IN OUR LIVES

Workplace, Community

K. Carll, Ph.D.

and Bacon
α • Sydney • Tokyo • Singapore
CRISIS AND HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS

Community and Corporate Responses to Violent Incidents

FREDERICK J. LANCELEY

There is no one place for a crisis of violence, as we have all seen in the newspapers and on TV. A violent incident can happen in the home, a school, the workplace, a public institution, a private business—just about anywhere. It happens suddenly, generally without warning, and the worst possible response is panic, as understandable as such a reaction might be. This chapter deals with strategies for responding to a violent crisis in a manner that will prevent its escalation, which might well result in tragedy.

FIRST-RESPONDER NEGOTIATIONS

It is 8:30 A.M. You have arrived at your office. Your secretary is already in, but with her is her ex-husband. He has a knife to her throat and shouts at you, “If I can’t have her, nobody will!”
How would you respond? How would your employees respond? The first hour of any violent crisis is the most volatile, and law enforcement agencies typically take about an hour to set up their crisis management team. Therefore, the responsibility for managing this dangerous, pivotal hour, which often governs the course of the entire incident, often falls on non-law enforcement personnel.

First-responder negotiations may be likened to first aid. They are crucial when something has to be done until the trained professionals arrive. None of us would allow the victim of an accident or crime to slowly bleed to death because we are not doctors or emergency medical technicians. We would try to do something. Likewise, first-responder negotiations represent an attempt to prevent a violent incident from developing into something even worse. First-responder negotiations, then, are not intended to replace negotiations by a trained negotiator; they should be used primarily as an effective holding strategy until help from trained law enforcement negotiators and tactical teams arrives.

The ultimate goal of the first responder is to prevent or reduce the likelihood of further violence. The initial actions of the responder should be directed toward calming the perpetrator and stabilizing the situation—that is, preventing the threat from spreading. First responders should bear in mind that almost invariably anxiety and fear are the predominant emotions being experienced by the perpetrator. Anger is also very common; so, above everything else, the first responder must ensure his or her own safety. This consideration cannot be emphasized too strongly.

**Do’s and Don’ts in First-Responder Negotiations**

Whenever possible, the first responder should begin to clear the area of employees and others, removing them to a place of safety. The evacuated persons should be taken to a holding area for debriefing by law enforcement personnel, a procedure that may prove vitally important for later negotiations and tactical efforts, as well as eventual prosecution. Another concern, in certain situations, involves any people who may be trapped by the perpetrator’s actions but whose presence he is not aware of. This is a very tricky situation, and the authorities should be informed of it as soon as they arrive. Meanwhile, first responders should not reveal to the perpetrator that they know anything about it. (The masculine pronoun is used throughout this chapter to identify the perpetrator of a violent incident, as by far the greatest majority of such incidents are instigated by men. Keep in mind, however, that women, too, are perpetrators, and, in any case, these general tips on how to act in such situations are not gender-specific.)

Generally, such as in the vignette opening this chapter, the first responder has no choice but to make the initial contact with the offender. During this initial contact, the first responder should concentrate on trying to calm the offender, develop additional information, buy time, and in one way or another keep him busy.

In some cases, it is the first responder who decides on his or her own to initiate contact with the perpetrator. In this instance, the first responder should concentrate on reassuring the offender that things are under control and that no one is going to try to come in after him. In any case, first responders should avoid soliciting any demands. Basically, the initial statements by first responders may set the tone for the next few hours. A first responder might begin by saying:

Hello in there. My name is _____ with _____. Everything is under control out here. Is everything all right in there?

In all cases, it is more important to be a good listener than a good talker. Listening carefully to the offender’s responses may provide the first responder with valuable information about the situation because everything the offender says will tell the intervener something about him. For instance, just listening to the offender may give the first responder an idea of what is important to him and what it will take to get him out of there. At this stage, bargaining with or making concessions to the offender should be
avoided, so while listening, the first responder should try to avoid offering anything.

More important, letting the offender talk not only provides information but may help reduce his anxiety, one of the key goals of the initial contact. Moreover, while the offender is talking, the first responder is gaining time. (The mere passage of time may be the most important goal to achieve during this stage; the importance of the passage of time will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.)

When talking to the offender, the first responder shouldn’t try too quickly to “push the deal” (i.e., make a resolution or compromise). Few of us trust someone who is rushing a deal on us before we are ready. This feeling is especially true of those who, like the perpetrator, are fearful and tense to begin with. First responders should also avoid giving orders or making demands that may escalate the confrontation.

It is important for the first responder to take notes on events and conversations as they occur and to note the time of each occurrence. This can also prove invaluable later on. Many negotiators in a crisis situation feel that they will be able to reconstruct events at a later time and fail to keep a log. They are shocked to realize when the time comes that they cannot remember what was said or done, why actions were taken or not taken, or what the sequence of events actually was.

Also, first responders generally attempt to minimize the seriousness of the attempted crime when speaking to law officers or other outsiders. They may say, for example, “Nothing much has happened. No one has been hurt [or killed].” Or, when asked about a victim’s condition, they may say, “I don’t know his condition because I’ve been talking with you.”

Most important, trust is critical to the establishment of a rapport with the perpetrator, and nothing will destroy the rapport-building process faster than being caught in a lie or trap. As a result, first responders must strive to be as honest as possible and to avoid tricks.

First responders and negotiators should also avoid directing frequent attention to the victims. They should not even call them hostages. Calling the victims “hostages” may lead the offender to believe he has bargaining power, and direct frequent attention to the victims may also lead the offender to believe he has more power than he really does. Instead, first responders should attempt to get him involved with themselves rather than increasing his involvement with the victims. However, it may be appropriate, in the early stages, to ask for the names and condition of all those under the offender’s control. Here negotiators and first responders may try to personalize the hostages or victims by using their names if known.

During this initial stage, if first responders are not sure what an offender means by some statement or demand, they should ask him for clarification, always being sure to use good judgment. They should not ask an offender to clarify a vague threat, and they should never dismiss any request (or demand) as trivial. If the perpetrator brings it up, it is important to him. Discussing seemingly small issues will keep him talking, allow time to pass, and set a precedent for working together. At the same time, first responders should never say no to a demand. Remember, not saying no does not mean saying yes. The attitude is “We will discuss anything.” In response to requests or demands, tell the offender, “I understand and will pass it on” or “Someone is working on that right now.”

