

“HELD HOSTAGE: NEGOTIATING LIFE AND DEATH FOR THE LAS VEGAS POLICE DEPARTMENT”

BY DENNIS FLYNN
REVIEWED BY BOB RAGSDALE



Retired Lt. Dennis Flynn served 30 years with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, spending 18 of those years with the department’s crisis negotiation team, the last 10 as team leader. In this book, he shares an enormous amount of knowledge and experience as he debriefs 10 incidents in detail, all of them different and unique. If you have been to any of the many crisis negotiations conferences throughout the country, you know that incident debriefs are very popular because they allow us to learn from the experience of others.

The book begins with the prologue, where Flynn provides details of his career and his development as a negotiator. He also talks about the evolution of the Las Vegas Metro team from a hostage negotiation team to the crisis negotiation team. The next 10 chapters document real-life incidents handled by the team. This is not a “feel good” book where all resolutions are negotiated and peaceful. This is a “real world” book that deals with the world in which SWAT and negotiation teams work, where things don’t always end the way they want them to.

Flynn sets the stage for each incident with a physical description of the crisis site. He then introduces the reader to the people involved, providing background information on any relationship problems, current issues in their lives and/or the life circumstances that bring the subjects into contact with law enforcement. He

takes us almost moment by moment as the incidents develop and covers the full spectrum of response, from the initial contact with communications and/or first responders, to the engagement by the negotiation and SWAT teams. We are provided with the facts known at the time and with updates as new information is developed, simulating real life.

Flynn then provides his insights and the progression of the incidents in a section titled “From a negotiator’s perspective.” We see his thought process in the selection of the appropriate primary, and sometimes secondary, negotiators based upon the information known at the time. Intelligence is gathered, looking for events, issues or losses that created the crisis, and possible hooks to help resolve it. Each incident is unique because it deals with a different individual, but there are basic strategies that are utilized in all incidents. The negotiation team’s thought processes are shared as they identify new developments and the possible strategies, approaches or themes to address them using what I call “the power of the team.”

We know the negotiation team does not operate as a lone entity. In the parallel approach that is so strongly advocated, SWAT and negotiations operate as a team under one command throughout the incident, supporting each other’s efforts in our goal of preservation of life. Ongoing communication between all elements is a must, as is trust. There are excel-

lent examples of this coordination and cooperation in this book, and some that are not so sterling. Each chapter detailing an incident has a “Lesson Learned” section at the end and Flynn provides honest appraisals of how things went and what could have been done better.

For the new negotiator, this book provides real-life applications of the techniques, approaches and strategies that were learned in basic crisis negotiations courses. As a seasoned negotiator, I found myself mentally joining the negotiation team as they worked through the incident, thinking of ways to move it toward a peaceful resolution, or at least a successful resolution. There are some minor editing issues but they did not detract from my appreciation and understanding of the book.

I recommend this book for negotiators, SWAT officers and commanders. There is a lot of very good information for a very reasonable price.

Available on amazon.com.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Bob Ragsdale is a retired Phoenix Police Department negotiator. He is a former NTOA instructor in crisis negotiations and a past member of the editorial review board for the *Crisis Negotiator* and *The Tactical Edge*.