

## PREFACE

The seeds of this book were sown after a defining moment in my life in a hospital emergency room in Dayton, Ohio. As a young psychologist working for the Dayton Police Department, I accompanied the police to the hospital to deal with an agitated, violent man who was brought to the hospital with injuries resulting from a stabbing wound inflicted by a girlfriend. While I talked with this man in a treatment room, he suddenly grabbed a large pair of scissors and took a nurse and me hostage, saying he would kill both of us. For two hours we pursued a dialogue focused on him, his life-threatening injuries, and the care required to keep him alive. The turning point in the crisis came when I asked, "Do you want to live, or do you want to die?" "I don't care," was his answer. I then asked, "What about your children losing their father?" He visibly changed mental states and began to talk about his children rather than his anger at his girlfriend and the police. In the end, he agreed to put the scissors down voluntarily and allowed the nurse and a surgical team to treat him. In an even more surprising moment after putting the scissors down, this very "violent" man then approached me, with tears in his eyes, gave me a hug, and said, "Thank you, George. I forgot how much I love my kids." His words of gratitude wired my brain forever to believe in the power of emotional bonding, dialogue, and negotiation with even the most dangerous person. I also surprised myself with the power I had to regulate my own emotion from sudden terror to calm, focused resolve.

The lessons I learned on that evening in 1968 are just as valuable to me now as a professor of leadership and organizational behavior as they were in my earlier careers as a clinical psychologist, a police psychologist, a hostage negotiator, an organizational psychologist, and radio talk-show host. I discovered that

my learnings as a hostage negotiator could be applied successfully to situations of powerlessness and entrapment in which a person is a metaphorical hostage rather than a physical hostage. In fact such potential “hostage” situations occur everyday professionally and personally.

My goal in this book is to offer what I have learned as a hostage negotiator for you to apply to situations in which you may be a metaphorical “hostage” in your life. Any time you feel entrapped, powerless, and helpless, you are, in fact, a “hostage.” While this book especially addresses leaders in organizations, it can be helpful to everyone in all walks of life.

Throughout my life, working with individuals, leaders, teams, and organizations, I have found many people held hostage by others, by situations, or even by their own emotions. They responded similarly to someone physically held hostage when there was no real “gun to their head.” They behaved like hostages even though they didn’t realize it and, in fact, had the power to do something about it. I also discovered people who could easily have been held “hostage” by a person or situation and yet were not. In fact, the hostage metaphor is a powerful model to understand behavior, and the hostage negotiation framework can help anyone who is a metaphorical hostage.

The story of my life is closely entwined with how this thinking came together. I was born into a family of five brothers and sisters on a farm in Ohio. My parents owned and worked the land as farmers as well as running a poultry business. As the eldest male child, it was a great honor for me to enter a Catholic seminary at age thirteen with the goal of becoming a priest. This experience brought with it many benefits: learning to live in a community; periods of intense study, education, and play; the forming of values and character; and learning about meditation and spirituality. One negative aspect was the loss of a “normal” adolescence. After some eight years, what had been a positive experience slowly became a negative ordeal when I could not face the truth that I wanted to leave. I had, in fact, become what I now understand to be a hostage to my own conflicting emotions about being in the seminary. I was fortunate enough to know a wise, extraordinary man, Father Edward Maziarz, who became a confidant. During one earthshaking dialogue, he looked right into my eyes and, with the

wisdom of ages, calmly said, “George, you are free. You have the right to choose to do whatever you want.” It was like a lightning bolt coming out of the sky that forever changed my destiny. His words and his authenticity touched the depths of my soul. The ensuing silence was sweet as my mind reorganized itself to accept that as a fundamental truth. As I burst into tears of relief, I asked him to repeat those beautiful words. They unlocked a prison door that I myself had created. At that moment, I understood one of the basic truths of life—what Warren Bennis calls the “crucibles of leadership”—those defining moments in one’s life that are a severe test of patience and beliefs, a trial that influences, shapes, and changes one’s life forever. I was twenty-one at the time. It took another year to complete the process for me to actually leave the seminary.

