

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #321

How To Negotiate With Hostage Takers

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[00:00:05] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is part two, the follow up, of our episode on the Florida & Munich [hostage](#)¹ crises.

[00:00:29] If you haven't listened to that one yet, I'd recommend you go back and listen to it, because today we are going to be talking about the lessons learned from them, how they are now applied in practice, and look at the 9 [principles](#)² used in [hostage negotiations](#)³.

¹ someone who is held or taken as security that specified conditions will be met before their release

² basic ideas or rules

³ discussions in order to reach an agreement

How To Negotiate With Hostage Takers

[00:00:46] OK then, let's get right into it.

[00:00:49] In 1961, 11 years before the Munich disaster, John F Kennedy said "Let us never [negotiate](#)⁴ out of fear. But let us never fear to [negotiate](#)."

[00:01:03] It seemed that this message wasn't applied to the world of [hostage negotiations](#).

[00:01:09] During the [hostage](#) crises in Florida and Munich, the security services [barely](#)⁵ [negotiated](#)⁶ at all, and when they did they simply didn't understand what the [hostage](#) takers wanted.

[00:01:23] And the results were, as you heard, [fatal](#)⁷.

[00:01:27] As Zvi Zamir, the director of the Israeli intelligence services, would later say about the German [airfield](#)⁸ rescue operation, "There was no rescue plan, no preparations, nothing whatsoever".

⁴ discuss the terms or conditions of hostage release

⁵ almost, hardly

⁶ discussed the terms or conditions of hostage release

⁷ resulting in death

⁸ the area where the aeroplanes take off and land

How To Negotiate With Hostage Takers

[00:01:43] Fortunately, Munich and Florida shocked law enforcement into taking [hostage incidents](#)⁹ more seriously.

[00:01:51] But as there was no real guidance on what to do in a [hostage negotiation](#)¹⁰ situation, the [procedures](#)¹¹ for this had to be built up [from scratch](#)¹².

[00:02:02] The first agency to take action was the New York Police Department, the NYPD.

[00:02:08] In fact, all contemporary [principles](#) and practices in [hostage negotiation](#) can be traced back to its work in the early seventies.

[00:02:18] So, what did it do?

[00:02:20] In late 1972 it [commissioned](#)¹³ two NYPD officers to set up a new [hostage negotiation](#) training programme. One of them was a man called Frank Bolz and the other was Harvey Schlossberg, who had a doctorate in clinical psychology.

⁹ events, situations

¹⁰ discussion in order to reach an agreement

¹¹ plan or course of action

¹² from the beginning

¹³ ordered, authorised

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[00:02:39] The men developed three overarching [principles](#) for approaching a [hostage](#) crisis: contain the scene, [isolate](#)¹⁴ the [perpetrators](#)¹⁵, and establish dialogue.

[00:02:50] In other words, firstly, make sure that nobody can get in or out of wherever the [hostages](#)¹⁶ are being held.

[00:02:57] Secondly, that the [hostage](#) takers cannot escape.

[00:03:01] And thirdly, start talking to them, establish [lines of communication](#)¹⁷ between the [hostage](#) takers and the security services.

[00:03:11] Very quickly, an opportunity arose to put these [principles](#) into action.

[00:03:17] On January the 19th of 1973, a small gun shop in New York called John & Al's Sporting Goods became the scene of a [hostage](#) crisis.

[00:03:28] Four men had tried to steal guns from the shop, then when the police were called they had taken nine people [hostage](#) inside the shop.

¹⁴ keep them away from other people

¹⁵ people who have done the illegal or criminal acts

¹⁶ people who are held or taken as security that specified conditions will be met before their release

¹⁷ means or ways of communication

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[00:03:38] The NYPD established communication with the [hostage-takers¹⁸](#), [conceding¹⁹](#) small demands for food and cigarettes in return for the release of [hostages](#).

[00:03:50] Although the [hostage](#) takers sometimes fired, and one policeman was unfortunately killed, the NYPD never returned a single shot.

[00:04:01] 47 hours after the [siege²⁰](#) in the store began, all nine [hostages](#) were released, unharmed, and the four [hostage-takers](#) were arrested.

[00:04:12] Things seemed to be moving in the right direction, and the situation could have been a lot worse.

[00:04:19] There was however one critical flaw in the store [hostage](#) crisis response.

[00:04:25] There were simply too many [negotiators²¹](#), making the communication [chaotic²²](#).

[00:04:32] Planners decided that from then on, only a select few, highly trained individuals would be chosen.

