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CRISIS NEGOTIATION TEAM PERSONNEL SELECTION

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Abstract

This research paper addresses guidelines for personnel selection for a Crisis Negotiation Team. These guidelines will help in the personnel selection requirements of persons who will be applying and working on the Crisis Negotiation Team. Literature review found criteria guidelines that could be noted by several agencies in the U.S. through their policies and procedures for Crisis Negotiation Teams. Many personal interviews along with research from articles and web sites were reviewed for personnel selection methods. Information gathered will be used to develop personnel selection guidelines for the crisis negotiation team.

Crisis negotiators will have to meet several requirements to deal with the highly psychological, emotional, and stressful situations that occur while working as a team. The selection guidelines criteria developed from comparing two major cities in the U.S. and eleven larger and smaller Law Enforcement agencies in Texas, will help in the selection process to find the most qualified personnel for the team. There are many characteristics that negotiators should possess to become effective. This research will help Comal County Sheriffs Office develop guidelines for our policy and procedure manual when selecting crisis negotiation team members. By using this research material to set guidelines for personnel selection it should assist in the selection of the most qualified personnel and reduce liabilities to our agency and our officers that are selected to do this highly stressful job.

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Introduction

At present, the Comal County Sheriff's Office has no Crisis Negotiation Team. The department is, however, currently developing a Crisis Negotiation Team that can respond to emergencies in and around our area. With the recent development of a SWAT tactical team it was evident that a Crisis Negotiation Team was needed in the event that a hostage incident occurs. Comal County has a courthouse, jail, and several local schools along with several other locations throughout the county that at any time could become a site of a hostage situation. If a hostage situation were to arise in the county the question would be, "Who would you want to rescue you and would they be qualified." Comal County law enforcement administration decided that the Comal County Sheriff's Office should develop a Crisis Negotiation Team.

This research is being conducted to determine the best method for selecting the most qualified persons to perform this highly stressful, psychological and emotional duty. Research will focus on what special characteristics and training such personnel should be required to possess to be selected for the Crisis Negotiation Team. With the development of the Crisis Negotiation Team, this research will enhance future training policies, procedures, and selection standards.

A survey was conducted of twenty-five Texas law enforcement agencies. Information on the selection of Crisis Negotiation Team personnel was solicited. Research found that of the agencies surveyed, eleven had crisis negotiation teams with some form of selection process. Comal County is located just north of San Antonio, which has an experienced full-time Crisis Negotiation Team, and has established departmental policies and procedures for personnel selection. Research was also solicited from the Seattle Police Department in Seattle, Washington.

The Seattle Police Department has a full time Hostage Negotiation Team, from which polices and procedures for personnel selection guidelines have been researched.

Finding the right personnel to perform a psychological, emotional and stressful job is not an easy task. There are many issues to look into when developing the proper guidelines for a crisis negotiation team personnel selection. These guidelines, when adapted to the selection process, should be beneficial in reducing liabilities not only to agencies but also the officers involved. Such guidelines will make the selection process more effective and efficient for all our officers. With the development of the Crisis Negotiation Team, it is hoped that the Comal County Sheriff's Office will have the ability to defuse critical incidents not only tactically but with verbal negotiations as well. This will help in the saving of lives during emergency situations, through peaceful resolutions and ultimately protect the citizens of Comal County.

Review of Literature

There are two major U.S. cities, which have full-time Crisis Negotiation Teams that have been used as a guideline for this research. When comparing San Antonio Police Department and Seattle Police Department along with the twenty-five other agencies surveyed in Texas, guideline comparisons were noted in their personnel selections. These comparisons will be used as data to develop guidelines for Crisis Negotiation Team personnel selection.

