

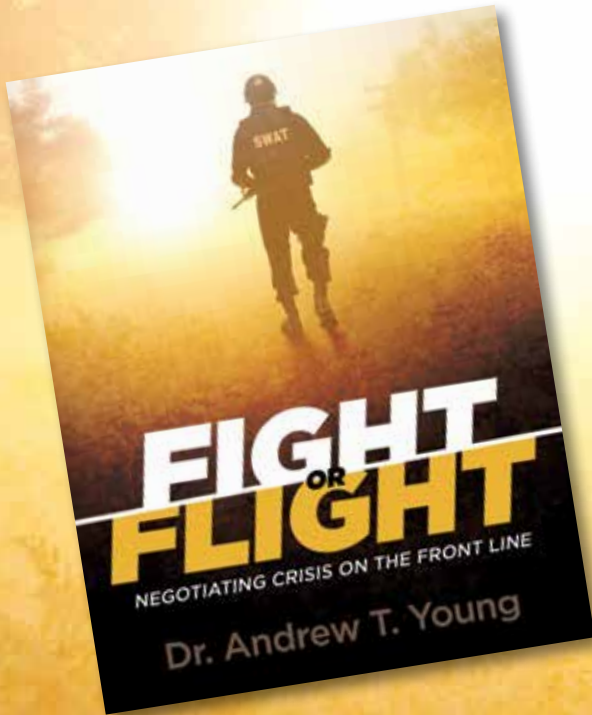
FIGHT OR FLIGHT

NEGOTIATING CRISIS ON THE FRONT LINE

by Dr. Andrew T. Young

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By their very definition, crisis response teams respond to the most serious instances of human drama — those of life and death. Emotions are high and often out of control, the actor has been (and is) making poor decisions, and the threat of death is at the forefront of the situation. The job of SWAT and crisis negotiators is to deal with these emotions and human drama and peacefully resolve the crisis. And that is the core of Young's book: the human emotions and human drama faced by SWAT and crisis negotiators.

Young's book is about the life and death drama at play in crisis situations and how SWAT and crisis negotiators deal with these emotions. Young details not only the emotions of the actors and how those emotions play out in the decision-making paradigm, he more importantly details the emotions of the responding officers and how they are affected by the outcomes of these situations.

His book is unique in that no other text describing SWAT operations and negotiating techniques focuses upon the emotional impact of these crisis incidents. While many talk technically about emotions, emotional content, emotional impact on decision-making, and dealing with emotions, Young is the only author in recent history to focus primarily on how those emotions impact the incident. At its heart, his book describes the emotional process that drives critical incidents. It is a compilation of his background, education, and history as a minister, counselor and mental health consultant on a crisis negotiation team.

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Moreover, the book deals with the emotions experienced by law enforcement when it is one of our own who is lost during an incident. His opening incident describes the nightmare scenario of all SWAT and crisis negotiations: the loss of one of our own to one of our own. Any law enforcement life lost in the line of duty is a tragedy, yet it is infinitely worse when a law enforcement life is lost due to the actions of another officer, whether intentionally or accidentally. Young clearly and succinctly describes what the law enforcement community experiences when this occurs, what resources are available for officers to utilize to emotionally cope with

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that tragedy, what the process of integration and assimilation is for coming to grips with those emotions and what must happen to move past those emotions and resume life and career. This chapter alone makes the book required reading for any officer.

Young's book is also valuable in that it takes readers away from the rote training and rote response that often guides our actions. Responders tend to depersonalize those involved in a crisis incident for fear that the actor and/or innocents (or law enforcement) may be hurt or killed, or that they may have to use deadly force against the actor. While that is necessary for tactical and emotional survival, it is important that law enforcement acknowledge the emotions of all the players in these incidents and how those emotions guide decisions.

Crisis incidents are about humans and the drama of being human. Young's book drives this point home and illustrates over and over that acknowledging the human aspects of the incident helps save lives, including the lives of law enforcement. The cases and lessons discussed by Young will help SWAT and crisis negotiators become better responders and better at dealing with people in crisis, and will make responders much more attenuated to the individuals involved, including law enforcement officers. Command decisions affect innocents, the actor and law enforcement. Remembering and prioritizing the humanness of emotions should be a component of every decision.

Young's book also speaks to the helpers of law enforcement. Many in the law enforcement community believe outsiders are not welcome, when in fact it is often these outsiders who are available to provide the

emotional assistance needed. Young is open and honest about being an outsider charged with providing emotional assistance to responders (including incidents where we lose one of our own). He describes how helpers can be shut out, both physically and psychologically; how it affected him, the agency and the individual officer; and how he overcame that resistance and non-acceptance.

This book should be required reading for all first responders, SWAT, crisis negotiators and incident commanders, who make the ultimate decisions regarding all of the players in this human drama. The cases presented, the emotional and psychological issues that must be confronted and dealt with in those cases, and the pathway to resolution of those emotions provides valuable training and learning not available elsewhere. ■

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Wayman C. Mullins is a professor of criminal justice at Texas State University. He is co-author of the book "Crisis Negotiations: Managing Critical Incidents and Hostage Situations in Law Enforcement and Corrections" (Anderson Publishing, 2013).

This book is available at drandyyoung.com



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