

## Using The Skills of The NYPD Hostage Negotiators

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## NYPD Hostage Negotiation Team

adaptability  
guide  
Empathy  
confidence  
prepared  
self-awareness  
Rapport  
open-minded  
voice tone  
Calm  
Patience  
influence

### ***What are the skills that these expert crisis and hostage negotiators use on a frequent basis to successfully and peacefully resolve an incident?***

In order to be successful the goal must be firmly established. HNT members engage people in a crisis situation using specific communications tools. First, this is done by showing **empathy**; second by **building rapport**; and third, by **developing trust** over time with the subject (person experiencing the crisis). This is crucial as it then **allows the negotiator to begin influencing the subject to re-evaluate their situation** and allow the negotiator to work collaboratively with him or her. Maintaining the subject's **self-determination** is important, as it is he or she that needs to come to that conclusion and make the decision to choose a peaceful end. The negotiator, needing to be charismatic, in essence is a guide providing assistance during the journey.

The following are important skills NYPD hostage negotiators use time and again that contribute to successful negotiations (but by no means intended to be an exclusive list). Note, although you might not be a law enforcement crisis or hostage negotiator, these skills can be applied to a variety of other negotiation, business, professional, and social settings as well:

#### **“Talk To Me” (Listen More, Talk Less).**

“Talk To Me” is the motto of the HNT for a reason. Expert NYPD negotiators listen much more than they talk. It is not merely a motto but more accurately it is a foundation of which all the skills are based on. Inviting the subject to talk makes the first impression that the negotiator is there to listen. This can come across as a surprise and therefore start the process of building rapport.

Think about it when you were last upset- would you rather talk or have someone else do the talking? HNT negotiators realize before any type of substantive negotiating can begin the subject needs to tell their story. The “Talk To Me” approach builds trust and rapport, as well as displays empathy.

#### **Patience.**

Expert HNT negotiators realize that slowing the process down and being patient is one of the most effective ways to reduce the subject from acting out based on overwhelming emotions at the detriment of a rational thought process. A negotiator's patience also helps him or her avoid jumping to conclusions and rushing quickly towards a resolution.

HNT negotiators are engaging a stranger experiencing a crisis, so if the negotiator skipped the steps of allowing the subject to speak and also skipping building rapport, the chances of the negotiator being able to influence the person to re-evaluate their situation and surrender greatly diminishes.

**Active Listening.**

Active listening is a cluster of “affective” and “effective” skills. The “affect” part builds rapport and trust while the “effect” gathers vital information. The PRIME SOS acronym can help you remember these vital skills as they are described as the most important in the negotiator’s toolbox of skills to help a person in crisis: paraphrase, reflect/mirror, “I” messages, minimal encouragers, emotional label, summarize, open-ended questions, and silence. Importantly, NYPD negotiators use active listening strategically and genuinely to display the next skill- respect.

**Respect.**

Yes, NYPD HNT negotiators show respect and therefore are non-judging in their tone and words. Rather, the negotiator’s words dually display friendliness and assertiveness. This allows the negotiator to show respect while also importantly still guiding the situation. Critical to showing respect is the negotiator being genuine. Being genuine is not manipulation, great acting, or being condescending but rather demonstrating care for the person to end the situation peacefully.

**Calm.**

Remember, hostage situations are tense, stressful, and anxiety-filled. The negotiator’s actions are contagious and as a guide using a calm, understanding, and respectful tone is what helps the subject realize there is an alternative way out of what was seemingly destined for a violent and potentially deadly conclusion. Starting with the initial greeting the negotiator is presenting a real alternative to the present chaos. The negotiator’s tone, willingness to listen, and empathy emits a confidence that shows the subject (and other police) that communication can work.

**Self-Awareness.**

NYPD HNT negotiator’s operate “in the moment” where their detailed and continuous training let’s them quickly know how to properly identify what is going on with the subject and then respond accordingly. The negotiator realizes they must establish a relationship with a complete stranger. This means the negotiator also realizes that they are spending most of their time listening and not talking so when they do talk, it must be purposely timed taking into account both their verbal and nonverbal elements.

**Adaptability.**

Along with a detailed level of self-awareness comes knowing when to change and adapt one’s strategy. Engaging in crisis and hostage negotiation is not a “cookie-cut” design where the same approach and actions are used each time in an identical way. Rather, skills like active listening are applied based on the context.

Often a subject will move from instrumental needs (I want a car, I want you to leave, I want my job back, etc.) to expressive needs (I am frustrated, I am devastated, this is hopeless, etc.). An expert negotiator sees this happening and changes their responses to, for example, one that includes emotional labeling in order to acknowledge their emotions.

**Conclusion.**

The NYPD HNT uses the above skills on a daily basis displaying that the most valuable tool law enforcement officers can have is often not something on their belt or that they can carry. Rather, their ability to communicate carries a much greater weight and influence that when used effectively, demonstrates respect, emits calm, builds rapport and trust, displays empathy, and can develop a bond with a total stranger that moments ago was consumed by a crisis with no way out.

If NYPD hostage negotiators are able to use these skills to show that even these incidents are not intractable, they are worth trying in other disputes and conflicts. Starting with a “talk to me” mindset can be your first step.