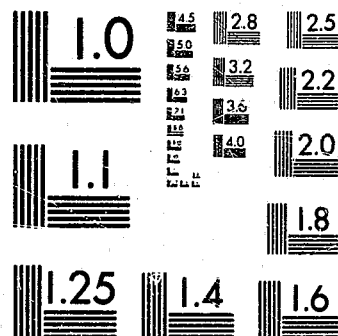


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THE USE OF SUGGESTIBILITY TECHNIQUES IN HOSTAGE NEGOTIATION

Martin Reiser and Martin Sloane

Hostage-taking has become an almost commonplace occurrence in society today and it will likely continue to increase in the future. Numerous municipalities have experienced incidents involving an emotionally disturbed person holding a spouse or family member as hostage, thwarted armed robbers using employees as insurance for escape, skyjackers jeopardizing many lives and expensive aircraft, organized terrorist groups attempting to barter hostages for money or political prisoners, and the occasional demented psychopath bent on destroying those around him as well as himself. In all of these circumstances, a key function of negotiation is buying time while attempting to defuse the situation (Culley, 1974).

Types of hostage-takers have been categorized and personality factors delineated which the negotiator needs to consider when communicating with the perpetrator (Goldaber, 1979). Along with the important individual differences among various suspects, there exist common factors in every hostage situation. It is

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in this connection that suggestive cues can be utilized in almost any hostage scenario--in addition to traditional persuasive tactics--as a supplement to negotiation approaches.

Persuasion and Suggestion

Persuasion and suggestion are two different methods currently used in hostage negotiation to influence a suspect's behavior. Persuasion involves influencing by reasons and arguments, whereas suggestion conveys ideas or thoughts by direct or indirect means using implication, hinting, intimidation, or insinuation (see Table 1). Persuasion is generally beamed at conscious mental processes involving logic and reason, while suggestion is aimed at influencing sub-conscious levels of the mind (Frank, 1961). Suggestion also evokes and utilizes potentials and life experiences already present in subjects but beyond their usual control mechanisms (Erickson & Rossi, 1979).

Conscious and Sub-conscious Processes

The conscious mind can only absorb a small amount of the stimuli which constantly bombards the sensory system. It must therefore limit the information it processes. In perceiving, encoding and storing data, the conscious mind selectively attends to bits of information which have meaning and value at the time. Like the narrow beam of a flashlight, the conscious mind illuminates only a tiny part (approximately 10 percent) of the total surround. Consciousness requires the focus of attention and the awareness of doing, feeling, thinking,

imagining or remembering, and utilizes cognitive functions to deal with reality in a rational manner (Reiser, 1973).

By contrast, the sub-conscious mind accepts most of the incoming stimuli from the senses (approximately 90 percent) and stores the data without filters or criticism. This sub-conscious reservoir can be channeled by specific techniques, and may explain why people in drug, deprivation, or relaxation states experience increased sensory perception, more vivid imagery, heightened artistic creativity, and exhibit "abnormal" behaviors (Tart, 1969). It may also be related to deeply hypnotized subjects who act out during stage performances in ways normally proscribed.

Altered States of Consciousness and Crises

Altered states of consciousness can be produced by a variety of maneuvers or events which interfere with the normal flow of sensory stimuli and with cognitive organization. They have been induced by third degree tactics, brain washing techniques, mob or group contagion effects, religious conversions, healing trance experiences, spirit possession states, tribal and religious ceremonies, fire walker trances, or by meditation and hypnosis techniques. Altered states may also arise from inner conflict, heightened emotional arousal or depression (Tart, 1976). In virtually every hostage situation suspects and hostages will be experiencing some degree of alteration in consciousness because intense stimulation will overload the senses.

Highly stressed individuals automatically shift into an altered state affecting both information processing and behavior. In hostage or barricaded situations, the individual succumbs to a state of emotional crisis. As a result, he develops cognitive and sensory distortions, as well as perceptual narrowing. In response to intense emotional arousal, the body and mind act to reestablish a state of equilibrium (Selye, 1956).

