

THE RELEVANT NEGOTIATOR

By

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Abstract

Negotiation is about skill. Regardless of the venue, the successful negotiator will be the skillful one. Not all negotiators are trained in police negotiations, or business negotiations or legal negotiations. However, characteristics shared by all, regardless of venue, are the skills instilled in each about how to deal with people and how to negotiate with them. Negotiations are negotiations. If you remember that, all else is commentary. Always do what you know how to do. That makes the negotiator relevant.

Relevance

Suppose. Just suppose that you are face-to-face with a suicide bomber. They are really more appropriately called “homicide bombers.” And, further, the bomber has not yet detonated. It can and has happened. In addition, you have the opportunity to talk with the subject. The Israelis have faced this exact situation. Perhaps, there is even a hostage involved although a hostage is not a likely scenario. As a negotiator, what do you do? What do you say? What’s next? Who cares? Keep reading.

The Event

This scenario, or one just as scary, could happen to any of us. It has happened in other parts of the world and the only question is when it will happen here or there. For some

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reason, in my scenario, there has been no detonation. What an opportunity to talk to the subject. And, lo and behold, you are the negotiator that is present on that particular scene. Now what?

Background and Training

In the 1960's, Dr. Edward S. Rosenbluh established a groundbreaking program for crisis interveners and first responders of all ilks. For the first time, he brought police and non-police crisis responders into the same classroom and said that the skills taught to one are transferable to the other. Additionally, special skills of one group were examined and found to be applicable to both groups. While often we tend to think narrowly about the application of the skills that we are taught within our field, Rosenbluh said that the basic skills were transferable and should be seen in this light. His teachings occurred to me as I pondered writing about relevance.

A few years back, I attended a conference taught by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It was a training course for experienced negotiators. As you might expect in a police training class, the question was asked about what a negotiator should do if confronted by a terrorist or a terrorist cell with multiple subjects. These are different scenarios than those that are usual for police negotiators. What skills are necessary and how should the situation be approached. Further, it was asked if we would be taught specialized procedures for these specific times. The reference was to what some of us might call "classic" terrorism. You remember, the terrorism that occurred when someone skyjacks an airplane and is willing to negotiate for something, and then usually

everybody goes home. The answer, given by the instructor stuck with me. It occurred to me that all negotiators should heed what he next made very clear. His answer made so much sense. He said that what you do is use the same skills, techniques and procedures you generally use in any type of hostage, barricade or crisis situation. Do what you know how to do and do it skillfully. The situation is different in many ways. There may be more people involved. It may be more stressful in some ways. The procedures are the same. Negotiate or intervene as you have been taught. Pay attention to basic skills. Do not forget everything you know just because you are standing in front of this homicidal bomber. As a non-police, trained negotiator, don't forget everything you learned just because you find yourself in unfamiliar waters. Like tools in a tool box, your skills can be adjusted and used to meet the current threats and / or issues just as you might work with a suicidal subject behind a locked door; or a hostage taker in a bank. Stand and remember what you have learned and concentrate on applying your skills. With the bomber, you may want to avoid telling the bomber to raise his or her hands. This may be a detonation procedure. And, you may want to stay farther away. So, this means that you may have to adapt. But, then, when is adapting not part of any negotiation? Think about it and remember it. It is such a simple philosophy that the power of it may not be easily fathomed. As a colleague of mine once remarked that, "A crisis is a crisis is a crisis," so might you want to remember that a negotiation is a negotiation is a negotiation. If you are able to adapt your skills, you may well find that you can successfully handle almost any situation.

Nowhere is it being suggested that you should find a homicide bomber with whom to negotiate. However, it is suggested that just as a, “crisis is a crisis,” and, “negotiations are negotiations,” that relevant skills are relevant skills. Use them to your advantage.

Guides and Reminders That May Help You (Greenstone, 2005)

1. Reason rather than react.
2. Never water barren trees.
3. When you find yourself in a circle, go for the feelings.
4. Add nothing for, “What it’s worth.”
5. Knowing what to stay out of is as important as knowing what to get in to.
6. Seek to understand, then to be understood. ~Stephen R. Covey
7. If the train is not going where you want to go, get off.
8. Learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable.
9. Silence is golden. Learn to shut up and strike gold.
10. The only failure is no resolution.
11. Bumbling is not always bad.
12. Acceptance does not imply agreement.
13. Change behavior. Attitudes will follow.
14. Never meet force head-on.
15. Negotiators have one mouth and two ears. The operational implications are obvious.

16. “In order to remain helpful, we must remain effective.” ~Dr. Edward S. Rosenbluh
17. Train as if your life and the lives of others depended on it; someday it may.
18. Something for nothing has little value.
19. Nothing works all the time with all people.
20. Gather intelligence intelligently.
21. The buck stops somewhere else.
22. Don't bullshit a bullshitter.
23. Avoid lying.
24. Deliver what you promise.
25. Perception is in the eye of the beholder.
26. Words are the lifeblood of the negotiator.
27. Negotiators can ill afford the imprecision of language.
28. Jargon is spoken by jargs.
29. Control by not controlling.
30. Courtesy costs you nothing.
31. Plan well. Then, plan again.
32. Negotiations are like crock-pot cooking; they take time.
33. No matter how thin you make your pancakes, they always have two sides.
34. Persons will never be left the same as you found them.
35. Crazy people are doing the best that they can.
36. Slow everything down.
37. Visualize a successful resolution.

38. Have a reason.
39. Don't let your opening be your closing.
40. Make haste slowly.
41. Be an agent of reality.
42. Demands are the basis of bargaining.
43. Sow the seeds of doubt and risk.
44. Nothing is as important as that which is trivial.
45. A negotiated resolution can only occur between two perceived equals.
46. Difficult negotiations take a while; miracles take a little longer.
47. Don't promise it if you can't do it.
48. If you don't understand, don't say that you do.
49. Create social expectations.
50. "What if" it.
51. Build the positive. Level the negative.
52. Be soft on people; hard on problems. ~Roger Fisher
53. Go for interests; avoid positions.
54. Seek alternatives.
55. Use objective standards.
56. Try to resolve each situation; acknowledge that you may not resolve every situation.
57. Hear what is not being said.
58. Don't judge if you feel no compassion.

59. Negotiators are persons who make waves, and then convince the taker that they are the only ones who can save the ship.
60. Keep breathing.
61. Use the subject's strength against them.
62. Know when the sky is falling—and when it is not.
63. Persistence and determination are omnipotent.
64. A soft answer turns away wrath.
65. Strategy dictates tactics; not the other way around.
66. Plan your negotiations; negotiate by your plan.
67. Never take a “No” from someone not authorized to give you a “Yes” in the first place.
68. Resilience = No excuses, optimism and attitude.
69. Remember your training.
70. Apply your skills.

References

Greenstone, James L. (2005). *The elements of police hostage and crisis negotiations: Critical incidents and how to respond to them*. Binghamton, New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.



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