

::The S.A.F.E. Model

Article Written by

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An Incident in Bowling Green, Kentucky¹

It was early in 2003 when I received a telephone call from Mr. William Hogewood, Program Manager, Crisis Negotiation program, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives (ATF). He asked me if I would develop an applied training program for all ATF negotiators that would allow them to use the S.A.F.E. framework in developing strategies for negotiating critical incidents. I accepted his offer, and by early 2004, ATF became the first federal law enforcement agency to have systematically incorporated S.A.F.E. strategy into their negotiation "toolbox."

Later in 2004, a three-day standoff took place in Bowling Green, Kentucky that tested the negotiation skills of ATF negotiators-and the usefulness of the S.A.F.E. framework in helping resolve a very difficult incident. On September 29th, 2004, ATF agents attempted to serve a warrant for firearms violations to a 41 year old male who had a long criminal history. At 4:30pm he fled and in the course of being pursued by ATF agents and the Kentucky State Police, hit a car and exchanged gunfire with officers during which time he was shot three times. The suspect then carjacked another vehicle and at 5:15pm, crashed into the front door of a home. The Kentucky State Police, along with ATF, surrounded the home and negotiations were initiated. Throughout the three days, the suspect fired approximately 200 rounds from the house; fortunately, no one was injured. As the incident unfolded, it became clear that the suspect desired to end his life in a gun battle with the police. At one point, after talking with his wife, she commented, "he's not coming out of that house alive. He's not going out peacefully" (*Daily News*, Bowling Green, Kentucky, October 2, 2004). However, S.A.F.E. strategies were used as part of an overall negotiation approach that validated the suspect's experiences and enabled him to reconsider his situation and peacefully surrender.

How the S.A.F.E. Model was Developed

Since 1973, much of what has been written about crisis/hostage negotiation has focused on the various motivational or psychological characteristics of perpetrators, the effects of being held captive (e.g., the Stockholm syndrome), and the emotional responses of hostage takers. Such information has been particularly helpful in increasing understanding about the effects of high stress on both subjects and negotiators. Specific approaches for developing effective *strategies in de-escalating* crisis situations and *evaluating the progress* of negotiations, however, have not been as fully developed.

The S.A.F.E. model represents one important framework for developing crisis negotiation strategy, defined as a communication plan to influence the behavior of the subject (e.g., hostage taker, suicidal individual) to peacefully surrender or assist in a tactical resolution.

The S.A.F.E. framework is based on years of behavioral science research and incorporates the valuable insights of countless crisis negotiators.² It has been field tested and adopted by a number of local, state and federal law enforcement crisis negotiation teams and identified as a critical skill for training international law enforcement agencies by the U.S. Department of State. In 2001, the S.A.F.E. model was honored as a featured contribution to public policy in the United States by the Consortium of Social Science Associations in their book: *Fostering Human Progress: Social and Behavioral Research Contributions to Public Policy*.

Applicability of the S.A.F.E. Model

The S.A.F.E. model is a practical framework for developing effective negotiation strategies to *de-escalate and resolve crisis incidents*. It is useful for detecting and measuring indicators of a worsening situation and for reporting progress to command. As such, the S.A.F.E. framework can be incorporated in the three core areas of a "critical incident position paper": (1) Status (where are we now?), (2) Assessment (what brought us to this point?), and (3) Recommendations (what should we continue to do-and what should we do differently?). In addition, S.A.F.E. strategies can be incorporated in incident command decision-making.

The model can be employed to resolve critical situations involving terrorist activities, international, "ethnic conflict" incidents, prison uprisings, cult confrontations, disgruntled, potentially violent employees, suicidal individuals, domestic (e.g., spousal violence) situations, barricaded individuals, and emotionally/mentally disturbed individuals.

Four "Triggers" for De-escalating Crisis Situations

The S.A.F.E. framework assesses and tracks four key "triggers" for de-escalating crisis situations. These four elements are expressed in the behavior and dialogue that takes place between the subject and the negotiator. By tracking these four dimensions, negotiation teams are better able to develop strategies for resolving the situation that do not compromise core security concerns. The four "triggers" are:

- Substantive Demands: The instrumental wants/demands made by the parties (e.g., subject and negotiator)
- Attunement: The relational trust established between the parties
- Face: The self image of each of the parties that is threatened or honored
- Emotion: The degree of emotional distress experienced by the parties

These four "triggers" function as predominant "frames" within which the subject (and negotiator) communicatively interact as a crisis incident unfolds. The basic process for negotiating these predominant frames is:

Identify:	Match:	Shift:
The predominate S.A.F.E. frame of the subject.	Communication to the S.A.F.E. frame of the subject.	To another S.A.F.E. frame after achieving some "progress" in de-escalating the situation within the existing S.A.F.E. frame of the subject.