Standard Hostage Negotiation Teams are not trained to handle barricaded subjects, suicidal persons, and other criminal activities. The current trend is to develop and use Crisis Negotiation Teams that are highly trained and capable of handling a variety of critical incidents. There are several different names used today to describe various negotiation teams. The FBI has a (CRT) Critical Response Team made up of negotiators from around the U.S. that responds to

international terrorist situations. There are also (CIT) Critical Incident Teams that respond to the same type incidents as a (CNT) Crisis Negotiation Team. Even though these teams have evolved in name they receive special training in psychological behaviors and cross training with tactical teams, but still perform the basic negotiation procedures to help save lives through peaceful resolutions.

Of the twenty-five Texas law enforcement agencies surveyed eleven agencies responded. These agencies responses appear to utilize similar personnel selection guidelines as that of the two larger cities, San Antonio and Seattle. Important comparisons between San Antonio, Seattle and the other eleven agencies surveyed, found that persons attempting to be on the negotiation team must first be a volunteer, second have to go through an oral interview board and have at least two years experience as a patrol officer.

San Antonio and Seattle address specific personality characteristics when selecting personnel for their Negotiation Team. When compared, both agencies look for good listening and interviewing skills, good writing and typing skills, flexibility, honesty, and streetwise experience. Additional selection criteria noted candidates should be self-motivated with ability to handle multiple tasks and a commitment to the negotiation philosophy. (San Antonio Manual, 2000) (Seattle Manual, 1998). These two agencies have many similarities between their Crisis Negotiation Teams. Both the San Antonio Police Department and the Seattle Police Department criteria will serve as a foundation for personnel selection guidelines for the Comal County Sheriff's Office.

A thorough review of several articles and web site information indicated there were additional selection criteria to be considered. Criteria included age and experience, female team members, language barriers, psychological training, legal counsel and formal training were of

importance. In selecting members to the team, age and experience were questioned. “The best performers on the job do not always get the promotions and those who do get promoted are not always the best performers” (Cain, 1994, p-9). George Maher speaks of using as many candidates as possible from the first line supervisors to give the negotiations some, “Horsepower”. (Maher, 1976). Negotiation instructor, Troy Smith (Personal communication, August 17, 2001) believes that negotiator candidates should always be committed to the team. Troy says he listens to see if the negotiator is a quitter or winner. His belief is a quitter never wins and a winner never quits but he also hates losing more than he likes winning.

Randall Rogan, says that out of a survey of 142 negotiation teams most negotiators primary duties were, patrol 39%; investigations 30%; administrative duties, 9%; and non-law enforcement members, 1%. “The common sense methods of seasoned patrol officers during stressful situations still seems to be the best way to handle critical incidents” (Rogan, 1994, p-14).

In researching the needs for female negotiators to be on the team, the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, published a survey of 100 negotiation teams. This survey revealed that few females served and comprised only 0-20% of the negotiation team. According to negotiator Marty Rocha (Personal communication, August 17, 2001) females are important to the team for interviewing / briefing witness, others involved in the critical incident etc. Sometimes there is a need for a mother figure for some personalities encountered at critical incidents. When selecting female negotiators to the team certain characteristics should be noted. Negotiation instructor Eddie Klauer (Personal communication, August 17, 2001) says many crisis situations are spawned off of domestic disturbances, typically, a female in this type of situation who is suicidal or in a borderline personality rage episode is not going to build much of a rapport with a male negotiator. In fact, the feeling of most actors in a crisis is a total hatred for the opposite sex.

Due to the demographics of certain areas, languages may become barriers that negotiators encounter. In Central South Texas there is a larger Spanish speaking population. It is more important that a team function together to solve a problem than it is to focus upon a particular culture or interest. According to negotiation instructor Chris Tillery (Personal communication, August 17, 2001) while the need of a Spanish speaker or any other language is of value, especially in Central South Texas, the need for the team to be able to be problem solvers is more important. "The negotiators weapon is communication and their ammunition is words" (OPP, 2001, P-1). "Regardless of the language being spoken, a good crisis negotiator is a good listener. What you do in the first 15 to 45 minutes of a hostage incident can have a significant effect on the eventual outcome" (Dolan, Fuselier, PP-2-5). "Negotiators must be good communicators, the outcome of the crisis often depends on how successfully negotiators handle and disseminate information" (Duffy, 1997, P-2).