First responders are not decision makers, and they should not present themselves as the final authority in an incident. On the other hand, they must avoid using terms such as “my boss,” “my supervisor,” or “the director of the company.” If such terms are used, the common response of the perpetrator is to ask for the person named. First responders certainly do not want to present themselves as any kind of final authority, but they do not want to set up another individual as the final authority, either. First responders should say things such as, “I’ll check with [the home office, ‘corporate headquarters,’ New York,’ or some other impersonal entity or group of decision makers].”

If demands are being made, the first responder should attempt to soften the demands. For example, the offender might say, “I want my job back and a $10,000 raise.” A first responder
or negotiator should say, “Okay, I understand you are concerned about your job. I’ll pass that along and make sure someone starts looking into it as soon as the others get here.” If the offender is making demands, first responders should not make alternative suggestions to him, and they should never, in response to any demand, allow for any exchange of hostages.

First responders should never set a deadline on themselves or tell the offender that something will be done within a specific time frame. For example, a first responder should not say, “I’ll have some coffee for you in ten minutes.” Deadlines, even self-imposed deadlines, are often difficult to meet despite the best of intentions. When the deadlines are not met, offenders tend to think it is because the negotiator or first responder is trying to trick him.

First responders should not introduce “outsiders”—namely, the offender’s friends, family, lawyer, doctor, clergy, and others. Using third-party intermediaries is a tricky business and has probably precipitated more violence than any other single negotiating tactic. For example, unbeknownst to law enforcement at the time, fathers have been put on the telephone with daughters they had previously raped. Family members and girlfriends have encouraged suicides. Wives’ lovers have been put on the telephone to talk to outraged, homicidal husbands. When such outsiders are put on the telephone, it is hard to predict what they will say despite what they tell the first responder beforehand. Friends, relatives, and others almost always arrive on the scene and insist that they can talk the offender out. The tricky part about using third-party intermediaries is in determining when it will work and when it will lead to tragedy. This decision is best left to experienced negotiators.

If a first responder senses he or she is in a possible suicide situation, he should ask the offender about it directly: “Are you thinking of committing suicide?” Every major suicide or crisis hot line in the United States considers this question essential to suicide intervention. Though first responders often find it difficult to bring the subject up, they should not feel they will push the offender over the edge or put the idea into his head. Often, suicide is an issue both parties know exists, and approaching the topic directly and openly is the best course. It will then be out in the open and available for discussion. It is very likely that the offender has broached the subject of suicide with friends and relatives, and they have either refused to discuss it with him or else made light of it. The negotiator’s willingness to discuss suicide will go a long way toward establishing rapport.

In this regard, first responders should be aware of a phenomenon known as “suicide by cop,” a situation in which an offender wants to die but does not want to do it himself. Instead, he wants the police or someone else to kill him. Virtually all suicidal people can be dangerous, but those contemplating suicide by cop can be especially so because they will kill innocent victims to provoke the police or others into killing them. A bank teller was killed on designated deadline when the police did not comply with the offender’s demand to be killed within thirty minutes. After killing the teller, the offender stepped in front of a window knowing full well that a police sniper was across the street. He was killed by the sniper.

All crisis situations involve peril, and first responders should never expose themselves to possible danger to negotiate face-to-face, especially if the offender has a firearm. When speaking to an armed offender, the interveners must be sure that they are in a position of cover and that they understand the difference between cover and concealment. “Cover” will stop a bullet. “Concealment” is something to hide behind. A brick wall may provide adequate cover. An azalea bush may provide concealment but not cover.

First responders must also be ready for success. The early surrender of an offender is always a possibility, and they should plan for it early on. First responders do not want to get into a situation in which they have to tell the offender to stay where he is because the people outside are not ready to receive him. If first responders are doing so well, in that they have developed a rapport with the offender, many law enforcement agencies will allow
them to continue after the police have arrived. The law enforce-
ment agency will sit by the side of the first responder and coach
him or her through the ordeal.

Lastly, when making decisions, remember the words of
Lieutenant Robert Louden, New York City Police Department (re-
tired): “Safety and control must always be the prime consider-
ations in the decision-making process.” No decisions should be
made that will increase risk to anyone or loosen the community’s
control of the situation.

Preparing for First-Responder Situations

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other law enforce-
ment agencies have been teaching what they call “first-responder
negotiations” to law enforcement agencies for about ten years.
The idea behind this approach is simply that if responding patrol
officers can effectively handle the incident at the outset, the sit-
uation may not evolve into something not only more dangerous
but more expensive in terms of manpower and overtime costs. In
fact, law enforcement agencies have successfully employed first-
response negotiations in a variety of circumstances such as those
involving hostage taking, barricaded perpetrators, and domestic
violence.

I have been training corporate security and human resources
personnel for some time to respond effectively to violent inci-
dents in the workplace and have seen firsthand the significant
benefits such preparations can bring to the community and cor-
porations. An effective response during the first few minutes to
an hour calms the perpetrator faster, thereby reducing the likeli-
hood of violence or further violence; enhances the probability of
a peaceful outcome; decreases workplace downtime; makes the
transition to law enforcement agencies easier; and lessens trauma
on employees.

Unfortunately, communities, corporations, and even law en-
forcement agencies find it difficult to spend money on training
for unlikely events. None of us wants to believe that a mecha-
nism for managing violent incidents is necessary in our work-
place. Yet, violence is a daily occurrence in our society. I recently
gave a presentation on managing violence in Charleston, South
Carolina, during which an interested acquaintance said that
there was never any violence in his workplace except, of course,
for the occasional fistfight. Violence is so common in our society
we have become inured to it.

NEGOTIATING A CRISIS SITUATION:
The Intent

Violence comes in many forms, and in managing an incident it is
crucial to determine the offender’s motivation. A confounding
factor in determining motivation is the lack of precision in our
vocabulary. For example, not all those held against their will are
hostages, but we often hear in the media that someone is being
held hostage. Using the term hostage strictly as done in this chap-
ter, however, we find that true hostage situations are relatively
rare. This section sets forth some more precise terminology and
so gives crisis negotiators a better perspective on what is actually
happening in an incident.

Consider the following scenarios: an ex-husband is holding
his former wife at gunpoint because she insisted on a divorce; an
embassy is taken over by terrorists who are pressuring for the re-
lease of their comrades from prison; an armed robber in a conve-
nience store is telling police that unless they shoot him, he is
going to shoot his captive; a subject enters a residence in the
middle of the night and abducts a baby for which the parents
later receive a ransom demand; and a teenage gunman walks into
a classroom, captures twenty of his classmates, and demands piz-
azas and Cokes. Upon arrest all of these individuals will, most
probably, be prosecuted for the violation of a state or federal kid-
napping statute, and, as such, all may be considered kidnappers.
Under the federal kidnapping statute, Title 18, United States
Code, Section 1201, “whoever unlawfully seizes, confines, in-
veigles, decoys, kidnaps, abducts, or carries away and holds for
ransom or reward or otherwise any person . . . shall be punished
by imprisonment for any term of years or for life.” The statute tells us who may be prosecuted under the statute but tells us very little about the offender’s motivation. Some states have statutes specifically for situations in which victims are being held against their will. These statutes are generally called “unlawful detention,” “false imprisonment,” or something similar.