In addition to rapid physiological changes, psychological concomitants focus on survival and escape. During the early phase of a crisis, confusion, magical thinking and anxiety override rational decision-making. A suspect's usual coping skills are often ineffectual relative to the massive stress and loss of environmental control. Feelings of frustration, anger and fear heighten the organism's attempts to achieve a state of balance and harmony.

Altered states of consciousness also include the following characteristics (Ludwig, 1976):

1. Changes in thinking, including disturbances in concentration, attention, memory and judgment. Primitive (primary process) thinking increases, reality testing decreases, ambivalence increases and there is a decrease in reflective awareness.
2. Time distortions. Time often appears to slow down.

3. Loss of control. Feelings of helplessness, impotence or omnipotence are common.
4. Changes in emotional reactivity. Emotional outbursts may occur ranging from elation to depression. Alternatively, the individual may become detached, colorless, uninvolved and distant.
5. Changes in body image. There may be feelings of depersonalization, derealization and a loosening of self and outer world boundaries.
6. Perceptual distortions. There may be increased suspiciousness and apperceptive distortion. Illusions and heightened suggestibility are characteristic.

Principles of Suggestion

A suggestion can be defined as the uncritical acceptance of an idea. Inputs from the five senses, including verbal, non-verbal and extraverbal, affect the higher brain centers. The key factors for increased suggestibility are: 1) Motivation, 2) rapport, 3) attention span, 4) imagery potential, 5) esteem for the negotiator, and 6) past reactions to suggestions (Kroger, 1977).

The perpetrator's susceptibility to suggestion is also influenced by his hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1971). Most hostage-takers

and barricaded suspects will be initially concerned with safety needs (fear of injury), physical needs (food, water, temperature, sound) and survival issues. A New York case exemplifies this intensification of basic needs; one barricaded suspect originally demanded six million dollars but finally surrendered for a "Big Mac" and a cigarette (Schlossberg, 1979).

Suggestion and Hypnosis

There are several principles of suggestion which may be operative during the communication process:

1. The Principle of Concentrated Attention says that whenever attention is concentrated on an idea over and over, it spontaneously tends to realize itself. Advertising jingles and propaganda dissemination are based on this concept.
2. The Principle of Reversed Effect holds that the harder one tries consciously to do something, the less chance there is for success. Whenever there is a conflict between imagination (subconscious) and willpower (conscious), the imagination wins. Unwanted smoking, eating and insomnia are examples of the failure of the will.
3. The Principle of Dominant Effect says that a strong emotion tends to override a weaker one. Connecting a strong emotion to a suggestion tends to make it more effective (Kroger, 1977).

Repetitive stimulation of any of the senses can induce a state of increased receptivity to suggestion. An altered state of consciousness akin to daydreaming and reverie is the hypnoidal state, a precursor of hypnosis. Hypnoidal states, which can be produced by fixation of attention and monotonous stimuli, are characterized by detachment, physical and mental relaxation, and some reduction in critical thinking. Everyday hypnoidal experiences are sometimes called "waking hypnosis" behaviors. Common examples of hypnoidal states are: complete absorption in a movie, being in severe pain, and "highway hypnosis" with the accompanying reduction of reality awareness.

"Waking suggestions" are those given to a subject in a non-hypnotic state. Hypnotic suggestions are those made to a subject while in hypnosis to influence hypnotic behavior. One difference in the effectiveness between waking and hypnotic suggestions is an increased likelihood of suggestibility in the hypnotized person. Waking suggestions given to a hostage taker may require repetition to be effective whereas suggestions made during the hypnotic state may be accepted with only one communication.¹

1 - Waking suggestions are the sine qua non of advertising in electronic and print media. Products of questionable necessity or value are sold for billions of dollars each year with the aid of suggestibility techniques.