¹⁸ the people responsible for holding someone as security that specified conditions will be met before their release

¹⁹ agreeing to, giving in to

²⁰ the surrounding of the place by armed forces

²¹ the people who would talk with them in order to reach an agreement

²² very confusing

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[00:04:40] To build up a [pool](#)²³ of elite [negotiators](#), the NYPD immediately set up the first training session based on the work of Frank Bolz and Harvey Schlossberg.

[00:04:52] The first NYPD [hostage negotiation](#) training session began in April of 1973.

[00:04:59] The course went into great detail about how to [interact](#)²⁴ with [hostage](#) takers, with people in a [hostage](#) or [kidnapping](#)²⁵ situation.

[00:05:08] Students learned how to buy time and how to [bargain](#)²⁶ in ways that would [encourage](#)²⁷ cooperation from [perpetrators](#).

[00:05:17] Bud Teten, an FBI agent with a background in behavioural science, was one of those who attended these early training sessions.

[00:05:25] Impressed by what he learned, he set up a similar course for FBI agents and police officers to deal with national-level [hostage incidents](#).

[00:05:36] The FBI Academy's two-week [negotiation](#) course focused on [abnormal](#)²⁸ psychology, case studies, and role playing exercises.

²³ group of people available when required

²⁴ communicate with, react to

²⁵ taking away illegally by force

²⁶ deal with them, negotiate

²⁷ make them more likely to do it

²⁸ not normal, unusual

How To Negotiate With Hostage Takers

[00:05:45] Communication techniques were the focus, it wasn't about how to attack in a [hostage](#) situation or how to use weapons to kill [hostage](#) takers safely, the objective was to [talk them out](#)²⁹ of the situation.

[00:06:01] For the course, Teten drew up a list of 9 [principles](#) for communicating with [hostage](#) takers which still inform [hostage](#) dialogues today.

[00:06:12] First, Teten said that the [negotiating](#)³⁰ team must measure the emotional stability of the [hostage](#) taker.

[00:06:20] In Florida and Munich, there was no attempt to deeply understand the psychological state of the [perpetrators](#), and, if you remember, Giffe, the main [hostage](#) taker in Florida, was mentally ill.

[00:06:35] Now, the [emphasis](#)³¹ was on learning as much as possible about the mind of the criminal.

[00:06:41] The first thing that a [negotiator](#)³² must do is to understand the subjects' motivation, goals, and emotional state.

²⁹ reach an agreement with them by talking

³⁰ the one which discusses the terms or conditions of hostage release

³¹ focus, priority

³² the person who would talk with them in order to reach an agreement

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[00:06:50] Only then could they plan how to [convince](#)³³ them not to kill innocent [hostages](#).

[00:06:57] Second, a [negotiator](#) must assess how dedicated a [hostage](#) taker is to getting their demands met.

[00:07:04] This was another key failure of the German response to the Munich [hostage](#) crisis. The police offered money to the terrorists because they had completely misunderstood the terrorists' [devotion](#)³⁴ to their stated goals. They offered them today's equivalent of over \$60 million dollars, but if they had understood their motivations properly, they would have known that probably no number would have been enough. They were dedicated to getting the prisoners out of prison, their [motives](#)³⁵ were not financial.

[00:07:36] The third [principle](#)³⁶ [forbade](#)³⁷, it disallowed, law enforcement from ever giving into one type of demand: the request from a [hostage](#) taker for weapons. In no situation would the police give the [hostage](#) taker weapons, absolutely never, for reasons that I imagine will be clear.

³³ persuade

³⁴ loyalty, dedication

³⁵ reasons

³⁶ basic idea or rule

³⁷ disallowed

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[00:07:55] The fourth [principle](#) was to [stall](#)³⁸ for time, to buy more time, which is one of the most difficult but most important of the nine [principles](#).

[00:08:05] This is because the first 15, even the first 45 minutes of a [hostage](#) crisis are the most dangerous.

[00:08:12] It's when nobody outside the [hostage](#) room really knows what's going on inside.

[00:08:19] Neither does anyone know the motivations of the [hostage](#) taker, nor the [likelihood](#)³⁹ that they will kill.

[00:08:26] It's [paramount](#)⁴⁰ that law enforcement push past this highly [fraught](#)⁴¹ first stage by getting the [hostage](#) taker to talk as much as possible, for as long as possible.

[00:08:38] This does two things, first, it buys time, meaning the [hostages](#) survive longer and allows a chance for the [hostage](#) taker to realise there may be non-violent approaches to [obtaining](#)⁴² their goals.

³⁸ slow down, delay

³⁹ chance, probability

⁴⁰ most important

⁴¹ causing anxiety and worry

⁴² getting, securing

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[00:08:53] Second, more dialogue enables law enforcement to gather as much information as possible about the situation and lets them plan the best next moves.