**Negotiating a Kidnapping: For Ransom, Reward, or Otherwise**

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines the transitive verb *kidnap* as “to abduct and detain (a person or animal), often for ransom.” Notice that this definition says “often for ransom.” Both the statute mentioned earlier and the definition of kidnapping acknowledge that kidnappings do not always involve ransoms. Thus, an incident does not have to include a demand for ransom to qualify as a kidnapping.

The kidnapper who “holds for reward or ransom” perpetrates a crime that is relatively straightforward in terms of motivation. The kidnapper is generally motivated by the desire for monetary gain, and the intent is to achieve that goal. The “otherwise” kidnappers are the ones who cause law enforcement the most difficulty in terms of understanding their motivation and thereby procuring a handle for managing and controlling the incident.

To understand an offender’s motivation, crisis negotiators must ask themselves throughout the incident, “What is the offender’s intent?” Negotiators must continue asking this question throughout the incident because (1) the answer is not always apparent and (2) the offender’s intent may change. In fact, crisis negotiators want the offender’s intent to change.

There are two variations of the crime prosecuted as a kidnapping: those in which a victim is held in a location known to the authorities, and those in which a victim is held in a location unknown to the authorities. Either form of kidnapping may or may not result in a substantive demand. If there is a substantive demand in return for the promised release of the abducted individual, that particular kind of victim is a hostage. (A substantive demand is one that the hostage taker could not have achieved by himself.) If there is no substantive demand made upon the authorities or other party, the person held is a captive or victim but not a hostage.

**Kidnapping: Unknown Location**

In a Latin American country, a young man was abducted, taken to a still unknown location, and his father received a demand for $20 million. In this situation, the kidnapper’s motivation is obvious; he wants the money. In a kidnapping in which the victim is taken to an unknown location and there is a substantive demand, the kidnapped person is a particular kind of victim called a hostage (see Figure 6.1). A *hostage* is defined as a person held and threatened by an offender to force the fulfillment of substantive demands by a third party. Notice that this definition of hostage makes no mention of the location of the victim but does mention substantive demands. Typical substantive demands are for ransom (usually money) or some political, social, or religious change. True hostage situations require bargaining by their very nature. Without a substantive demand, there is no hostage situation but law enforcement may be facing an equally or more dangerous situation.

In South Carolina, a woman was abducted from her front yard. Sometime later her body was found in a wooded area. She

![Diagram of Kidnapping—Unknown locations]

**FIGURE 6.1**
had been sexually assaulted, tortured, and murdered. Her assailant could have been charged with kidnapping as well as other offenses.

If the kidnap victim is taken to an unknown location and no ransom demand is made, that victim is not a hostage by definition. If there is no ransom demand, why was the kidnapping carried out? These are the “otherwise” kidnappings. Kidnappers do not perpetrate their crimes unless the act benefits them in some way. Any number of motives or purposes are possible: sexual assault, abuse, or exploitation; child stealing; romance; a custodial or domestic dispute; religious or cult considerations; deprogramming; political considerations; narcotic involvements; retribution; transportation in connection with another crime; or a host of other reasons.

**Kidnapping: Known Location**

In the movie *Dog Day Afternoon*, victims are being held in a bank. The bank robbers want to trade the victims for transportation out of the country. These victims are hostages. Before the aircraft hijacking statute was passed, aircraft hijackers were charged with violation of the federal kidnapping law. Now aircraft hijackers are kidnappers, and their victims are hostages.

Kidnappings in locations known to the authorities may or may not result in substantive demands. A subset of kidnappers who make substantive demands and are holding their victims in known locations are called hostage takers (see Figure 6.2). Substantive demands being made from a known location are identical to those being made from an unknown location except that now there is often an escape demand. An escape demand is necessary because the authorities know where the kidnapper is located. For example, an armed robber is trapped in a convenience store by a rapid police response, and he wants a getaway car. Terrorists aboard a hijacked aircraft are demanding freedom for their imprisoned comrades and themselves. The armed robber could not escape by himself, and the terrorists could not effect the release of their associates without assistance from the authorities. These events are hostage situations. Negotiators in such situations usually have a rather clear idea of the perpetrators’ motives.

On the other hand, consider an offender holding several people at gunpoint and demanding soft drinks, pizza, and cigarettes. Could he have achieved his demands without holding people and without the assistance of the authorities? Obviously, there are easier ways to get pizza, drinks, and cigarettes. Other nonsubstantive, and quite common, demands include demands for alcohol, coffee, or the like. These demands are within the reach of anyone, so why is the offender holding his captives? Something else is going on in the offender’s mind besides a desire for fast food and cigarettes. This is not, by definition, a hostage situation, and it is vital for negotiators and law enforcement people to determine what is driving the incident.

In April 1979, in a lecture to his students, Harvey Schlossberg, Ph.D. (New York City Police Department, retired), observed that a hostage taker is not there to kill his victims. He is there to get his demands met. Dr. Schlossberg’s words are as true today as they were then. Hostage takers are not there to kill their victims, but a would-be-murderer may look like a hostage taker, and unless negotiators are able to determine his real intention, their negotiations will miss the point and be ineffective. Negotiators must continually ask themselves, “Is there an easier way to get this demand met?” In the case of relatively trivial demands, they must be sensitive to a possible other agenda, maybe a homicidal impulse or homicidal/suicidal intent. They must be aware of the

![Figure 6.2](image-url)
situation; for example, victims are sometimes hiding and the offender is not sure where they are. On other occasions, it may be that the innocent persons are present because they want to be and there is no real threat to them.

On the other hand, in the scene at the beginning of this chapter in which the man was holding his wife at knifepoint, there were no substantive demands, so what did the offender want? The answer is nothing. The offender has what he wants! The offender may have one or more intentions, uses, or purposes for the captive such as sexual assault, abuse, or exploitation, humiliation, homicide/suicide, or gain a captive audience for his suicide. At such times, the intereners must determine what is behind the offender’s actions.

