Book Review: Crisis Negotiations: Managing Critical Incidents and Hostage Situations in Law Enforcement and Corrections (2nd ed.)
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tive is articulate, engaging, and very accessible. Rather, it is the absolute futility of incarcerat-
ing individuals for their natural lives and the sense of injustice that the nature of this sentence
provokes that is so demoralizing. Indeed, as Paluch’s father succinctly puts it, life imprison-
ment without parole can be considered little more than “a silent sentence of death” (p. 208).

Alana Barton
Edge Hill

Crisis Negotiations: Managing Critical Incidents and Hostage Situations in Law Enforce-
ment and Corrections (2nd ed.), by Michael J. McMains and Wayman C. Mullins. Cincinnati,
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Incidents involving barricaded suspects, hostage takers, or persons threatening suicide are
only a few of the dynamic calls requiring a proficient and effective law enforcement
response. Officers who first arrive at the scene must quickly assess the situation, secure the
location, estimate the threat level, and direct additional responding units appropriately.

Crisis negotiators have the daunting task of establishing contact with the barricaded sus-
pect (or hostage takers, depending on circumstance), eliciting demands, and resolving the
standoff with the goal of preserving life. For such incidents to be effectively resolved, all
responding units must understand clearly the functions of the others. This will allow a coordi-
nated response to be successful.

An effective negotiator must have the knowledge and capability needed to resolve tense
critical incidents. Crisis Negotiations is a book that gives an intense insight into the intricate
subject of negotiations. Authors Michael J. McMains (San Antonio Police Department) and
Wayman C. Mullins (Southwest Texas State University) also take an in-depth look at critical
incident management.

The text is a brilliant informational tool for both beginner and expert negotiators. The
authors thoroughly explain the ideas and concepts of command centers, negotiating teams
and tactical teams, equipment considerations, intelligence gathering, tactical response,
postincident debriefing, mental health assistance, and support personnel. The text is well
structured and separated into practical chapters that provide essential definitions and infor-
mative examples. The book further assists negotiators by illustrating actual case studies of
past critical incidents. The beginning of each chapter provides an outline of learning objec-
tives for that particular discussion. A summary can be found at the end of each chapter, com-
plete with references for further reading and a set of exercises to focus on what the reader has
learned in that particular chapter.

Of the 14 chapters contained in the book, chapter 8 is perhaps one of the most enlighten-
ing. “Team Structure, Roles, and Command” is an educational tool for those interested in
learning the fundamentals of the negotiation process. This chapter examines a definition of
teams, identifies problems during incidents that are related to team issues, and describes the
roles and structures of response teams that will help overcome the problems that have de-
veloped in the team management of crisis incidents.
The chapter begins by explaining that teams need to be committed to a common purpose, to common performance goals, and to common approaches to the problem. The authors then proceed to explain that there must be a team approach to managing crises. Teams must have clear and effective channels of communication, and they must agree on specific plans of action. The chapter further presents a graph that illustrates the general organizational structure of a typical hostage incident.

Next presented is the idea of command posts. To facilitate communication, problem solving, and control of an incident, a command post needs to be established. The authors detail to the reader that the command post should have sufficient room to accommodate the following personnel: the field commander, a tactical supervisor, a negotiator supervisor, a traffic/patrol supervisor, an intelligence/recorder/communications officer, and a public information officer. Next is a detailed description of the specific duties and responsibilities that each of these personnel must perform during a crisis.

Establishing the negotiation area is next presented in great detail. The environment should be designed to meet the negotiators’ needs for safety and security, freedom from distractions and criticism, and control of their environment. The location should be based on the principles of separation and isolation. With the help of fellow researchers’ data, the authors point out the importance of eight steps in building an effective team: establish urgency and direction, select members for their skills and their potential for developing skills, carefully construct the first team meeting, set clear rules for behavior, set and pursue a few immediately productive tasks, challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and goals, spend lots of time together, and use the power of positive feedback, recognition, and reward.

The chapter finishes by listing the FBI’s guidelines for organization of a negotiating team. The team includes the team supervisor, primary negotiator, secondary negotiator, intelligence officer, and mental health consultant. A description of each of their specific duties is fully detailed.

“Communication in Hostage Negotiations” is another informative chapter. This chapter presents to the reader the importance of effective communication. The authors begin the chapter by illustrating that hostage negotiations can be summarized in one word: communication. Police negotiators are successful because they understand the principles of communication, practice those principles, and then apply what they have practiced to the hostage situation. Next, the seven components that make up the communication process are presented. Barriers to effective communication, crisis communication, and verbal tactics in crisis communications are other subject areas that are explored thoroughly within chapter 6.

McMains and Mullins also present “The Stockholm Syndrome” in great detail. This chapter begins with a historical review and perspective of the syndrome. The chapter further explains that hostages can be divided into two categories: survivors and succumbers. The difference between survivors and succumbers is summarized in chart form in chapter 14, “Post-Incident Debriefing.”

A successful negotiation will get the hostage taker to surrender and the hostages released. An effective negotiation also keeps tactical officers from being forced into a hostile environment and put into harm’s way. All of this may happen within minutes or stretch out for several days. Police negotiators are negotiating for life. They are negotiating not just for the life of the hostage or victim but for the hostage taker and other police officers as well.

An extremely imperative area of applied criminal justice is crisis negotiation. Academic scholars are now acknowledging that law enforcement is unlike other professions. Police
officers are trained to carry out their duties during exigent situations and must be able to restore the balance of order. During extraneous situations, officers must make split-second decisions in the absence of complete and accurate information.

Because the law enforcement field is so complex, an emphasis has been placed on resources that give helpful assistance to personnel. McMains and Mullins, the authors of Crisis Management, have created a comprehensive handbook intended to help negotiators and line officers through demanding critical incidents. The authors have left nothing out of this book. The information presented to the reader is abundant. The text leaves the reader with a knowledgeable insight into the complex area of negotiations. In sum, this book is a thought-provoking evaluation of managing crisis incidents and is guaranteed to inform and enlighten the reader.

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Criminological Theories: Understanding Crime in America, by Anderson and Dyson, is a textbook detailing a range of theories that the authors consider apposite to the American student’s understanding of criminology and the theory of crime. The book’s subject matter in itself is therefore welcome because there is now consensus that theory is (and has perhaps ever been) fundamental to breathing life into criminology, envisaging just responses to crime, and theorizing alternative prospects for criminal justice.

The book commences with an introductory section that outlines salient features of the crime problem in the United States. This is largely a matter of attempting to explain the disjuncture of a decline in violent crime but rabid, widespread, and increased public fear of crime. However, a convincing explanation of this anomaly remains tantalizingly beyond the grasp of the reader. This, the book’s preface, is telling enough, revealing a central objective in encouraging students to think critically about crime and particularly victimization, standing in stark contrast to the textbooks of just a few decades ago, which did not prioritize victimization in such a fashion. A trivial but nonetheless irksome weakness of the text is evinced by the sundry definitions scattered about the introduction. The authors advise that “crime is defined as any commission or omission of a law forbidding or commanding such behaviour,” a nicely precise definition, which includes omissions, a generalization that may sit uncomfortably with those possessing even a rudimentary understanding of the law. Similarly, criminology is defined as the “scientific study of the origin, causation, nature and extent of crimes” (p. 6), a