With the many personalities that crisis negotiators encounter, the psychological perspectives stand out. Dr. Oringderff (Personal communication, August 20, 2001) states, without some formal training, regardless of the "people skills", the negotiator is working without conceptual theory and implementation, and is likely to be ineffective. However, "Negotiators who learn to manage stress successfully go back to their jobs with renewed confidence and commitment. A stress management program can benefit not only the negotiators by helping them health wise, but also the agencies they represent from liabilities" (Bohl, 1992, P-24). Negotiators need to be proficient in their mental skills to be successful. According to Dr. Oringderff (Personal communication, August 20, 2001) psychological testing of some sort would be beneficial to the negotiator selection process mainly to avoid personality traits that each individual negotiator may exhibit. Psychological training questions always seem to come up

when selecting negotiators. Dr. Mullins (Personal communication, August 7, 2001) believes that psychological testing can be looked at but personally it is not necessary. Trained crisis negotiators don't turn public streets into a psychiatrist's couch. "The crisis negotiation team is designed to save a life, they don't have the luxury of having the time to be therapeutic" (Mertz, 1999, P-1). Communication still seems to be the best way to solve problems. "When angry, count ten before you speak, if very angry, a hundred" (Jefferson, 2001, p-1).

Dealing with any volatile incident is always a touchy legal situation. Litigation against law enforcement officers and agencies continue to plague the system. Crisis negotiations deal with suicidal persons who throughout history have used agency-assisted suicide. "Basically it's a means of getting somebody else to do it for you" (Yarbrough, 1998, P-36). "And if the actor survives, he will always sue the officers involved. For him, it's a win - win situation" (Danaher, 1998, P-42). However, accusations against negotiators can be kept to a minimum if personnel are qualified.

Training qualified personnel selected to be proficient negotiators encompasses many aspects. Most agencies send qualified personnel to a 40-hour basic hostage negotiator school, and then to a 40 hour advanced hostage negotiation school. Several of these are located throughout Texas and the U.S. like the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. "In a crisis you do not rise to the occasion, you resort to your training" (D'Angelo, 2000, p-9). "Administrations should place no less emphasis on the training provided to their negotiators team. At a very minimum negotiators should complete the FBI Basic Hostage / Crisis Negotiation course"(Wind, 1995,p-2).

Methodology

If a person were taken hostage, who would they want to rescue them and would that person be qualified? Research data has been reviewed to find the most efficient way to select qualified individuals for the Crisis Negotiation Team. From this research a set of guidelines will be developed that should enhance the Comal County Sheriff's Office negotiation personnel selection process now and in the future.

Research information was found in several journals and magazines at the Sam Houston State University Library. These journals and magazines contained several articles pertaining to Crisis Negotiation Selection Processes and Training. Information was also solicited from San Antonio Police Department Crisis Negotiation Police and Procedures Manual, and Seattle Washington Police Department Policies and Procedures Manual Crisis Negotiation Team Selection and Training. Many of the agencies that were contacted for information did not respond with information about their team policies and procedures. A survey of twenty-five law enforcement agencies in Texas was conducted. Of the twenty-five solicited, eleven of these agencies have some formal type of selection process, which will be charted.

A questionnaire was faxed to several full time negotiators to solicit information referring to negotiation concerns in South Central Texas. Several Internet web sites with information referring to negotiation team selection and training were also studied.

Personal interviews and telephone interviews were conducted with several experienced law enforcement officers mainly from Crisis Negotiation full time teams and some SWAT members.

Findings

Research indicated that guidelines for selecting Crisis Negotiators are fairly consistent throughout the U.S. and are comparable in large and small law enforcement agencies. The challenge of responding to a critical incident is increasing on a daily basis within the scope of law enforcement. One of the most critical roles in a crisis situation is that of the Crisis Negotiation. It is absolutely imperative that those officers who are called upon to fulfill this vital role be selected based upon a thorough and well-conceived selection process.