Putting Figures 6.1 and 6.2 together to form Figure 6.3 illustrates a number of interesting points. Hostage situations, on the left side of Figure 6.3, involve bargaining because the victim was taken for his or her value in trade. Trading and bargaining in true hostage situations are, therefore, to be expected. On the other hand, because the offender wants something, negotiators are not powerless. They have some control.

On the right side of Figure 6.3 are the nonhostage situations. These incidents are not motivated by a need to get something from the authorities, so no bargaining is done. If the location of the victim is known, these incidents tend to be more emotional, and as a result crisis intervention techniques come more into play. On the upper-right side of Figure 6.3, we have nonhostage situations in which people have been abducted and are being held against their will. If the victim has been taken to an unknown location and the authorities have no contact with the offender, there is not much the authorities can do but look for them.

On the lower-right side of Figure 6.3, we also have nonhostage situations. In these known-location situations, the offender may not want to talk to the authorities but he generally does, eventually. In this situation, he does not want anything from the authorities, so there is no bargaining. Crisis intervention techniques are employed in this kind of situation rather than hostage negotiation techniques. In essence, the negotiator becomes a crisis intervenor. Hostage negotiation is crisis intervention with bargaining techniques added. If we take the bargaining out of a hostage negotiation, we are left with crisis intervention.

Today’s crisis negotiators must respond to a wide variety of incidents, including kidnapping. It is important for negotiators to understand that there is more than one form of prosecutable kidnapping—those at known locations and those at unknown locations—and either form may result in a demand. It is critical to know that some kidnapped persons are hostages and others are potential murder victims. It is also vital to fully understand these differentiations because the circumstances of the crime so directly reflect the offender’s intent and the possible outcome of an incident. The offender’s purpose for holding an abducted individual will have a direct bearing on how a negotiation is
HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS

Hostage negotiation, as a discipline, began in the New York City Police Department in the early 1970s. Shortly after New York City began its program, the FBI began one of its own. Thanks to Harvey Schlossberg, Ph.D. and Captain Frank Bolz, both now retired from the New York City Police Department, and the FBI, every major police department in the United States has developed a hostage negotiation team.

Since the 1970s, hostage negotiators have experienced a remarkable record of success. Surprisingly, no nationwide statistics on hostage situations or their outcomes are available, but experienced hostage negotiators in seminars at the FBI Academy have consistently estimated a very high success rate. If the nonviolent resolution of hostage situations is so common in such major cities as New York, Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago, we should ask, "Why are we so successful?" From that question arises another: "Are there identifiable elements in a hostage situation that might indicate when the odds of success are less than favorable?"

Before attempting to assess whether a hostage situation is negotiable, we should determine whether the incident is actually a hostage situation. This determination is achieved by defining our terms.

To negotiate is to arrange or settle by conferring or discussing, which is precisely what negotiators attempt to do in a hostage situation. Hostage negotiators are not mediators. Mediators are generally viewed as neutral. Hostage negotiators are not neutral because they are paid by and are representing the city, county, state, or federal government. Negotiators trying to appear neutral will lose credibility with the hostage taker because he knows the negotiator is a cop even though he is not acting like one. Acting neutral may even cost credibility with or the confidence of others on the crisis management team because they may fear that the negotiator’s objectivity has been lost. Negotiators can only maintain the confidence of both sides by being both firm and empathetic—but within their role of law enforcement officers.

Negotiators at the FBI Academy are taught the "Eight Elements of Hostage Negotiation," described in the following subsections, and use them in their assessment of an incident.

1. A Need to Live on the Part of the Hostage Taker

Hostage negotiation techniques presuppose that the hostage taker has a need to live; that is, they presuppose that the hostage taker wants something that he cannot achieve by himself, a substantive demand, and that he wants to live to enjoy the fruits of his crime.

Negotiators often express concern about provoking the hostage taker lest he kill the hostage. Yet the hostage taker, if he has a need to live, cannot provoke the authorities too much, either. The hostage taker hopes to provoke the authorities just enough to get his demands met, but not so much that they feel compelled to use overwhelming deadly force against him. (Previously discussed were the situations in which the intent is suicide by cop, not gain. This is a very dangerous situation and requires crisis negotiation techniques that differ from hostage negotiation. Thus, determining early the offender's intent is vital to managing the situation. In the following discussion, we will largely assume that the intent is to live and profit from the abduction.)

If a hostage taker has a need to live but recognizes that his demands will not be met, he does not have many remaining options. One option is to kill a hostage out of spite, frustration, or as a last-ditch effort to get demands met. He knows, however, that if he employs this option, the authorities are likely to use deadly force against him. If he has a need to live, killing a hostage becomes an option he rationally cannot risk. Having failed in getting the authorities to meet his demands and fearing the use of deadly force by the authorities, surrender becomes the hostage taker's remaining alternative.
2. A Threat of Force by the Authorities

The offender must appreciate the fact that the authorities have a force option available to them. The threat of force must be a viable one; that is, the offender must perceive that the force option is available to the authorities, that he is vulnerable to it, and that the authorities are willing to employ it should they deem it necessary. If even one of these perceptions is missing, the threat of force will be a hollow one.

In general, it is better to play down a threat of force in order to reduce the offender’s anxiety, but he must know it is there. The hostage taker does not want to provoke the force option because he has a need to live, and the force option would jeopardize his life. When the authorities employ the force option, the incident is over, and the hostage taker knows that, whatever else happens, his demands will not be met. He knows that the authorities always prevail in siege situations that end in a shootout. The authorities may suffer losses, even severe losses, but the end result is almost invariably the arrest, or even death, of the offender.

The threat of force element is equally valid in international hostage situations. The offending government or terrorist group must realize that the victim government has a force option available, the offenders are vulnerable, and the victim government has the will to employ the force option. If the hostage taker feels no threat, he has nothing to lose and everything to gain by holding hostages.

For example, during the Carter administration Americans were taken hostage in Teheran, Iran. The Iranian government knew that the United States government had a force option available. They knew, too, that if a missile were launched at them, there was nothing they could do to protect themselves from the action. What they did not believe was that President Carter would take such overwhelming tactical action.

Enter Ronald Reagan and his message: nuclear wars are winnable. There is talk of using nuclear weapons tactically. Reagan becomes president, and on the day he is inaugurated the hostages are released. Why? Because President Reagan might take the actions the Iranian government did not fear under President Carter.