Repetition of suggestions is also important in shaping neural pathways leading to a quasi-conditioned response by the subject. Misdirection of attention is useful in diverting an individual's conscious awareness from the suggestion which, in turn, decreases the likelihood of conscious resistance. Harsh, authoritarian communications are more likely to produce resistance, whereas permissive language and intonation increase the likelihood of compliance. Harshly commanding someone to "Stand up!" as opposed to asking, "Aren't you tired of sitting down?" exemplify both modes. The reduction of implied criticism increases the probability that the suggestion will bypass conscious censorship and be carried out (Reiser, 1980).

Neurolinguistic Functioning and Suggestibility ✓

The use of suggestive principles at hostage scenes is further mediated by language processes. Briefly, the study of human communication has been divided into three areas: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. The first area, syntactics, deals with the question of transmitting information. This includes the problems of coding, capacity, redundancy, and other statistical properties of language. Semantics, the second area, deals with the meaning of message symbols. The third area, pragmatics, affects behavior (Watzlawick, 1967).

The manner in which language is communicated and the value for the recipient impact actions. In hostage situations, a negotiator

is primarily concerned with analogic versus digital communication. Analogic communication consists of the non-verbal, including posture, facial expression, gesture, voice inflection and the sequence, cadence and rhythm of the words in the context of the transaction. In contrast, digital language is concerned with verbal word sequences. Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect which exist side by side and are complementary. The content of the communication is conveyed digitally and the relationship aspect is conveyed in a predominantly analogic fashion.

Digital (verbal logic) communication involves secondary processes (conscious reality) and mainly dominant brain hemisphere functioning (left brain in right-handed people), whereas analogic (non-verbal, non-logical) communication utilizes primary processes (subconscious) and non-dominant brain hemisphere functions (Watzlawick, 1978).

During crisis states (such as hostage situations) the normal balance between brain hemispheres is altered and non-dominant hemisphere functions become more prominent. Subconscious processes of the non-dominant hemisphere are accessed more easily during altered states because the dominant, rational hemisphere has less control of its censorship function.

In applying suggestibility techniques during hostage scenarios, communication is directed toward influencing a subject's non-dominant processes as much as possible. The non-dominant hemisphere is influenced largely by analogic communications. Indirect forms of communication, including imagery, are useful ways of accomplishing this task (Lazarus, 1977).

Suggestibility Techniques

Milton H. Erickson, M.D., a pioneer of indirect suggestion, developed unique methods of inducing hypnotic trance in clinical patients and influencing behavior toward therapeutic goals (Erickson and Rossi, 1976; 1979). Erickson's approach relies on a sequential pattern designed to induce an altered state of consciousness (trance) and indirectly guide the subject in the desired direction. The sequence involves the following steps:

1. Fixate attention
2. Depotentiate normal habits
3. Initiate subconscious cues
4. Reinforce positive responses

Fixating the hostage-taker's attention can be initiated by encouraging him to talk about himself and reflecting back the feeling level as accurately as possible. This helps build rapport and assists in developing trust and a working relationship.

Depotentiating normal habits involves a tactical shift from following the subject and reflecting back feelings in a primary listening mode to leading the subject in order to alter his conscious mental set. The purpose of this phase is to keep the subject's conscious mind occupied while giving subconscious cues. Ways of accomplishing this can include:

1. Acting casual and permissive. Avoid arguing any point. The hostage-taker will be expecting authorities (negotiator) to be critical and demanding.
2. Redirect the hostage-taker's attention away from his demands.
3. Use phrases rather than complete sentences.
4. Use non-sequitors (statements that do not follow from the facts).
5. Tell boring stories that have little apparent relevance.
6. Alter voice loudness and pitch at periodic intervals.

Initiating subconscious cues is possible while the dominant hemisphere processes of the subject are attempting to logically analyze the sudden shift. The negotiator can choose from a variety of themes in seeding ideas and building on them. The type of indirect suggestion selected can utilize any of an

approximate dozen of Ericksonian forms, from truisms to induced imagery (Haley, 1973; Bandler & Grinder, 1975).

