

# FROM CRISIS NEGOTIATION TO CRISIS NAVIGATION

*Lessons from the Inside*

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# ABOUT MO FAHAD SHAUKAT

- ✓ 15+ years in frontline operations, crisis negotiation & mental health leadership
- ✓ Correctional Officer, Hostage/Crisis Negotiator, National Training Officer - CSC
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- ✓ Post-Secondary Educator, Criminal Justice
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# THE GAP WE DON'T TALK ABOUT

## WHAT WE TRAIN FOR

- Acute incident response
- Tactical de-escalation
- Use of force protocols
- Scene containment
- Immediate stabilization

## WHAT ACCUMULATES

- Moral injury over time
- Erosion of trust in leadership
- Communication breakdown
- Chronic low-grade stress
- Quiet disengagement

*Training prepares us for the scene. It rarely prepares us for what comes after.*

# WHAT CRISIS NEGOTIATION ACTUALLY TEACHES

## Active Listening

Not waiting for your turn to speak. Demonstrating that you heard what was actually said.

## Empathy as Tactic

Empathy doesn't mean agreement. It means understanding the other person's internal frame well enough to work with it.

## Emotional Regulation

Your calm is contagious. Your panic is too. The negotiator's state shapes the conversation's trajectory.

## Influence without Authority

You don't always have rank on your side. You work with trust, credibility, and relationship.

## Slowing the Pace

Speed escalates. Deliberate pacing de-escalates. This is counterintuitive to people trained for rapid response.

## Minimal Force, Maximum Communication

The goal is resolution, not control. The best outcome requires the least force.

# NEGOTIATION VS. NAVIGATION

*Two different demands. One shared toolkit.*

## NEGOTIATION

Bounded - a defined situation with a start and end

Reactive - triggered by an acute event

The goal is resolution of the immediate crisis

Measured in hours, sometimes minutes

Ends when the scene clears

Success is visible and immediate

VS

## NAVIGATION

Ongoing - no clear finish line, no defined scene

Proactive - built into daily leadership and culture

The goal is sustained function and trust over time

Measured in months and years

Never fully ends - it is a continuous practice

Success is often invisible until its absence is felt

# THE TRANSLATION PROBLEM

*Skills built in crisis rarely transfer automatically to everyday leadership.*

## Context Collapse

The techniques feel "too intense" for a 1:1 conversation — so practitioners don't use them. The toolkit stays locked in emergency mode.

## Identity Conflict

Using empathy outside an incident can feel like weakness. Command cultures often punish the very behaviors that make crisis negotiation effective.

## No Deliberate Transfer

Organizations train for incidents and stop there. Nobody teaches how to take these skills off the scene and into the team room or the boardroom.

*This presentation is about bridging that gap — deliberately.*

# FIVE TRANSFERS

*From the scene to the system*

01

*Active listening in negotiation*



**Active listening in supervision and peer support conversations**

02

*Empathy as a de-escalation tool*



**Empathy as an organizational trust-building mechanism**

03

*Emotional regulation under immediate threat*



**Emotional regulation under sustained institutional pressure**

04

*Calm, paced communication on scene*



**Calm, paced communication in disciplinary processes, debriefs, and conflict**

05

*Influence without authority in the field*



**Influence without authority in lateral leadership and peer roles**

# LEADERSHIP UNDER PRESSURE



*The leader in a high-stress environment is not the one who eliminates pressure. They are the one who stays functional inside it — and by doing so, gives others permission to do the same.*

## Debriefs

Apply structured silence and reflection, not just after-action tick-boxes. Debriefs done well look a lot like negotiation check-ins.

## Conflict in Teams

Lateral conflict is rarely about the stated issue. Apply the negotiation principle: what does this person actually need that they aren't saying?

## Difficult Conversations

Most supervisors rush to resolution. Negotiation teaches you to stay in the discomfort long enough for the other person to feel heard.

## Trust Repair

After institutional failure — policy violations, leadership breakdowns, organizational betrayal — the rebuilding follows the same sequence: acknowledgment, presence, patience.