3. Communication between the Hostage Taker and the Authorities

In a hostage situation, the hostage taker must communicate his demands and threats to someone. The “someone” is generally the authorities but could be any party capable of fulfilling the hostage taker’s demands—for example, newspapers or television and radio stations that were told to broadcast a manifesto or air a grievance in return for a hostage’s life. Television and radio stations have been taken over in Phoenix and Cleveland as well as elsewhere. One might even say that the so-called “Unabomber,” who threatened to continue killing unless his manifesto was published in a leading newspaper, was holding the American public hostage. Without the communication of demands to a third party, the incident is a private dispute. There is no such thing as a secret hostage taking. A demand and threat must be communicated.

The person or entity who is confronted by the hostage taker must care about the lives of the hostages. If the extorted party expresses and feels no concern about the threat to the hostages, the hostage taker has nothing with which to bargain. It is only the caring about the hostage that gives the hostage taker his power. For example, many of us can remember that troubled time when Americans were being held hostage in Teheran, but how many of us can remember what Iran’s leader at the time said when Iranians were taken hostage in Iran’s London Embassy? Essentially, he said the hostages should be proud to die for the revolution. Where does that leave the hostage takers? The Iranians were rescued due to the caring of the London Metropolitan Police and the British military.
4. A Leader or Decision-Making Process among the Hostage Takers

The failure of one of the hostage takers to assume a leadership role or the failure of a decision-making process to develop among the hostage takers can make a negotiated resolution an extremely difficult, if not impossible, goal to attain. If a single leader emerges among the hostage takers, the authorities seek to influence him, so that he makes the decisions they want. He should be someone who not only can make decisions but who can enforce his decisions among the other hostage takers. He should also be someone the authorities can hold personally accountable for his actions and the actions of the other hostage takers.

At the Atlanta penitentiary siege in November and early December 1987, negotiators were having a difficult time determining who was in charge among the Cuban detainees. Actually, two problems were present. First, the detainees were split among several factions so there was no one leader among them. Second, many of the detainees had experienced prison time in the Cuban system. It took a while for negotiators to understand that in Cuba, when a disturbance occurred in a prison, the authorities would expend a great deal of effort in determining who was responsible for the disturbance. After such a determination was made, the inmate leadership was punished severely. So, when FBI negotiators in Atlanta asked who was in charge, several detainees insisted that they were not leaders.

If no one person emerges in a leadership position, the authorities should look for a decision-making process so that the process as opposed to an individual can be influenced. Individual and/or group decision making will take place among the hostage takers, and the more the authorities can influence the decision-making process, the higher the likelihood of a successful resolution. In the past, the authorities have successfully used the tactic of dropping leaflets or speaking to large groups over loudspeakers to ensure that all of the hostage takers or their followers hear the government's position. Again, at the Atlanta penitentiary, authorities, sensing that not all of the detainees were receiving the government's message, decided to reach out to all of the detainees. The crisis management team set up loudspeakers and printed leaflets telling all of the detainees the government's position.

Sometimes coherent negotiations are impossible. In a small Midwestern county jail, an overweight deputy sheriff with a heart problem was taken hostage by several inmates. Each of the inmates had his own agenda. Negotiators were barraged from all sides with an uncoordinated array of demands, deadlines, and threats. The deputy was tactically rescued after many hours of unproductive negotiations.

In a situation with multiple hostage takers without leadership or without a group decision-making process, the authorities will find themselves negotiating what amounts to several hostage situations simultaneously. While each of the hostage takers negotiates his own personal agenda, they are "sharing" the same hostage to enforce their demands. Any one of the hostage takers, individually, could take violent, aggressive action against a hostage for his own purposes, especially if he knew he would not be held personally responsible.

Finally, if the decision maker for hostage takers is outside the containment area, every effort should be made to isolate the contained hostage takers from their leadership. Isolation may be achieved by jamming radio frequencies, cutting telephone lines, or simply shutting off electricity. Negotiators want a leader to emerge from the contained group of hostage takers.

5. A Demand by the Hostage Taker

Hostage situations by definition involve substantive demands. If no substantive demands are made in an incident, it is not a hostage situation. Instead, the occurrence may be intended as a homicide, a homicide-suicide, an opportunity for sexual exploitation, or any number of other possibilities.

Barricaded offenders, even those holding innocent persons, for example, will often make nonsubstantive demands for such things as cigarettes, beer, a relative, pizza, and so forth. The
6. Containment of the Hostage Taker

Some years ago, a law enforcement agency located a bank robber it had been after for some time because in the course of his robberies he had pistol-whipped a number of bank tellers and injured them quite severely. Upon locating the robber, the authorities telephoned his residence and demanded his surrender. The bank robber unsuccessfully attempted to escape through a back door, side window, and attic. Finally, he told his girlfriend, “Tell them I’m coming out and I’m coming out shooting!”

He did come out of the house but with a handgun to his own head, walking rapidly and shouting, “Get back! Get back! I’ll kill myself!” The officers did stay back and attempted to keep him surrounded while maintaining their positions of cover by moving from car to tree to car down the street. The bank robber turned a corner, and officers had reason to believe that he entered a residence. The occupant of the residence was very fearful, and it took the officers twenty minutes to realize that she was afraid of them, not of anyone inside the house. The fugitive bank robber had escaped. Fortunately for the officers’ careers, the bank robber surrendered himself the following day.

Containment in the smallest possible area is vitally important. Containment includes restraint from leaving the crime scene. In other words, there is no such thing as moving containment. If the offender and the incident are moving, the incident is not contained. Officials want to restrict the offender’s movement, whether it be on foot or in a vehicle. Moving hostage incidents are often the most dangerous because they cause a loss of some measure of control, are difficult to command, and add problems in communication. The more officials can restrict the offender’s freedom of movement, the better off negotiators are. He should have as little room as possible to move around, and the authorities should collapse perimeters around any areas he vacates, to deny him reentry. As the offender comes to see just how contained he is, he will realize that he cannot expect to harm or murder his victim with impunity.

7. Passage of Time

The passage of time in a hostage situation is often the best thing to happen for a negotiator because it does so much to accomplish a successful, nonviolent resolution. Time is so vitally important to achieving a successful resolution that the subject is worthy of a book by itself. Simply put, time provides the following advantages to the authorities:

1. The hostage taker’s basic human needs, such as hunger and thirst, increase, and he comes to realize that only through the negotiator can his needs be met.
2. Anxiety diminishes.
3. As anxiety is reduced, the offender’s ability to think more rationally increases.
4. A bond may develop between the hostage taker and his victim, thereby increasing the hostage’s safety.
5. Opportunities for escape may arise for the hostages.
6. The gathering of information for good decision making takes place.
7. The formation of a negotiator/offender rapport may be established.
8. The offender’s expectations are reduced.
9. The tactical team has an opportunity to formulate not only emergency and deliberate assault plans but also
plans for hostage releases, deliveries of items to the offender, and the offender's surrender.