Research data revealed that in reviewing information from not only the larger cities in the U.S., but also the eleven surrounding Texas law enforcement agencies a special emphasis for personnel selection of a Crisis Negotiator that should include but are not all inclusive of the following criteria in Table I.

Table I – Criteria Comparison Results

		Negotiator Characteristics									
		Volunteer	Oral Board	0-2 Yrs. Experience	Good Listener	No Discipline Record	Not Prejudice	Flexible	Handle Stress	Good Writing Skills	Formal Training
Police Departments in Texas	Baytown PD	*	*								*
	El Paso PD	*		*						*	*
	Abilene PD	*	*	*	*	*					*
	Garland PD	*	*								*
	Sherman PD	*	*	*							
	Rowlett PD	*									*
	McAllen PD	*	*								
	Hurst PD	*									
	Round Rock PD	*	*	*		*					
	Marshall PD	*	*								*
	Taylor PD	*	*								

Information reviewed found law enforcement agencies had few worries, relative to age and experience. Most agencies required a minimum of 2 years patrol experience with no age limits. The need for female's to be on the team was found to be important due to the fact that hostages are sometimes women. It appears that crisis negotiation teams view having the diversity of a female negotiator on the team very important, but not an absolute because there may be

times when in the event that no female employee is available to be on the team and that should not stop the team or render it ineffective.

When dealing with language, research found that in the Central South West Texas area having Spanish-speaking officers on the team would be an asset. Negotiators tend to stay with the theory that negotiators should try to have a Spanish-speaking officer on the team. A Bilingual officer benefits the team in areas with a heavy Spanish-speaking population by being able to communicate effectively with the person immediately.

Psychological testing for negotiators was found to be a very debatable subject. Some believe testing would be beneficial to eliminate prospective negotiators that may not be able to cope with the negotiation tasks. The majority reviewed found psychological testing not to be a necessity since all agencies do psychological testing on new employees when hired and could use those test results as a psychological guide for negotiator candidates.

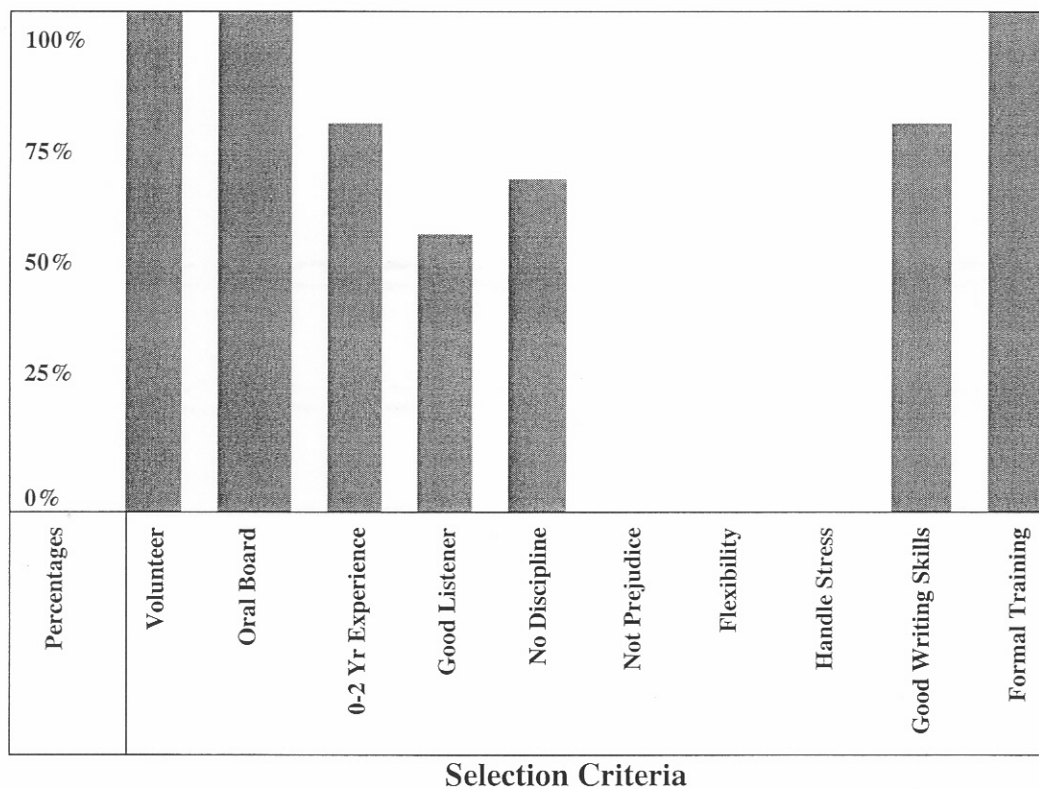
It was found that legal counselors on the team would be beneficial by being present when legal issues come up. However, the probability of having this legal advisory available is remote since most attorneys are not available when needed at a negotiation scene. For this reason, some agencies use their district attorney office lawyers to represent the teams when they are called out to incidents to give legal support.

