



AN OVERVIEW OF THE HOSTAGE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

**Revised and Updated
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A. Hostage-taking is:

1. Rational behavior: It isn't ethical, moral or legal but it is used because it (often) works
2. Effective problem solving: Hostage-takers (often) get what they want by taking hostages

B. Hostage-takers fall into three basic categories:

1. Criminals (traditional kidnap-for-ransom, criminals caught in the commission of other crimes, etc.)
2. Crusaders (Kidnap for a cause, includes most terrorist events)
3. Crazyies (Psychologically unbalanced, mentally disturbed, etc.)

C. Resolution options: Three primary options are available to the family, organization and/or Crisis Management Team (CMT):

1. Ignore/defer: Take no action or let someone else (government, etc.) handle everything for you
2. Rescue: Some type of armed, violent rescue attempt (usually conducted by the host government's military forces)
3. Negotiations: Enter into a structured dialogue with the kidnappers in an attempt to secure the release of the hostage(s)

D. The "wild card"

1. There is a new U.S. policy initiated in June of 2015 in response to public/family pressures in previous cases
2. Under this new policy, the government will act as a "first responder", proactively and early, in all cases where a U.S. citizen is kidnapped outside the country

3. The U.S. response will be managed through a new fusion cell where representatives of every U.S. agency with a mandate or responsibility in a hostage case will work together, in the same room, under unified leadership
4. The U.S. will look to the closest family member to act as the primary point-of-contact with the government and also as the primary source of decisions to be made (this is a change from previous practice when the employer or sending agency normally had this role)

E. Negotiation:

1. Negotiations are almost always the preferred course of action because history clearly shows that negotiations have the greatest chance of success with the lowest potential risk (to the hostage)
2. The first question facing the organization or CMT is: Will you negotiate?
 - a. Is this the best option given the facts and circumstances of the particular case?
 - b. What do organizational policies require, permit or preclude?
 - c. Are there any legal factors (prohibitions against negotiations, etc.)?
3. The second question facing the organization or CMT is: Can you negotiate?
 - a. Do you have the capability to contact the hostage-takers?
 - b. Do you have a trained, competent negotiator?

F. The objectives of hostage negotiations are multiple and, prioritized, are:

1. To keep the hostages alive
2. To persuade the captors to release the hostages
3. To gain as much information as possible
4. To support alternative strategies for release of the hostages

G. The foundation for negotiations is simple – the kidnappers:

1. Want something they can't otherwise get
2. They decided to get it through taking a hostage

H. Hostage negotiations are unlike any other negotiations. They are not like:

1. Litigation
2. Business negotiations
3. Bartering
4. Many tactics regularly used successfully in hostage negotiations seem counter-intuitive *until* the dynamics behind them are fully understood

I. There is one area in which hostage negotiations do resemble other types of negotiations: Ultimately, to succeed, the hostage negotiator needs to have some position of strength in order to get concessions from the captors

J. The foundation for hostage negotiations is that:

1. The negotiator can provide what they want; or,
2. The negotiator can keep them from getting it

K. The hostage negotiator's primary position of strength is to:

1. Establish early and often that he will only negotiate for a living hostage
2. This means that he will, from time to time, require proof of life

L. The basic negotiation strategies:

1. Initially, stall for time, which is used to:
 - a. Gain more information to plan a negotiation strategy
 - b. Give time for positive relationships to develop between the hostage and captors
 - c. Develop possible alternatives to propose to the captors
2. Require proof of life
3. Personalize the hostage(s) to the captors
4. Stall out ransom demands
5. Eliminate ransom demands
6. Offer alternatives to persuade the captors to release the hostages (things we don't have to give them, or things we are willing to give them)

M. Basic guidelines for the negotiator:

1. Remain calm
2. Use time
3. Counter threats
4. Understand roles
5. Control decisions
6. Control process
7. Maintain objectivity

N. The hostage negotiation "formula"

1. Make your point:
 - a. Have an objective (or possibly two) for each contact or session with the captors, and make sure that if at all possible, your point is communicated or your objective is achieved
 - b. Normally, you'll try to do this early in each session
2. Anticipate
 - a. In the planning process, anticipate what the captors may want to achieve during this particular contact
 - b. There will almost always be multiple potential objectives for the captors

3. Counter
 - a. For each of the captors' potential objectives, we need a plan to counter or at least respond to those objectives
 - b. We also need "standing" contingency plans for potential actions by the captors

O. The negotiation process

1. Establish & maintain communications
2. Use time appropriately
3. Obtain information
4. Calm the captors
5. Establish rapport
6. Determine the "range of possibilities" for resolution
7. Decide what your negotiation goal is
8. Begin the "bargaining"

P. During the negotiation process:

1. Continuously evaluate and modify
 - a. The range of possibilities
 - b. The negotiation goal
2. See to reach consensus on the solution
3. Work to agree to a release scenario
4. Continue to assess and evaluate the "Range of Possibilities" for resolution:
 - a. What do the captors demand?
 - b. What are they interested in?
 - c. What might your organization be willing to do?
 - d. Establish a list of possible resolution strategies
5. The Bargaining Process
 - a. Establish and maintain trust (the foundation of the negotiation)
6. Always blame someone else for negative answers and unpopular decisions
7. Never make agreements or promises that you cannot or will not keep
8. Never get caught lying to the captors
9. Agree in part wherever and whenever possible
10. Deal with small issues first
 - a. Create a climate of success
 - b. Always seek ways to demonstrate your good faith
 - c. Always take personal credit for things that please the captors
 - d. Divide the big issues into smaller component parts
 - e. Lower expectations constantly
 - f. Explore the captor's positions
11. If there is no progress, try to initiate (new) negotiable issues
12. To persuade, use episodic information (examples, stories, etc.)
13. Always suggest release and its benefit to the captors

Q. Reaching consensus

1. Unconditional release always acceptable
2. Other solutions must be pre-approved by the CMT
3. The closer you are to agreement (consensus), the more delicate and deliberate the negotiations become
4. As you get closer to agreement (consensus), re-state the agreement (so far) as often as possible
5. If agreement is in sight, increase the frequency of positive reinforcement
6. Keep the negotiations on the track – don't allow changes or surprises

R. Indications of progress in the negotiations

1. Less violent content
2. They talk longer and more often
3. Speech is at a slower rate
4. Speech, pitch and volume is lower
5. Talk is about personal issues
6. A deadline passed without incident
7. Threats decrease
8. No deaths or injuries since negotiations started
9. Hostages are released

S. The “Two Commandments” of hostage negotiations

1. Do NOT make promises/agreements that you cannot or will not keep
2. Do NOT tell any lies you can get caught in

T. Rules of hostage negotiations

1. Avoid saying “no”
2. Claim responsibility for the good (i.e., everything the captors like)
3. Blame others for the bad (i.e., everything the captors dislike)
4. Don't make decisions – never convey that the negotiator has that authority
 - a. “I need to check”
 - b. “I'll check on that”
 - c. “I'm working to find out about that”
5. Don't give up something for nothing
6. Don't believe a hostage is dead until you see the body
7. Don't believe a hostage has been released until you see him or her
8. Control the negotiation
9. Build your position of strength
10. Keep suggesting release