On the negative side, time is expensive in terms of money and manpower. Exhaustion can lead to carelessness and irrational behavior on the part of law enforcement as well as the offender; blocking city streets for long periods of time can be inconvenient for large segments of the city’s population and lead to pressure for a dangerous, immediate resolution to the situation. Injuries, illness, and the presence of drugs can also lead to demands for a quick solution. Nevertheless, time almost always works on the side of the authorities and against the hostage taker.

8. The Negotiator as a Significant Other

Law enforcement negotiators aim to establish a special relationship with the offender from the very beginning. They introduce themselves to the hostage taker by stating, “My name is _______. I am a negotiator for the _______ Police Department, and I would like to help you work this out.” Negotiators deliberately provide their name without rank to avoid the possibility that the offender may believe they have more power than they actually do. Also, introducing themselves as negotiators helps establish the appropriate relationship with the offender. As a representative of the police department, the negotiator does have access to power, even if he or she is not the final authority in the incident. As a negotiator, the official establishes that he or she can use this power to help or hurt the hostage taker. A significant other is someone who can hurt or help, and the negotiator has stated that he or she is willing to help. The negotiator appears to the offender not simply as a member of the enemy party but also as a possible ally in a difficult situation.

Summing Up Hostage Negotiation

Although hostage negotiators have enjoyed a remarkable record of success since the early 1970s, it is essential that negotiators understand why they are successful and, on the other hand, be able to readily recognize those circumstances under which the authorities may not be successful via negotiation. A thorough understanding of these eight elements will aid negotiators in determining the probability of success via negotiation, establishing negotiable circumstances, and maintaining a proud record of achievement.

KIDNAP NEGOTIATION: A TEAM EFFORT

The negotiation effort is far more than a team of negotiators talking to the “bad guy” over the telephone. What negotiators are saying to the offender is only part of the message being conveyed to him. In a sense, every crisis management component is part of the negotiation effort. The whole procedure includes not only what the negotiators say to the offender but also every observed move the tactical team makes, every radio and television broadcast the offender hears, and every decision made by management. For the negotiation effort to be maximally effective, all actions taken or not taken by each of the crisis components must communicate the same message. It is essential that all crisis management components follow the same strategy.

Planning Kidnap Negotiations

The crisis management team should meet early in the incident and regularly after that. Management must decide what message it wants to convey and how that message is to be conveyed. If management decides it wants to be tough, everybody is tough. Negotiators take a hard line. Tactical teams display an obvious presence. Management adopts a strong position that is reflected in their decisions and media releases. If management decides it wants to take a softer line, negotiators are more empathetic, the tactical teams maintain a low profile, and management is more conciliatory in its decision making. Management must make the
overall decision on strategy, and each component of the team communicates management’s message to the offender.

Periodically throughout the incident, the team members must meet to discuss progress, evaluate their strategy, and make adjustments as necessary. If the crisis management team shifts its strategy, everyone on the component teams must be informed of the change and briefed on what the new strategy is.

Expressing the same message to the offender obviously requires communication and agreement among all the crisis management components. If the components are not talking to each other and information is not passed down within their respective teams, it is unlikely that a single message will be communicated to the offender. What is required is not only interteam communication but also intrateam communication. The actions of a single individual, if not in line with the current strategy, can destroy the efficacy of the negotiation effort and, perhaps, any chance of a peaceful resolution. Thus, management’s giving negotiators full rein or allowing them to “do their thing” does little good unless the entire management team and the tactical team know what the negotiators are doing and support them by sending the same message to the offender. Differing messages from each component lead the offender to distrust the negotiators and believe that they have no influence with management, thus prolonging the incident or provoking an unwanted response.

For example, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for negotiators to convince the offender that the authorities intend him no harm when he can see tactical teams moving into position. Any movement by the tactical team while operating under this strategy must be accomplished with complete discretion. When the negotiators’ strategy is to be reassuring, all the team’s components must act accordingly, if they expect to appear credible to the offender.

Sometimes crisis managers deliberately abandon this policy of one message. Obviously, every critical incident is unique and requires a “game plan” of its own, just as each ball game is unique and requires its own game plan. Some offenders can be persuaded and coaxed, while others must be pressured to do the “right thing.” When management decides to apply pressure, one sure way to do so is to inject uncertainty deliberately into the equation. An easy means of instilling uncertainty in an adversary’s mind is to convey multiple, differing messages. His fear and paranoia will do the rest. Even in this situation, however, the type of differing message sent must be thought out beforehand, and each component must be aware of its role in the strategy. In a sense, every message communicated to the opposing side is part of the negotiation effort. Every person who conveys that message to the offender becomes part of the negotiation effort. Negotiators have tactical responsibilities such as the passing of intelligence information. Similarly, tactical team members have negotiation responsibilities in the message they convey to the offender. It is not enough to know and respect the role of the other crisis management components. It is essential that all components view themselves as part of a single, unified effort and convey only one message to the offender if the desired outcome is to be achieved.

Kidnap Negotiations in Foreign Settings

Nonpolitical hostage situations abroad most commonly involve either corporations or private families. When operating in foreign countries, especially underdeveloped countries, some United States corporations, rightly or wrongly, feel that it is necessary to “go it alone.” Many reasons persist for this view. Often, the police are not adequately trained to handle the investigation and delicate negotiations that kidnappings require. Unfortunately, too, in many parts of the world corruption is rampant among the police and military. As a result, families and corporations are reluctant to trust them, sometimes with good reason. Finally, cultural differences make for uneasy feelings in the corporation or family.

Though corporate executives may have negotiated many business deals, a kidnap situation is usually unlike anything a businessperson has previously encountered. The stakes do not get much higher than in a kidnap situation, a situation that may
affect the future course of a business in that country, the company’s public image, morale, and sometimes its solvency. Emotion and stress, especially when the victim is known to the negotiation team, can weigh on the team’s judgment to the point of affecting the outcome.

First, every effort should be undertaken to reduce the effects of stress. Planning and practicing the negotiation dialogue, having a third party who does not know the victim, or enlisting a panel of advisors composed of trusted friends, relatives, and experts are all steps that can avoid the negotiator’s problems of stress and emotional involvement.