Following are some of the types of indirect communication that can impact suggestibility and influence behavior:

1. Truisms

"Sooner or later you may get tired."

2. Not Knowing, Not Doing

"You may not know when you will get hungry. You won't even need to think about it right now."

3. Open-Ended Suggestions

"We all have the capacity to compromise, but sometimes we don't know when we're ready to negotiate."

4. Covering All Possibilities of a Class of Responses

"Sooner or later, you may or may not want to get a breath of fresh air. The really important thing is to pay attention to what you need."

5. Implied Directive

"When you're ready to talk this out, then we'll find a solution."

6. Imbedded Statements

"You may wish to keep this thought in the back of your mind where we can get to it when needed."

7. Imbedded Questions

"Can you remember the last time you felt relaxed?"

8. Binds

"How soon do you think you'll be ready to negotiate?"

9. Double Binds

"Would you like to negotiate a settlement now or would you prefer to wait awhile?"

10. Interspersal and Associative Focusing

"I'd like to tell you about another settlement I helped negotiate..."

11. Future Projection

"Perhaps you'd like to discuss this issue later."

12. Induced Imagery

"Imagine how relaxed and comfortable you'll feel when we finally solve this situation."

13. Encouraging a New Frame of Reference

"I could be wrong, but I'd guess that your wife (mother, etc.) is feeling pretty scared right now. If you put yourself in her place, I wonder what you might be feeling?"

One frame of reference for applying indirect suggestions is the hierarchy of needs explicated by Maslow (1970). Some hostage-takers may develop a preoccupation with physical needs (food, water), safety needs (fear of injury), or ego needs (acceptance, recognition, worth). By skillfully concentrating on these needs, the negotiator can subtly influence suspect response. The concept of "buying time" during a prolonged negotiation process implies an ongoing deprivation of basic needs and an increasing focus on their satisfaction.

Sample Indirect Cue Themes

Physiological, Environmental, Comfort Needs (Hunger, thirst, fatigue, sleep, sound, light, temperature, space, tobacco)

"What would you like to eat?"

"Just let me know when you are thirsty and we'll work something out."

"I'm having a sandwich and a cold drink right now, and I'm wondering if you are hungry yet."

"Imagine yourself out of that pressure cooker with a cigarette and some hot coffee."

"The pressure will lift when you come out and you may feel tremendous relief and peace of mind."

Safety, Medical, Control Needs (secure, safe, uninjured, relaxed, certain)

"When you let that hostage go, then we might..."

"When you come out I can insure your safety."

"I wonder if you have contemplated a safe way out of this situation?"

"Does anyone have medical concerns we should know about?"

"Would you like to come out now or in 10 minutes?"

"Can you remember the last time you felt relaxed?"

"Your safety is within your control. It's just a few steps away."

"Some of my friends tell me to loosen up. How do you relax when you're uptight?"

"Can you allow yourself to be safe and secure?"

"I used to have a partner who would tell me to relax."

"You must be wondering what will happen next."

"I had a situation like this once..."

"I'd like to tell you an apparently meaningless story..."

Ego Needs (acceptance, affiliation, recognition, worth)

"People can make the most of learning opportunities."

"I'm wondering how you feel about the prospect of talking with the reporter when you come out."

"I'm very curious about when you first decided..."

"I wonder whether you know..."

"And so clearly you want and need..."

"And you fully realize so well..."

"I'm curious to know if you can really..."

"You can continue to feel the satisfaction of..."

"It takes a courageous kind of person to come out and work out the problem."

"And you may be aware of a certain sensation."

Dealing with Resistance

The conscious mind acts, in part, as an inhibitor and censor, while the subconscious functions as a storehouse of potential behaviors. In order to avoid unpleasant or threatening material, the conscious mind pushes certain thoughts, feelings and images out of awareness into the subconscious using the mechanism of repression. The conscious ego resists the re-emergence of this material by maintaining counter-pressure and distance (Reiser, 1973).

