

Crisis negotiation – what I learned from my first deployment

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Reflections on my first crisis negotiation

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I joined the Hostage and Crisis Negotiator Cadre in May 2021, having completed my national course.

The crisis incident

An acute crisis incident occurred in which the subject, a young woman, was sitting on the edge of the top floor of a 19-storey car park.

I joined a colleague (Negotiator 1), who had been with me on my national course. This was our first full-on crisis deployment and, as I arrived, I had a good idea of how he might be feeling.

Looking up at the car park, I could see how high it was. I'm not great with heights. I could feel the fear rising as the adrenaline coursed through me, but I just had to suck it up and get on with it.

Once I got to the top, my training kicked in. I knew the risk was extremely high, as the subject was regularly moving, as if to jump. Her welfare was of paramount importance, and so we intervened regularly to distract her from jumping.

Negotiation process

She was virtually silent throughout the fifteen hours of negotiation. We stood just out of arm's reach on the right side of the barrier. Time passed both incredibly slowly and yet incredibly fast. Maintaining our focus was remarkably easy because of the level of risk in front of us.

The subject would take out her phone on occasion or pause to roll a cigarette. Even this would make my stomach churn, as she tended to lean over the edge and almost drop things. Her lack of engagement hugely increased the risk and therefore inflated the value of any disclosures she

made. This information enabled us to identify a family member, who was critical in resolving the incident.

I was aware of the importance of keeping Negotiator 1 functioning at his best and took some of the burden from him by directly managing some of the interventions when the subject went to jump. She kept either leaning forward as if to roll off the ledge or, more alarmingly, thrust her hips forward as if to slide off. My assistance allowed Negotiator 1 to maintain rapport and manage his emotions.

After seven hours, Negotiator 1 and I withdrew, and two new negotiators took over for a further seven-hour period before reaching a safe resolution.

Learnings

The biggest learning points for me were the value of having high-quality training and the trust you can have for the team around you, because you know that you have all been trained to the same level. Our national course was challenging, but this deployment justified the standard to which we were held and the work that we both put in.

- This article was peer reviewed by Sergeant Adam Wells, Hertfordshire Constabulary.

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