

Letter to Editor:

Hostage/Crisis Negotiations: Lessons Learned from the Bad, the Mad, and the Sad

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Tom Strentz (2013)

Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher

ISBN: 978-0-398-08869-9

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Dr. Thomas Strentz has been a Marine, a social worker, and has spent over 40 years as a member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. While employed there, he helped create and guide the FBI's crisis negotiation team. All of this experience has gone into writing this book about significant situations that he and other negotiators have faced and how the lessons learned from those incidents have affected the field of crisis negotiations. He has selected a few incidents that illustrate certain important factors and techniques of negotiations and written the book with an eye towards educating the reader about some of the more important aspects of what he has spent his life doing.

Looking at the title alone may suggest only an updated version of Hacker's book, *Crusaders, criminals and Crazies: Terror and Terrorism in Our Time* (1977). However, Dr. Strentz goes into much more depth and breadth. Other than brief introduction and conclusion sections, Dr. Strentz organized the book into three main parts (as the title indicates). The first section is titled "The Bad" and concerns people with Anti-Social Personalities (ASP). The author describes this condition, and then shows how it can cause people to become hostage takers. He gives advice for dealing with ASP sufferers and describes different situations in which these techniques were used to save lives.

The second section is titled "The Mad" and discusses hostage and crisis negotiations involving mentally ill people. The author points out that there are

many mental illnesses that can cause a person to attract the attention of negotiators, and then discusses a small subgroup of these conditions. He details a number of cases in which mentally ill people took hostages (including an especially entertaining story of a man whose sole demand was for more people to feed the birds) and how different techniques were used to end those situations.

The third section is titled "The Sad" and discusses negotiations involving suicidal people. These situations require a very different approach by authorities, and most law enforcement departments have different policies to deal with these situations because of previous incidents and the legal fall out that hollowed. The author discusses instances in which people were attempting to hurt themselves and how the negotiators handled the situation.

The book and the incidents described within it are sometimes heartwarming, sometimes sad, but always entertaining. The author carefully chose the situations discussed to illustrate certain techniques or problems faced by negotiators, and he ends each chapter with a "lessons learned" section that summarizes what the most important aspects of those stories were. This practice allows the reader to understand complex concepts in a very simple way, and to see exactly how and why certain tactics and techniques are used today.

The one area of the book that could have used more attention is the editing. The book is written in a very conversational style. While this style is great for discussing these situations in a presentation or small group context, reading a text written in a conversational

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style can be challenging. There are spots where the relaxed style has resulted in awkward and unclear phrasing that requires re-reading.

Overall, the book should be highly engrossing to both experienced negotiators and casual readers alike. Experienced negotiators and law enforcement professionals can expand their knowledge and pick up valuable techniques for dealing with these

unpredictable people and situations. Readers with no previous knowledge of negotiations or police work can easily understand each situation and enjoy the great, true stories of a lifetime spent in law enforcement. This book does an excellent job bridging education and storytelling to create a valuable learning tool that's genuinely enjoyable to read.

Received on 30-07-2013

Accepted on 31-07-2013

Published on 13-08-2013

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2013.02.28>

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