When reviewing issues of training all agency negotiators are now required to attend 40 hours of basic crisis negotiation school training to be certified. Although not considered to be ultimately all-inclusive, the above traits and professional abilities are considered necessary in the overall selection criteria for a crisis negotiation selection process. Some agencies believe Tactical Teams and Negotiation Teams should train together but society requires that law

enforcement exhaust all means available for a peaceful resolution prior to launching a tactical assault (Wind, 1995, p-1).

Of the law enforcement agencies surveyed in Texas and across the u.s. the following percentage chart was developed to show the most used criteria in this selection process. As can be seen by the chart, there are three areas in the 100% range that most agencies feel are essential when selecting personnel for the Crisis Negotiation Team,

Table II - Criteria Percentage Table



Discussion/Conclusions

Comal County currently does not have a crisis negotiation team. The question that comes up then, is if you were taken hostage, who would you want to rescue you and would they be qualified? The purpose of this research was to determine the most effective methods and procedures of personnel selection when developing a crisis negotiation team. From the law enforcement agency data reviewed and charted it indicates there are three major criteria in the

100% range when selecting negotiators. Negotiators must be volunteers, go through an oral interview process, and attend a 40 hours basic negotiation training school. Research data also found that agencies in the U.S. and Texas possess similar personnel selection procedures. These procedures will help develop a set of guidelines that will support Comal County Sheriff's Office Crisis Negotiation team personnel selection.

Several law enforcement agencies do not have a crisis negotiation team or were reluctant to send information pertaining to their negotiation team's policies and procedures. As the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, and on the U.S. Pentagon, demonstrated anyone can become a hostage, at any time, in various ways (National News). During a telephone interview with retired FBI agent Byron Sage, who was in charge of the FBI Negotiation Team during the Waco Branch Davidians incident in 1993, Byron emphasized the importance of selecting the most qualified personnel for the Crisis Negotiation Team. Byron says, that the challenge of becoming a qualified Crisis Negotiator in this day and age is a daunting task and one that should not be entered into lightly. Only the most qualified and capable of candidates should be selected for this vital role (Sage, 2001).

Setting personnel selection guidelines will be beneficial in reducing liabilities to not only Comal County Sheriff's Office but to other law enforcement agencies by making the selection process more efficient. With personnel selection guidelines for negotiators, law enforcement agencies will have another avenue when approaching a volatile situation not only by tactical "SWAT" methods, but with verbal negotiation resolutions as well. The saving of lives by peaceful negotiation instead of the use of force will insure a higher quality of life and protect the citizens of Comal County. With the information gained on personnel selection guidelines agencies will be able to select the most qualified personnel for this important job.

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