[00:09:05] The fifth **principle** was that law enforcement should never offer suggestions to the **hostage** taker.

[00:09:12] The **hostage** taker must **articulate**⁴³ their demands independently.

[00:09:17] By offering things to them, the authorities may give away **needless**⁴⁴ **concessions**⁴⁵ and tip the power balance in favour of the **hostage** taker. It's all about waiting to see what is requested, and only then deciding to accept or reject it, never offering something to the **hostage** taker.

[00:09:38] The sixth principle was that law enforcement should only give a **hostage** taker something if they think they will get something tactically valuable from them in return. Every **concession**⁴⁶ to the hostage taker must be tactical and it should bring the situation a step closer to a peaceful **resolution**⁴⁷.

[00:09:59] The seventh **principle** is to keep the perpetrator making decisions constantly, weighing up the risks and benefits of the options being presented to them.

⁴³ announce, declare

⁴⁴ not necessary or too many

⁴⁵ things that are given, especially in response to demands

⁴⁶ a thing that is given, especially in response to demands

⁴⁷ ending, solution

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This buys time but it also **exhausts**⁴⁸ the **hostage** taker psychologically, putting them in a position where they may consider **surrender**⁴⁹. Decisions are tiring, especially when life and death might be involved, so the idea behind this is to tire the **hostage** taker out and get them to think that **surrendering**⁵⁰ might not be so bad after all.

[00:10:35] The eighth **principle** is to always make it clear to the **hostage** taker that there is the potential for ending the **hostage** crisis, that **surrendering** does not necessarily mean failure. The **negotiator** must always make clear that there are alternative routes out for them to end the **siege**, there is always a way out.

[00:10:58] The ninth and final **principle** is to select the **negotiator** with care. This is an important point because although there were many advances in formalising **procedures** around **negotiations**, the personal **intuition**⁵¹ and skill of the **negotiator** has remained an important part of the job. The person matters hugely.

⁴⁸ makes them very tired

⁴⁹ stopping resisting, giving themselves up

⁵⁰ stopping resisting, giving themselves up

⁵¹ ability to understand a situation based on instinct or feelings

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[00:11:21] The ideal [negotiator](#) has to find the perfect balance between emotional [detachment](#)⁵² from the situation they are in and a capacity to build emotional [rapport](#)⁵³ with the [hostage](#) taker by finding [common ground](#)⁵⁴ and by displaying [empathy](#)⁵⁵.

[00:11:38] Clearly, it is a very difficult job, and although these guidelines and processes can be followed, it is an incredibly skillful role requiring a combination of experience, a deep understanding of human psychology, and the ability to adapt to the situation as it [unfolds](#)⁵⁶.

[00:11:58] And the hardest [hostage negotiations](#) tend to be, as you might imagine, with situations involving terror groups.

[00:12:07] Not only are the [motives](#) typically political, and their demands almost never actually met, but terror groups are likely to be familiar with the psychological [principles](#) and tactics used by the police and by the [hostage negotiators](#).

⁵² disconnection, distance

⁵³ good understanding, link

⁵⁴ things accepted or agreed on by both parties

⁵⁵ the ability to understand and share the feelings of another

⁵⁶ develops, evolves

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[00:12:24] They will be trained to see and [interpret](#)⁵⁷ what the police are trying to do, and they have their own set of techniques to [counter](#)⁵⁸ those of the [hostage negotiators](#).

[00:12:36] And of course, terrorists tend to be more willing to die for their [cause](#)⁵⁹, which makes them particularly tricky to [negotiate](#) with.

[00:12:45] So, to [recap](#)⁶⁰, these 9 [principles](#) were: measure the emotional stability of the [hostage](#) taker, assess how dedicated they are to their demands, don't give them weapons, buy time, don't offer suggestions, only give them something if they ask for it, always force them to make decisions, remind them that there's a way out, and choose the person actually doing the [negotiating](#) with great care.

[00:13:13] Now, you are probably familiar with [hostage negotiation scenarios](#)⁶¹ from films and TV. The police surround a building, there are people pointing their guns towards their targets, helicopters [swirl](#)⁶² overhead, a man shouts into a microphone, "COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP".

⁵⁷ explain the meaning of, understand

⁵⁸ respond to

⁵⁹ belief, ideal

⁶⁰ repeat the main points

⁶¹ situations

⁶² move quickly in circles

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[00:13:31] And perhaps you're wondering where these nine [principles](#) of [hostage negotiation](#) come into this.

[00:13:38] In reality, they don't, most modern [hostage](#) situations [bear](#)⁶³ little resemblance to how they are [portrayed](#)⁶⁴ in the movies.

