

# **STRATEGIC THINKING, CRISIS INTERVENTION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: CONNECTING CLASSROOM KNOWLEDGE WITH FIELD EXPERIENCE**

**Frank G. Bourgeois '13G\***  
**Graduate Student, M.B.A. Program, Rivier University**

**I**t was Thursday night on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and I was walking out of police headquarters to drive to Rivier University to take part in a capstone class: *Strategies of Innovations*. I had only two classes left before completing my M.B.A. in Business Management.

Suddenly, I was stopped in the hallway by the Commander of The Special Operations Unit. He advised me that we had a suicidal, barricaded gunman in a city hotel room with reported shots fired. He further advised me to put my team together immediately. As the supervisor of the Crisis Intervention Unit, I am responsible for a team of officers who are all F.B.I. certified in hostage/crisis negotiations and conflict resolution. What I learned in the next seven hours and intend to share with you in this manifest, is how the theories and principles I learned in my M.B.A. graduate studies, had integrated themselves into my law enforcement career.

Shortly after the first gun shots had been reported, I was putting my team together and setting up a Negotiation Operation Center (called a N.O.C. – phonetically: *knock*). In the best interest of time, I chose to set up the N.O.C. at police headquarters while the tactical/contact team was setting up in the hotel. Like any good crisis intervention unit, we began by gathering as much intelligence as we could on the subject in crisis whom I will refer to as Larry. As with any negotiation, intelligence is critical. The more we understood about Larry and his crisis, the greater the probability of a peaceful resolution.

While gathering information and setting up our equipment, I quickly evaluated the intelligence we had thus obtained and based on that, I selected a primary negotiator whom I felt had the best chance of developing a rapport with Larry. On this date there were approximately 7 police officers in the N.O.C. Each officer has a different role including, primary negotiator, coach, scribe, liaison to the tactical unit, and support services. The most important element here is the ability to work together as a team toward our common goal.

Although I am restricted from disclosing any trade secrets of crisis/hostage negotiations, disclosing the strategic mission of this situation is no secret. That strategy involves ending the situation with a peaceful resolution for all parties involved while getting the person in crisis the help he or she needs in hopes of avoiding any similar occurrences in the future.

Complicating matters was the fact that Larry had a weapon and had already fired it multiple times, making this situation much more challenging. As protocol dictates, a large portion of the hotel was evacuated. However, we, as negotiators, were well aware that our contact/tactical team was only feet away from an armed person who was not scared to shoot. In evaluating the intelligence we had obtained thus far, we decided that we would attempt to establish telephonic communications with Larry. In doing so, we were met with a very distraught individual, very emotionally charged, suicidal and violent. Communications occurred in short bursts as Larry continued to hang up on us repeatedly. It is also no secret that, for my team, to negotiate a peaceful resolution, continued dialogue is a critical component to that resolution. However, after a couple of hours consisting only of short conversations and repeated hang-ups, we all acknowledged that we were no closer to our strategic goal than we had been two hours ago. I then received a report of another gunshot fired. I feared Larry either shot himself or shot one of

the tactical officers. Fortunately, no one was injured. As I had learned in my *Strategic Management* class, it was now time for a deployment strategy as what we were doing just wasn't working.

We decided that we would use a third party intermediary or a T.P.I as it is known in the "industry." We considered a few different people and ultimately selected a close friend who I will refer to as David. We had David transported to headquarters and we informed him of our plan. He was coached on what to say and what not to say, and David agreed to give it a try. David was brought into the N.O.C and monitored very closely by the members of my team. Although David tried his best, our team collectively agreed that we were still not making any progress. As with any deployment strategy, we had to take it off the table as the results were not advantageous, in fact the effort almost futile.

In the business world, we often conduct a S.W.O.T. Analysis on our company. As we know, this is an assessment of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats both internally and externally. This analysis is ever changing based on many factors inclusive of the moves made by our competitors. This crisis situation was no different. Many times during this seven hour standoff, I found myself conducting a S.W.O.T analysis of our situation and making further decisions based on our position. The only real difference between a business S.W.O.T. analysis and this crisis S.W.O.T. analysis is that the decisions in this crisis produce almost immediate results and the results could potentially be fatal.