Unquestionably, negotiation experience—whether as a sales representative, labor negotiator, businessperson, or attorney—can be valuable experience to fall back on when negotiating with kidnappers. However, it should never be forgotten that the opposing team in a kidnapping situation is not composed of “typical” businesspeople. Some adversaries will suffer little from the burden of a conscience. They also may be impulsive, violent, and heavily armed; suffer from a wide variety of personality disorders; or be drug and alcohol abusers, career offenders, or fanatics.

Additionally, businesspeople are not normally concerned for the safety of their negotiator, but kidnap negotiations are not normal circumstances. Sometimes the safety of the family or corporate negotiator becomes a concern. Those events include any face-to-face negotiations, the ransom drop, recovery of the victim, and communication drops. Special care should be taken at all times when the offender knows that the extorted party is in possession of the money, whether the ransom be in the home, office, hotel room, or car.

Even though there may have been, in retrospect, hints of the coming crisis, kidnappings generally catch families and corporations by surprise. All good businesspeople do their homework before walking into a business negotiation, but a kidnap negotiation requires that the negotiation team play “catch-up,” with a lot to do under very adverse conditions. Contingency planning for this unlikely event will go a long way toward reducing anxiety, stress, team hostility, and uncertainty, and such planning should be standard operating procedure for any company that does business in those parts of the world where such incidents are known to occur.

Kidnap or hostage negotiation should never be approached as an individual effort. The negotiator should be part of a team that provides ideas, emotional support, family or corporate consensus, information, and an opportunity to practice the negotiation. United States law enforcement negotiation teams have long successfully utilized the team approach, and a cardinal rule for them is to never negotiate alone.

The victimized group also needs to decide who will be representing them in the negotiation. The negotiator is often a family member, a law enforcement officer, a government or corporate official, a paid representative, a family friend, a clergyman, or an attorney. The advantages and disadvantages of each alternative are often situationally determined. Whoever is selected as negotiator should not represent him- or herself to the hostage taker as the ultimate decision maker. The negotiator should always say he or she must refer back to the rest of the family, corporate headquarters, Washington, D.C., downtown, or wherever decisions are being made. The negotiator should not refer to a single individual as the decision maker. The negotiator should position him- or herself as a conduit of information to the kidnappers, a mere spokesperson for the family or corporation.

Some family members have been excellent negotiators, but some obvious inherent problems are associated with their potential emotional involvement. Generally, it is best not to use a close family member, but, in a situation in which a suitable family member can maintain his or her composure and follow instructions, using family members can have several advantages. Their relationship to the victim provides immediate credibility that other parties might require time to develop. The kidnapper will tend to make certain assumptions because of the family relationship that the negotiation team may be able to use to its advantage. Also, family members know the victim well should that knowledge become important in a spontaneous, unanticipated development.
Other concerned persons and groups have their own objectives that may not readily align themselves with the negotiation team’s objectives. Among others whose objectives may differ from the team’s objectives are certain members of the victim’s family, the police, the government, stockholders, unions, and media representatives. The objectives and priorities that emerge over time in a kidnapping crisis can be surprising, provoke anger, and have consequences lasting well beyond the resolution of the incident.

Objectives that may come into conflict with the negotiation team’s objective of the victim’s safe return include:

- Being able to continue business in the country when the kidnapping incident is over
- Maintaining corporate morale
- Preserving or enhancing the corporate public image
- Minimizing the amount of ransom paid
- Minimizing the victim’s time in captivity
- Avoiding embarrassment to the corporation or other parties
- Identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting the offenders
- Attempting to deter future kidnappings
- Maintaining an inheritance
- Not “going public”
- Enhancing a personal position in the corporation, government, or family
- Being the first wire service or news network to break the story, have dramatic footage of the ransom drop, and so forth
- Maintaining the financial situation of the corporation or family

In some countries, using local law enforcement officers to negotiate or even notifying them of the incident may be a risky proposition. There may be problems of inexperience, cultural differences, possible corruption, and/or lack of training. In the United States, however, the FBI has an excellent record in the successful resolution of kidnapping incidents.

A reluctance to negotiate and a desire on the part of families and corporations to pay the ransom immediately is not unusual. Bargaining for someone’s life is an inherently nasty business, and no one wants to risk or bargain for the life of someone he or she cares about. Nevertheless, consider the following: if the ransom is paid immediately, the kidnapper may feel he seriously underestimated the wealth and resources of the family or corporation, decide not to release the hostage, and come back with a new, higher ransom demand. Such an outcome has happened.

Also, kidnappers are generally uncertain about how much they can get for the victim. If the family or corporation agrees to pay the demanded amount immediately, the kidnapper may conclude that they have no intention of paying and have notified the authorities. Most kidnappers expect to negotiate the ransom amount, and anytime a deviation from their expectations occurs, in any way, the risk to the victim increases.

The victim family or corporation often makes statements such as “We will do anything to get him [or her] back safely.” These are very laudable feelings, but as a practical matter, the extorted parties cannot do anything to get the victim back; they have practical limits. Negotiators should not appear too eager or too willing to pay anything to get the victim back. The sooner the other side becomes convinced that the extorted party’s financial limits have been reached, the sooner the situation will be resolved. Negotiators must be patient. They must be prepared and act prepared for a long siege. (In the United States, kidnappings for ransom rarely last more than a week or ten days. In other parts of the world, kidnappings lasting six months or more are common.)

In a kidnap for ransom, the kidnapper must communicate with the extorted party. The communication and demand generally take the form of telephone calls, tape recordings, or letters. Any telephone negotiation with the kidnappers should be tape recorded. Law enforcement hostage negotiators have found that tape recording the dialogue between hostage taker and the police.
can be useful not only for prosecution but also for the negotiation process, useful in that the tapes of the negotiation session can be reviewed for important negotiation hints that were lost in the “heat of battle.” Everything the kidnappers say is a potentially helpful piece of information. Equally, however, every time the corporate or family negotiator is in contact with the kidnappers, the offenders are told far more than the spoken word. Care should be taken to ensure that the kidnappers are getting the message the team wants them to receive.

In negotiating the ransom amount, negotiators must be aware of the pattern of concessions in terms of amount and time. How much are the kidnappers coming down in their demanded amount, and how much is the extorted party going up in its counteroffer? Negotiators want the kidnappers to be coming down in significantly larger increments than the negotiators are going up. The extorted party should be going up in odd amounts and in progressively smaller increments. The family or corporation wants to give the impression to the kidnappers that they are being drained of every last dollar and there is just no more money.