Substantive Demands are the instrumental, situationally relevant wants, interests and needs expressed by the parties. Some Substantive demands are central (or primary) to the situation and some are peripheral (secondary). *When the subject is in a Substantive demand frame, the negotiator's goal is to bargain or problem-solve with the subject to achieve a peaceful surrender.*

It is important to track the kinds of demands a subject makes and his/her response to negotiator's demands and requests. In this way, appropriate and effective responses to the subject's demands can be offered. The S.A.F.E. model highlights three Substantive demand strategies negotiators may employ when the subject is predominately operating within the Substantive demand frame: (1) when and how to ignore or "downplay" the subjects substantive demands (or order to focus on Attunement, Face or Emotional distress frames), (2) when and how to bargain (trade) substantive demands of the subject for central, substantive demands of the negotiator, and (3) when and how to problem-solve substantive demands with the subject. The S.A.F.E. model helps negotiators:

- Distinguish between central and peripheral substantive demands
- Determine whether subject's demands are increasing or decreasing, hardening or softening and whether threats made are offensive or defensive
- Track the degree to which the subject ignores/rejects or considers/accepts negotiator demands and requests
- Re-frame subject's demands by identifying the "expressed position" versus underlying "interests" and use problem solving strategies to negotiate subject's underlying interests in ways that do not compromise fundamental security concerns

Attunement is concerned with the degree of trust, power, control and relationship that is developed between the subject and the negotiator. In crisis situations, hostage takers typically experience stress and threat. Negotiators begin their interaction with subjects along these relational dimensions -- not at ground zero, but at a deficit. *The negotiator's*

goal in this area is to engage in cooperative behavior to build trust and liking (without compromising safety or security concerns).

Resolving critical incidents is often anchored in the relational trust established with the negotiator. This trust is fundamentally developed through the demonstration of cooperative behavior. Cooperation in a crisis incident has a cumulative effect, slowly moving a subject from a state of mistrust to a state of trust toward the negotiator. The importance for negotiators to develop a more positive relationship with subjects is critical to incident resolution and often plays a central role in the surrender ritual. The S.A.F.E. model helps negotiators:

- Inject into the negotiation systematic cooperative messages and behavior (in ways that do not compromise tactical advantage)
- Develop strategies for meeting peripheral demands in order to increase trust
- Employ persuasive strategies for building trust (e.g., the similarity principle, language, active listening skills)

Face refers to the projected self-image of the subject. Subjects are particularly sensitive to communication and behavior that may be perceived to attack or threaten their own self-image or reputation. When this occurs, subjects typically harden their positions and become more resistant to the influence of the negotiator. *The negotiator's goal when the subject is in a Face frame is to validate the Face needs of the subject.*

The ability of negotiators to effectively acknowledge and respond to the face needs or concerns of the subject can influence whether the situation escalates or de-escalates. When an individual's face is attacked or threatened, he/she is more likely to engage in more violent actions--when face is honored, the potential for violence decreases. For example, very negative statements made by the subject about his/her own face or self-esteem are common in suicide interventions. In cases where the negotiator either does not recognize these types of statements or is not able to effectively honor or "plus up" the subject's face, suicide is a high risk. The S.A.F.E. model helps negotiators identify and develop effective responses to:

- *Face attack* behavior engaged in by the subject that is directed toward him/herself
- *Face attack* behavior engaged in by the subject that is directed toward others
- *Face honoring* behavior engaged in by the subject that is directed toward him/herself
- *Face honoring* behavior engaged in by the subject that is directed toward others

Emotional Distress involves intense, negative emotions that compromise an individual's ability to cope with the stress of a crisis situation. It is important to track the degree to which the subject expresses positive versus negative emotions. When emotional distress compromises the subject's ability to problem-solve, a flight/fight response can emerge, increasing the unpredictability of the situation. *The goal for the negotiator is to help subjects cope with their emotional distress in a way that permits them to re-assess the situation and then influence the subject toward a cooperative resolution.*

The S.A.F.E. framework integrates work on emotion and stress by developing strategies of (1) empathic listening to communicate to the subject that his/her situation and emotional state is understood, and (2) influence strategies that focus on the "action tendency" of the specific emotional (distress) state of the subject. The S.A.F.E. model identifies five core emotional distress states and their action tendency along with specific negotiation strategies for communicating with subjects who are experiencing such emotional distress. These five key emotional distress states and their action tendency are: (1) sadness (sense of loneliness, discouragement attached to a significant loss. The action tendency of sadness is to seek help in coping with the loss, (2) Fear/anxiety (sense of apprehension, uncertainty, danger based on a threat). The action tendency of fear/anxiety is to avoid or escape from the threat, (3) Disgust (sense of distaste, revulsion toward something or someone (typically oneself if the subject is suffering from substance abuse) who is viewed as spoiled or deteriorated. The action tendency of disgust is to get "rid of" or "wash away" the poison or cause, (4) Anger (sense of being physically or psychologically restrained and unfairly harmed by others). The action tendency of anger is to attack the offending party, and (5) shame (intensely painful sense of dejection and rejection from others, feelings of inadequacy). The action tendency of shame is to hide, disappear or die. Perhaps the most volatile emotional "cocktail" is shame combined with anger as this produces a sense of "humiliated fury." The S.A.F.E. model helps negotiators to:

- Identify core negative emotions and their action tendency experienced by subjects in crisis situations
- Engage in empathic communication in which emotions are accurately understood and addressed
- Employ appropriate active listening skills in dealing with subject's emotional distress
- Use specific strategies for influencing the subject by framing the subject's behavior in terms of the action tendency of his/her predominant emotional distress state.

Using the S.A.F.E. Model

The S.A.F.E. model can be easily integrated into the team's overall critical response effort. The negotiation team or incident command should designate a "S.A.F.E. Advisor." This person should receive authorized training in the S.A.F.E. model and may be an individual whose background is in crisis intervention or conflict resolution. The S.A.F.E. Advisor can also be a member of the negotiation team or incident command structure. The primary negotiator should not, however, assume the role of S.A.F.E. Advisor! S.A.F.E. strategy should be incorporated into the decisions made by the negotiation team and by incident command. Further, negotiation strategy should be re-evaluated based on changes as the incident unfolds. The S.A.F.E. advisor should monitor and track the four "triggers" (Substantive demands, Attunement, Face, Emotional distress), maintain wall graphics to display observed patterns, and identify specific S.A.F.E. frame strategies for responding and influencing the subject. Recently, as part of S.A.F.E. training that I conduct, participants receive a copy of the S.A.F.E. Field Guide and S.A.F.E. Assessment

Tools which are helpful "on scene" as an incident develops. During appropriate times during a crisis incident, the S.A.F.E. Advisor can brief the negotiation team leader and members concerning what S.A.F.E. issues are most dominant for the subject and what kinds of strategies can be used to address these S.A.F.E. triggers.

Overall, the S.A.F.E. model offers a comprehensive approach for assessing, evaluating and developing effective response strategies to subject's behavior in crisis incidents. This model should be included in the expanded toolbox of crisis negotiation teams.[3](#)

1- Article in M.J. McMains & W.C. Mullins (2006). *Crisis negotiations: Managing critical incidents and hostage situations in law enforcement and corrections* (third edition).

2- The author would like to thank Dr. Randall Rogan, co-developer of the initial S.A.F.E. framework, Major Robert Beach, SSA James Cavanaugh, Mr. William Hogewood, Mr. Anthony Hare and Mr. Chuck Paris for their support of the S.A.F.E. approach for resolving crisis incidents. The initial elements of the S.A.F.E. model were developed by Drs. Hammer and Rogan. Further development of the S.A.F.E. model and S.A.F.E. negotiation strategies as highlighted in this paper are developed by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D.

3- In addition to the S.A.F.E. Field Guide and S.A.F.E. Assessment Tools, other information on the S.A.F.E. model and related work can be found in Hammer, M.R. (in progress). *Saving lives: The S.A.F.E. model for resolving hostage and crisis incidents*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publications; Rogan, R.L. & Hammer, M.R., & Van Zandt, C. (Eds.) (1997). *Dynamic processes of crisis negotiation: Theory, research and practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing; Rogan, R.G., & Hammer, M.R. (Forthcoming). The emerging field of crisis/hostage negotiation: A communication-based perspective. In J. Oetzel & S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.), *Handbook of conflict communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Hammer, M.R. & Rogan, R.G. (2004). Threats, demands, and communication dynamics: Negotiating the 1991 Talladega prison siege, *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations*, 4, (1),45-56; Rogan, R.G. & Hammer, M.R. (2002). Crisis/hostage negotiations: A communication-based approach. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Law enforcement, communication, and community* (pp. 229-254). John Benjamins, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Hammer, M.R. (2001). Conflict negotiation under crisis conditions. In W. Eadie & P. Nelson (Eds.). *The language of conflict and resolution* (pp. 57-80). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Rogan, R.G. & Hammer, M.R. (1998). An exploratory study of message affect behavior: A comparison between African Americans and Euro-Americans. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 17 (4), 449-464; Rogan, R.G. & Hammer, M.R. (1995). Assessing message affect in crisis negotiations: An exploratory study. *Human Communication Research*, 21, 553-574; Rogan, R.G. & Hammer, M.R. (1994). Crisis negotiations: A preliminary investigation of facework in naturalistic conflict discourse. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 22, 216-231; Hammer, M.R. & Weaver, G. (1994; 1998; 2000). Cultural considerations in hostage negotiations. In Weaver, G.R.

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