In thinking back to that time, I realized that in becoming a hostage to my emotions, I had stayed in that situation long after it was time to leave. I was hostage to my grief about leaving what was familiar and all the benefits and security it brought. I also felt sad about not meeting the expectations of myself and others. I am eternally grateful to Father Ed, whose words rewired my brain and influenced my mind’s eye (a concept you will read more about), thus reshaping my focus. Father Ed also represents another concept you will learn about in this book—that of secure bases, which are the anchors and supports you have in life in the form of people or goals that become major sources of empowerment. You will have the opportunity to see how important secure bases are for all of us.

While finishing my psychology degree, I worked on a federal-government-sponsored program, the first to place psychologists side-by-side on the street with police. The purpose of the program was to reduce homicides in domestic violence situations by offering immediate help. It was crisis intervention aimed at helping the most violent people and most vulnerable victims and then linking them to the community mental health system. I became involved thanks to the trust of a wonderful psychologist, Dr. John Davis, who asked me if I was interested in the project. After saying yes, I asked him why he had asked me. He responded, “You are one of a few people I know who like challenge to this degree, and you have the caring and skill to deal with violent people and the resilience to survive whatever happens on the street.” I was honored by his confidence

in me. For my part, I never carried a gun, despite being advised and encouraged to do so. I knew that my best weapon was words: talking, listening, dialogue, and negotiating.

During the time I worked with that project, I personally was taken hostage four times—once in a hospital emergency room, and three times in homes during domestic violence disputes. It was those experiences that convinced me so deeply of the power of the hostage metaphor. You have the power never to be a metaphorical hostage and the power to influence and persuade others to make constructive choices even in extreme emotional states.

In 1972 I was asked by the chief of police to teach in the Dayton Police Academy in programs for police leadership development and to help establish two hostage negotiation teams—one for the Dayton, Ohio, Police Department and one for the Montgomery County, Ohio, Sheriff's Department. Since then, and for the past thirty-five years, I have been involved in hostage negotiations in many forms, including direct negotiating, and training and debriefing hostage interventions throughout the world.

At the same time, I worked in a psychiatric hospital teaching mental health specialists to work with chronic schizophrenics. I witnessed horribly inhumane treatment of patients and became a part of a change initiative to transform the way the psychiatric hospital staff dealt with patients, moving from use of force and seclusion to the concept of creating bonds with people held hostage by the most severe psychiatric disorders. I already knew from working with the police what emotional bonding could accomplish. I now discovered that the same was possible with individuals who had extreme mental disorders. I will always be grateful to Dr. Carl Rogers, who personally helped me understand the power of “unconditional positive regard”—a fundamental aspect of authentic bonding. He was convinced of the importance of this concept for every human being, regardless of circumstances. That idea remains a fundamental part of how hostage negotiators create the bond to convince the hostage taker to release his hostages.

Over time, I expanded from the world of clinical psychology to the world of executive education with business leaders. In the clinical world, dialogue and conflict resolution were a central focus of my work. Simultaneously, my work in organizations involved a similar focus in a different context. Dialogue and conflict resolu-

tion build strong teams, and great leaders must be able to deal effectively with people. In my work, the hostage metaphor was a recurring theme for both individuals, teams, and organizations that were blocked, lacking empowerment, or trapped in internal or external conflicts. The resolution always came when personal power, team power, and organizational power brought an escape from the hostage mentality and the establishing of a mind-set of choice and freedom.

For many years I have taught workshops, made presentations, and given speeches to leaders across many organizations, industries, and businesses in some eighty-five countries. Time and again, I have found that even “high potential” leaders and chief executives can make enormous strides when they understand the fundamental need in humans to create attachments, to bond, and to grieve losses. This is the same understanding every hostage negotiator uses to be successful.

In this book, I have chosen powerful hostage scenarios and other violent encounters in my effort to demonstrate the ideas presented. I have found that the emotional immediacy of such stories can provide great insight into why individuals create positive or negative outcomes in business or life. I think you will find you can easily apply these ideas to your own work and life.