A hostage-taker's resistance to cues can be handled by accepting and then defining reluctance as cooperative behavior. Once the person is cooperating, he can be diverted toward new behaviors. One approach is to focus on the subject's need to be upset and to express angry feelings via the hostage situation, but to vary the duration, frequency, or intensity. "I don't blame you for feeling upset, and very shortly, when the steam gets reduced, the whole situation will be less of a headache to you."

A subject's resistance can also be defused by either demanding more resistance or by preempting it:

"You'll probably find this silly, but I have the impression..."

"This is bound to sound ridiculous, but one could say..."

"There is a very simple solution to this problem, but I am almost sure you won't like it..."

"To do this will be very difficult for you, because on the surface the solution will look absurd..."

"You're probably as upset as I am over the time its taking to solve this, but you and I are making progress in..."

Talking about the similarities between the present situation and the past where a resolution was possible may mobilize the earlier behavior. It may also be useful to have the subject perform some action in order to increase the likelihood of further suggestibility. An example might be, "I'd like you to hang up the phone and call me right back when...". If the suggestion isn't followed, the negotiator can apologize for asking more of the subject than the person is willing or capable of accepting at that point. The suggestion can then be rephrased.²

2 - Indirect cues are very subtle. Even if one is rejected a new suggestion can be substituted without adverse effects.

It may also help to adapt the subject's tonality and way of speaking, using words and phrases the person has used. This pacing procedure provides feedback of the subject's own experience on both conscious and subconscious levels (Bandler & Grinder, 1979):

"And you may become aware of (remember, experience, feel, hear, see yourself)..."

With very resistant subjects it may help to encourage a seeming regression. This may assist a subject to discriminate between past influences and present situational factors:

"I wonder if you can go back and feel as bad as you did when you first encountered this problem, because you might see if there is anything from that time you wish to recover or salvage."

Reinforce Positive Responses

The use of positive language is also important. Avoiding negatives while utilizing aphorisms (short sentences expressing a general truth); ambiguities, puns, allusions, euphemisms, innuendo, and double-bind messages can be effective. These cues may bypass usual censorship and influence the subject at a subconscious level.

Even a small response can be used to enhance and shape desired goals. The subject is always "right" in regard to his responses,

and the negotiator utilizes whatever is communicated to relabel, rephrase and interpret in a positive way.

Conclusion

All people are suggestible to some degree. Like others, hostage-takers are connected to persons, places, experiences or ideas which consciously or subconsciously influence their behavior. With proper motivation, positive rapport and pertinent cues, the suspect will likely follow suggestions that are subconsciously relevant.

Though persuasion has been used routinely in the past, the notion of influencing the suspect subconsciously through suggestion is a relatively new concept. That hostage-taker and hostage are already in an altered state of consciousness provides the negotiator with an advantage. By utilizing suggestibility techniques, the negotiator adds an increment of influence in defusing, shaping and ultimately resolving a life-threatening crisis.

The hostage negotiator has traditionally been trained to be a reactor to events; Erickson's methods require a more indirect, proactive approach to problem-solving. Law enforcement officers are usually quite adept at forceful persuasion, but find permissiveness and the use of suggestion more difficult. The conveyance of indirect cues involves a subtle balance of skills; police negotiators often have the capacity and opportunity

to combine both approaches, but some additional training may be required.

Applied research is sorely needed to test out suggestive approaches, to further develop these new techniques, and to refine the operational model of indirect communication as it applies to hostage negotiation.

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TABLE 1

<u>PERSUASION</u>	<u>SUGGESTION</u>
Impression of force.	Impression of choice.
Compliance or resistance.	Feeling of self-imposed decision-making.
Direct.	Direct or Indirect.
Analytic.	Non-analytic.

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