[00:13:47] Over hours, days, and sometimes even weeks, the [negotiator](#) and their [back-up](#)⁶⁵ team - from intelligence gatherers to the senior coordinator of the mission - will act more like psychologists than police officers, trying to [untangle](#)⁶⁶ what is actually motivating the people to threaten violence.

[00:14:07] And the good news is it works.

[00:14:10] The vast majority of [hostage negotiations](#) are, thankfully, resolved without a shot being fired by the police.

[00:14:19] [By some counts](#)⁶⁷, modern [negotiation](#) strategies have a 95 percent success rate, meaning that the situation is resolved without anyone dying.

⁶³ have, show

⁶⁴ represented, described

⁶⁵ support, help

⁶⁶ find an answer to

⁶⁷ according to what some people say or calculate

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[00:14:30] As we saw in Florida and in Munich, [hostage negotiations](#) used to be very different, and this “life and death” situation would normally end in death for everyone involved.

[00:14:42] Luckily, it’s not like this anymore.

[00:14:45] And while there are still tens of thousands of [hostage](#) and [kidnapping](#) situations every year, too many, of course, with some big, some small, the good news is that never before in human history have we been better at [resolving](#)⁶⁸ them, so that everyone involved has the best possible chance of getting out alive.

[00:15:08] OK then, that is it for today's episode on How To [Negotiate](#) With [Hostage](#) Takers.

[00:15:14] I guess and hope that you will never have to [negotiate](#) with a [hostage](#) taker, or be in a [hostage](#) situation yourself, but I hope it was interesting in any case, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:15:25] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:15:29] Does your country have much of a problem with [kidnapping](#), and [hostage](#) crises?

[00:15:34] Interestingly enough I discovered that Belgium has one of the highest [kidnapping](#) rates in the world, which was certainly surprising.

⁶⁸ finding a solution to

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[00:15:42] Can you think of ways in which you can apply these [hostage](#) negotiating techniques to other areas of your life?

[00:15:48] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:15:52] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:16:01] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:16:05] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Hostage	someone who is held or taken as security that specified conditions will be met before their release
Principles	basic ideas or rules
Negotiations	discussions in order to reach an agreement
Negotiate	discuss the terms or conditions of hostage release
Barely	almost, hardly
Negotiated	discussed the terms or conditions of hostage release
Fatal	resulting in death
Airfield	the area where the aeroplanes take off and land
Incidents	events, situations
Negotiation	discussion in order to reach an agreement
Procedures	plan or course of action
From scratch	from the beginning

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Commissioned	ordered, authorised
Isolate	keep them away from other people
Perpetrators	people who have done the illegal or criminal acts
Hostages	people who are held or taken as security that specified conditions will be met before their release
Lines of communication	means or ways of communication
Hostage-takers	the people responsible for holding someone as security that specified conditions will be met before their release
Conceding	agreeing to, giving in to
Siege	the surrounding of the place by armed forces
Negotiators	the people who would talk with them in order to reach an agreement
Chaotic	very confusing
Pool	group of people available when required
Interact	communicate with, react to
Kidnapping	taking away illegally by force

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Bargain	deal with them, negotiate
Encourage	make them more likely to do it
Abnormal	not normal, unusual
Talk them out	reach an agreement with them by talking
Negotiating	the one which discusses the terms or conditions of hostage release
Emphasis	focus, priority
Negotiator	the person who would talk with them in order to reach an agreement
Convince	persuade
Devotion	loyalty, dedication
Motives	reasons
Principle	basic idea or rule
Forbade	disallowed
Stall	slow down, delay
Likelihood	chance, probability
Paramount	most important

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Fraught	causing anxiety and worry
Obtaining	getting, securing
Articulate	announce, declare
Needless	not necessary or too many
Concessions	things that are given, especially in response to demands
Concession	a thing that is given, especially in response to demands
Resolution	ending, solution
Exhausts	makes them very tired
Surrender	stopping resisting, giving themselves up
Surrendering	stopping resisting, giving themselves up
Intuition	ability to understand a situation based on instinct or feelings
Detachment	disconnection, distance
Rapport	good understanding, link
Common ground	things accepted or agreed on by both parties
Empathy	the ability to understand and share the feelings of another

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Unfolds	develops, evolves
Interpret	explain the meaning of, understand
Counter	respond to
Cause	belief, ideal
Recap	repeat the main points
Scenarios	situations
Swirl	move quickly in circles
Bear	have, show
Portrayed	represented, described
Back-up	support, help
Untangle	find an answer to
By some counts	according to what some people say or calculate
Resolving	finding a solution to

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

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What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com