The negotiation team should also look at the pattern of concessions over time. Who gains the most in terms of offers and counteroffers over time? Sometimes, kidnappers will not contact the extorted party for significant periods of time in an apparent attempt to pressure the family or corporation. Waiting, however, puts pressure on the kidnappers, too, because they do not know what the police, government, family, or corporation is doing. If the extorted party maintains its composure and comes back with only a minimal counteroffer after a significant amount of time has passed, the kidnappers will feel that the risk of the wait is not worth the marginal amount gained.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the negotiation process is talking the ransom down even further when the negotiator knows the ransom can be paid. As one family negotiator said, “The negotiation does not really begin until you get them down to a price you can pay.” The fear that the victim may be killed when the ransom could have been paid is a very heavy burden for any negotiator to bear.

Negotiators should avoid expanding the pool of money available to pay the ransom—that is, they should not say anything to the kidnapper about borrowing money from friends, the bank, relatives, or the corporation. If the kidnappers tell the negotiator to go to the corporation, bank, relatives, and so on, for the money, the negotiator should say that corporate money is not available to pay ransoms, there is no collateral for a loan because the house was already mortgaged to meet the previous offer, and other members of the family and family friends are actually borrowers from the family and are in no position to provide money. The negotiation team does not want to give the impression that more money is “out there” if only the kidnappers are willing to risk the wait. In line with this, because of the risk involved in waiting for larger amounts, kidnappers may accept a much lesser sum than is available immediately. In response to a demand for money, the negotiators should consider telling the kidnappers that they will attempt to raise more money, but a smaller total is available now.

Negotiators should always insist on current evidence of a walking, talking victim. Polaroid photographs with the victim holding the day’s newspaper is a common means of providing this evidence. Sometimes, the victim will read the day’s front page on an audio- or videotape that is then sent to the family or corporation.

Naturally, all contacts with the kidnapper should be planned and rehearsed to the maximum extent possible. The more that developments are anticipated, the better prepared the negotiation team will be to counter them effectively. In anticipation of an incoming telephone call, for example, the negotiator should have a brainstorming, planning, and rehearsing session with the rest of the negotiation team. The negotiation team should role-play and ask “what if?” questions about every possible scenario they can dream up. The team should discuss possible responses and jointly decide on an appropriate response for every contingency. These rehearsals should include the give-and-take of the ransom negotiation itself; negotiator responses to violent and, perhaps, even gruesome threats; responses to unexpected threats, demands, or developments; and any other possible topics the
negotiation team can conjure up. The team should decide not only what they will say but how they will say it. The negotiator should play his or her role in a “no holds barred” practice with the rest of the negotiation team.

Preparing for contact with the kidnappers will instill confidence in the negotiator, maximize the negotiation opportunity, help the negotiator maintain his or her composure, and reduce stress. A further objective of these brainstorming, planning, and rehearsal sessions is to avoid talking the team into a disadvantageous or possibly dangerous position with the kidnapper. If, when contact is made, a topic arises that has not been anticipated, discussed, and rehearsed, every effort should be made to delay discussion of that topic until the next negotiation session. Above all, negotiators must be patient. They must take their time and avoid the temptation to blindly agree to a proposition that has not been thought through by the negotiation team.

As mentioned in first-responder negotiations, lies and tricks are also to be avoided in kidnap negotiations. Tricks are to be avoided not because of any moral implications but because lies and tricks are difficult to keep going for long periods of time without getting caught. Lies are particularly difficult to maintain with changes in negotiator. It would not, for example, be a good idea to attempt to pass off a police officer as “Uncle Joe.” We do not know with any certainty what the hostage is telling the kidnappers. Getting caught in a lie during a kidnap negotiation has the potential for being a lethal error.

Negotiators must be very careful about using humor in their contacts with the kidnappers. Negotiators do not want to create the impression that they are not taking the kidnappers or the negotiation seriously. Negotiators should bear in mind that the person they are dealing with is not just another businessperson. Moreover, joking is dangerous with mentally disturbed individuals and people with personality disorders. Negotiators can never be sure how the kidnapper will interpret the humor. Additionally, language and cultural problems make it very difficult to joke in a foreign language or through an interpreter, especially in a situation in which people are not expecting humor. If the kidnapper makes a joke and it seems appropriate for the negotiator to laugh with him, that response is all right. Negotiators, however, should not initiate the humor.

The negotiation team should not make any assumptions about their adversary. They must not underestimate the kidnappers, but, on the other hand, they should not give them undue credit, either. Sometimes their lack of preparation and planning is startling. The negotiating team, however, should be most careful of its actions and movements. There is a real possibility that negotiators will be watched, if only from time to time. They must avoid taking any actions the kidnappers could perceive as a threat.

As already mentioned, face-to-face negotiations with kidnappers are rare and should be strenuously avoided. If they are called for, however, the number one concern and priority is negotiation team safety. The team members should ask themselves why they are going face-to-face. What is to be gained in terms of the safe release of the victim? Does the benefit of this meeting outweigh the risk to the team? If the decision is to go face-to-face, the team must make sure that police will be covering the meeting, the negotiation site is one chosen by the team, and the meeting has been carefully planned. Again, the team should not accept the kidnapper’s choice of site; it should select a different site. It should not walk into the offender’s plan. Once the face-to-face plan is implemented, the team should not deviate from it in the slightest.

Parameters should be set for the meeting. Negotiators should state their limits before circumstances become confrontational. A negotiator might say, for example, “I’ll tell you up front, my boss isn’t going to let me [whatever the limits are], so don’t even suggest anything like that because I’m not going to able to do it.” It is better to get those kinds of issues out of the way before getting down to serious negotiations. The negotiator should also insist that no weapons be present, saying something such as, “I want to tell you up-front that my boss won’t let me meet with you unless I’m assured that you won’t be armed. He tells me he wants [the victim] back but not at the expense of losing me.”
The objectives of the negotiation should be thoroughly discussed and priorities set. Most people agree that the safe return of the kidnap victim with minimal physical and/or psychological damage is the top priority and objective. A competing objective is the maintenance of the health and safety of the negotiation team itself. It is not helpful to the resolution of the crisis if a member of the negotiation team is killed, injured, or kidnapped.

CONCLUSION

First-responder negotiations, hostage negotiation, kidnap negotiation, and the resolution of other violent crises are best left to law enforcement officers who are trained, experienced, and paid to take the risks involved. However, time or other circumstances may demand that persons in the family, community, or corporation take action, if only a holding action, until help arrives. The action taken may be critical to the outcome of the crisis. Just as training is required to provide first aid in accidents, training is required to provide “first aid” in violent crises. We can go through life hoping we never happen upon an accident and never encounter violence, but neither eventuality is unlikely.