It was time for a second deployment strategy. At this point, we had identified some facts that we knew not to discuss as it provoked a negative response from Larry. At the same time, we also had identified some facts that Larry seemed to be open to discussing. We decided to work with those facts in hopes to get Larry to see that there was much to live for and that together we could get past what had caused him to go into a crisis mode on this date. This went on for another couple of hours. Progress was slow, but any move forward is good progress. We were able to get Larry's emotional level down, and the short bursts of dialogue were getting longer.

However, a new problem had emerged. Larry had access to more than one phone line. When he hung up with us, he would use the other line to call others who would recharge his emotional level. This was very problematic for us, but what we had no control over, we used to our advantage. It became readily apparent to us that Larry would not willingly relinquish his position, put down the firearm, walk out of the room, and surrender himself to the contact team. With this, we developed yet another deployment strategy knowing that action by the tactical team was inevitable. We intentionally used both lines to our advantage to tire Larry out. The constant change in emotional level was having an effect on his exhaustion.

At the same time, I was monitoring the same effect on my team's primary negotiator. Although not the best practice, I had other fresh primary negotiators readily available to transition in. These were my reserves, which Larry - my competitor - did not possess. This was yet another strength and opportunity for my S.W.O.T. analysis. The importance of not only creating a proficient team but a team deep with many cross trained talents is crucial to any team's success.

My N.O.C. was like a boardroom. I had input from the functional equivalent of C.F.O's, C.O.O.'s, C.I.O.'s, etc. Our deployment strategies, constant re-analysis, repositioning and re-evaluation of the situation were no different than those occurring across Corporate America thousands of times a day. In those same boardrooms, collaboration is vital. In our situation, collaboration was vital not only within my strategic team, but also between my team and the tactical team on the ground, and the long term strategic goals of both teams were the same ones. The main difference lied in the path of achievement by each team. Getting the two to work together was crucial as it exponentially increased the probability of achieving our common strategic goal.

With that said, I was well aware that we were approaching a time where negotiations were waning and a disruptive tactical plan would have to be executed. No different than a marketing team trying to figure out that optimal “time of entry” into a market with a disruptive product, here I was far away from Dr. Gregory Kivenzor’s *Strategies of Innovation* class, with the responsibility of identifying the tactical teams optimal “time of entry”. The cost of a poor decision in the boardroom is loss of revenues. A poor decision in my N.O.C. was a potential loss of life.

I turned to the primary negotiator and I asked him for his opinion of Larry’s emotional state. I was advised by the primary negotiator and my team that Larry was at the lowest point of agitation and emotion as he had been in the last six plus hours. It was now that an entry had to be executed as it presented the least likelihood of a violent response. I decided it was in fact the optimal time. Using several tactical advantages that I cannot disclose, entry was made. The N.O.C. was deafeningly quiet as we monitored the tactical channel for updates. Within minutes, we heard the tactical team leader advise us that Larry was in custody and everyone was safe. The N.O.C. cheered as we had achieved our strategic goal set at the beginning of this situation. We achieved our peaceful resolution, and could now provide Larry with the help he needed.

In sports, teams watch game films of their plays even when they win. I am a big proponent of this. We later debriefed the situation looking at what we had done correctly, could have done better, and what, if anything, we needed to change to become more efficient and effective. In the business world, we learn that when we reach the top of our game, the only way to go is down. It is therefore of utmost importance that we never reach the top of our respective games. We constantly have to remain in the development and growth phase to succeed.

After exhausting 15 hours at work, I drove home and began to realize the many similarities between what I had learned in the classroom and what I had been doing in the field. In a seven- hour period, my team had dealt with conflict resolution, strategic goals, deployment strategies, S.W.O.T. analysis, collaboration, leadership, time of entry, teamwork and an exit strategy. It was only then that I had realized that I had integrated both facets of my life into one.

I came back to school to diversify my personal portfolio never expecting that what I would learn in a business classroom would have a prolific effect on how I think in the field. The value of my M.B.A. education by far exceeded what I had ever expected it would do – it might even have helped save a life. What a return on investment... ■

---

\* **FRANK BOURGEOIS** is a graduate student at Rivier University graduating in May 2013 with his M.B.A. He is a 22 year veteran of law enforcement finishing his 19th year with The Nashua N.H. Police Department. In the course of his career, Frank has worked in many capacities to include patrol officer, community policing officer, undercover detective, S.W.A.T. operative, and detective supervisor. Frank is currently assigned as a police prosecutor at The 9th Circuit Court–Nashua District Division and also serves as the supervisor of The Crisis Intervention Unit. He is married with two daughters and resides in Massachusetts.