crisis may be undecided about what to do, of two minds about what to do, or convinced of a definite course of action to take. In all of these cases there is, nonetheless, some room for an alliance with someone who can help them through their terrible time by the scant hope suggestions, and rational arguments they bring. For the person in crisis it means "finally" being heard, moving toward rational thought leading to reconsideration of their plans, evaluating alternative courses of action and their consequences, and redecision.

What the **S** really wants (regardless of what he or she says or whether or not is deserving of it) is: