



BASE: BUILDING A STRONGER FOUNDATION *for* CRISIS NEGOTIATORS

BY PAT DOERING

If you've spent any time on a crisis negotiation team, you already know this job takes more than just being a voice on a phone. It takes experience, instincts, training, emotional resilience and let's face it, a little bit of luck at times. But even the best teams out there often operate in isolation, making up their own standards as they go.

That's why the formation of the National Negotiators BASE under the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) is such a big deal. For the first time, we will have a centralized board made up of negotiators, for negotiators, with one goal in mind: to bring consistency, professionalism and unity to a field that's been doing life-saving work for decades without a common playbook.

Why BASE?

Ask 10 negotiators how their team is structured or how they're trained, and you'll probably get 10 different answers. That's not because anyone is doing it wrong, but because there's never been a true national standard. BASE aims to fix that.

BASE stands for Board for Advocacy, Standards and Excellence. The idea is simple — gather 25 of the best and most experienced negotiators from across the country and beyond, and give them a platform to share best practices, create training benchmarks and advocate for what we all know: crisis negotiation isn't a luxury, it's a necessity.

This board doesn't just meet once a year and call it good. There are quarterly meetings, working groups and an annual summit. Members are drawn from all types of agencies — large, small, urban, rural, local, federal — and that mix is important. You're not just hearing from the big-city teams with full-time units and gear closets the size of small apartments; you're also hearing from the negotiator who's the only one for three counties, working out of the trunk of a cruiser.

And it's not just law enforcement. From the start, BASE has prioritized building a board that reflects the full picture of a real-world negotiation response. Corrections officers, dispatchers, clergy and mental health professionals will be an integral part of the board. These folks are already doing the work handling suicidal inmates, managing the first calls into 911 centers, walking families through grief and provid-

ing clinical insight in the middle of chaos. Their voices are essential if we're serious about setting real standards that work on the ground.

It's going global

One of the most exciting developments with BASE is its international reach. The challenges negotiators face aren't unique to the United States. Whether it's a standoff in rural Kansas or a barricaded subject in central London, the fundamentals of crisis negotiation hold true.

BASE is actively exploring partnerships with agencies and organizations across the globe, with the goal of learning from our international counterparts and sharing what we've learned as well. Negotiators from countries like the UK, Canada, Australia and Israel bring valuable perspectives, tactics and cultural insights that can make us better at home.

If there's one thing this field needs more of, it's collaboration, and BASE is the vehicle to make that happen.

Recognizing NCNA and global perspectives

As BASE continues to grow, we must acknowledge and recognize the valuable work already being done by organizations like the National Council of Negotiation Associations (NCNA). NCNA represents the collective experience of state and regional negotiation associations across the country, groups like the Missouri Association of Crisis Negotiators, the Texas Association of Hostage Negotiators and many more. These are the teams that have been holding the line, teaching the next generation and shaping the culture of crisis negotiation for years.

BASE is committed to listening to and learning from NCNA's member associations. Their input is critical, and their continued leadership at the state and regional levels deserves respect and support.

We also recognize that this effort doesn't stop at the U.S. border. International perspectives bring valuable lessons in integration, cultural dynamics and long-term post-crisis support. The goal of BASE isn't to dictate, but to unify, adapt, and elevate the profession by embracing diverse voices and shared experience, whether that's from a rural agency in the Midwest or a metropolitan team overseas.

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More than advocacy, it's action

What makes BASE different is that it's not just a think tank. It's a working board with actionable goals:

- Create national training standards that can be adapted across agencies
- Provide pathways to meaningful growth for new and experienced negotiators
- Advocate for mental health support and burnout prevention within negotiation teams
- Share training scenarios, case studies and after-action lessons from around the country
- Promote the inclusion of dispatchers, mental health professionals and tactical teams in the negotiation process

Let's talk about the real benefits

If you're a negotiator reading this and wondering what BASE means for you, here's the short version:

- You'll have a voice in shaping national standards.
- You'll have access to resources, scenarios and training support that can make your team better.
- You'll be part of a network of negotiators that spans the country, and eventually the world.
- You'll see the value of negotiation rise within your agency as advocacy efforts gain traction.
- And maybe most importantly, the next generation of negotiators will have the ability to leverage the experience and hard work of the generation before them by way of standards, case studies, operational guidelines and doctrinally sound training tools.

Getting off the ground: Small team, big goals

To get this moving, we've started with a working group of 11 experienced negotiators from across the country. We've held our first formal Zoom meeting and are preparing for our inaugural in-person meeting this October at the NTOA's Crisis Negotiations Conference in Chandler, AZ.

We've got a lot on our plates, but two key priorities are already in motion:

1. Bring mental health advisors into the fold. We're developing policy and best practices for integrating licensed mental health professionals into negotiation teams. This isn't just a trend, it's a necessity. The subject of most barricade or suicidal incidents isn't thinking in terms of tactics or consequences; they're thinking through trauma, grief, addiction or psychosis. Having a trained clinician embedded with negotiators can provide insight that could change the entire outcome.

2. Expand NTOA's Tactical Response and Operations Standards (TROS). The TROS is the gold standard for tactical teams. We're working to expand those standards to address the structure, function and expectations of negotiation teams as well. That includes everything from selection and training to composition, equipment and post-incident debriefs.

Final thoughts

BASE isn't just an acronym; it's a foundation — one built by negotiators who have stood at the door, held the phone and carried the weight of getting it right when it mattered most. The creation of BASE is about making sure that experience, those lessons and that calling are shared, supported and elevated.

The road ahead is exciting. With partners like NCNA and an international vision, BASE has the potential to completely transform how we approach crisis negotiation from training and standards to wellness and outreach.

About the author

Patrick Doering recently retired after an over 28-year career in law enforcement with the Lake St. Louis (MO) Police Department. He spent 20 of those years as a negotiator on a multi-jurisdictional team. For the last three years, he served as the commander of that team. He is a graduate of the FBI National Academy, the FBI National Crisis Negotiation Course, and the London Metropolitan Police (Scotland Yard) National Negotiators Course.

Doering is a former president and co-founder of the Missouri Association of Crisis Negotiators. He has presented case studies at several negotiation conferences across the country. He has been the Crisis Negotiation Section Chair for the National Tactical Officers Association since 2018.

Questions: Contact Pat Doering at ltldnegotiator@gmail.com

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