All the stories in this book are from real people facing real-life situations. They are taken from my own experiences: when I was a hostage negotiator or when I worked with senior business executives in companies and consulted with organizations, or from colleagues, or from the media. With the exception of the news stories, names have been changed to protect people’s identities.

Can we understand what it means to be taken hostage? And how does it feel to be a hostage in a metaphorical sense—the hostage in our heads? If we understand how the mind works, and the incredible power we all possess to determine how we feel about our own lives, we can learn how to free ourselves from the limitations and mental “chains” that may stop us from reaching our full potential. We can all become better leaders, managers, employees—and better people by doing this.

The chapters in this book are designed to take you on a journey that leads to a place where you can live and work in a hostage-free state of mind. First, it is important to understand what I mean

when I use terminology related to hostage situations. The word *hostage* was taken from Old French (circa 1275) and used in relation to a person being given as security. For example, a landlord might hold a lodger as security for payment of rent or for services. The use of the word *hostage* in relation to acts of terrorism is as recent as the 1970s. Finally, in a metaphorical sense, every day we allow ourselves to be taken hostage by ourselves or others.

To overcome this metaphorical hostage mind-set, it is important to understand the concept of the “mind’s eye” and how that determines the way we think, focus, and achieve results. We also need to look at the tremendous power of the bonding cycle—forming attachments, bonding, separating, grieving, and rebonding—and discover the ways the mind’s eye is formed. We must appreciate how critical it is to go through the grief that results from broken and lost bonds because unresolved grief can block people from moving on in life.

Special forms of attachment and bonding are the secure bases in our lives. Secure bases are the most influential sources of what shapes our mind, teaching us how to deal with the painful side of life.

In the course of this book, we will explore skills and techniques that can help resolve conflicts, even though most people naturally fear dealing with conflict. Through understanding the mind’s eye and secure bases, we can learn to apply the skills for managing conflict, and to reach greater truth through a powerful dialogue. The richness of discovery when two people, or a group, enter into a true dialogue with open hearts and minds should not be underestimated in its ability to build bonds and resolve conflicts. An extension of dialogue is negotiation. We will examine the power of negotiation, encompassing influence and persuasion, and the ability it has to change the destiny of destructive processes. Recently, the Dalai Lama was quoted as saying that war is an outdated idea. Imagine using the power of talking, dialogue, and negotiation as a primary way of solving disputes.

Understanding how our emotions work is a vital aspect of self-awareness that enables us never to be a metaphorical hostage. How we master our emotions affects the amount of pain or joy we feel. There are many people who suffer deep losses and yet come back to finding joy in their life. By being master of our own selves, we

increase the likelihood that we will never be held hostage by ourselves or anyone else. If we can understand the beliefs and values that shape our thinking, and recognize and respect the intrinsic dignity of the individual, we can act in ways that ensure we stay empowered even if we are a physical hostage.

The essence of these ideas is based on what I know to be true about being a person, including how to be a husband, a father, a friend, a leader, a teacher. The core concepts described here are like pieces of a puzzle. If one or more pieces are missing, then a person can easily start acting like a hostage, finding him or herself powerless and trapped. The result is a state in which a person is not living up to his or her full potential. When all the puzzle pieces fit together, they create a beautiful picture of a place where the person has a sense of real freedom and satisfaction and can learn to live an empowered life. This is something every leader must do and model.

The twenty-first century has begun with a number of disturbing trends, including the upsurge in terrorism; the swing toward political and religious fundamentalism; widespread natural disasters, possibly caused or exacerbated by global climate change; and the phenomenon of globalization. To handle these and the stresses they cause, we need to be able to manage our emotions so that we can still find joy in life over and over again. It is my personal vision and mission that, one day, every woman, man, and child in every country around the world can live their lives with a hostage-free state of mind and appreciate the greatest gift of all—experiencing the joy of being alive. It is my hope that reading this book will be much more than an intellectual exercise for you. Through engaging in a dialogue with me and yourself, I hope that you will have an emotional experience that will stimulate your heart, mind, and spirit to take you to new places in your personal and professional life.

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour

Excerpt from *Auguries of  
Innocence*, William Blake