# PEER SUPPORT IS NOT A SOFT SKILL

*It requires the same discipline as any technical response.*

## Negotiator's task

Establish rapport quickly

Identify the real ask (not the stated one)

Regulate your own emotional state first

Don't rush to resolution

Make the person feel heard before you offer anything

Know when to hand off to a specialist

## Peer support task

Establish rapport quickly

Identify the real need (not the presenting one)

Regulate your own emotional state first

Don't rush to resolution

Make the person feel heard before you offer anything

Know when to hand off to a specialist

*The skills are identical. What changes is context — and courage to use them.*

# ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

*Individual resilience cannot compensate for structural dysfunction.*



## Structure enables or undermines everything

Communication breakdowns, peer support failures, and leadership disengagement are often symptoms of structural problems — not character failures of individuals.



## Trust is organizational infrastructure

When people don't trust that the system will protect them, they don't use its resources. Peer support lines sit idle. Wellness programs go unused.



## Wellness policy must match lived experience

A 24/7 helpline only works when the culture around it says: asking for help is acceptable. If that culture doesn't exist, the infrastructure doesn't matter.



## Training people to support others requires supporting the trainers

Organizations frequently build peer support programs without resourcing the peer supporters. Compassion fatigue is a structural failure, not a personal one.

# WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

## The Supervisor Who Listens Differently

Instead of responding to a struggling officer with advice or reassurance, they ask: "What do you need right now?" and stay with the silence. That one shift in approach changes the entire interaction.

## The Debrief That Goes Past the Incident

A structured debrief that asks not just "what happened" but "what did that bring up, and how are you carrying it now" — that is crisis navigation applied to the institutional level.

## The Peer Supporter Who Doesn't Fix

Trained to resist the instinct to resolve, to advise, to provide a resource. Their job is presence and containment. The call ends without a solution — and that is the right outcome.

## The Organization That Makes It Safe to Ask

Not with a poster campaign. With consistent, visible behavior from leaders who model help-seeking, who normalize conversation about stress, who don't punish vulnerability.

# THE COST OF GETTING THIS WRONG

**3.5x**

Higher rate of suicide among first responders compared to line-of-duty deaths (BCFPCA, 2019)

**~44%**

Of public safety personnel meet criteria for one or more mental health disorders (Carleton et al., 2018)

**70%**

Of first responders who experience mental health challenges do not seek help (MMHI)

***These numbers are not arguments for more programs. They are evidence of a culture problem.***

## **Stigma is not a personal failing**

It is the rational outcome of organizational cultures that have historically punished vulnerability. Address the culture, not just the individual.

## **Access alone is not enough**

You can build a resource. If the culture doesn't support using it, you've built something that sits empty.

## **Leadership is the intervention**

Research consistently shows that supervisors and peers are the first line of response. They need the same skills crisis negotiators use.

# STRATEGIES YOU CAN APPLY

*For leaders, peer supporters, and organizations*

## FOR INDIVIDUALS

- ▶ Name and pace your stress response before engaging
- ▶ Apply active listening in daily team interactions, not just emergencies
- ▶ Practice asking open questions instead of providing solutions
- ▶ Treat peer check-ins as a skill, not a favor

## FOR SUPERVISORS

- ▶ Model help-seeking visibly and consistently
- ▶ Use structured reflection in debriefs, not just incident review
- ▶ Slow down difficult conversations — stay with the discomfort
- ▶ Recognize that empathy in leadership is not optional

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

- ▶ Resource the people who resource others
- ▶ Build trust before you need it — don't launch support programs during crisis
- ▶ Align policy with culture: what leaders model must match what policy permits
- ▶ Train for communication the same way you train for use of force

# WHAT CRISIS NAVIGATION REQUIRES

## AWARENESS

Recognize what is actually happening — not the presenting behavior, the underlying state.

## PRESENCE

Stay in the conversation. Don't flee to advice, process, or procedure when discomfort rises.

## PACING

Slow the interaction down. Resolution cannot be rushed. Premature closure is often no closure at all.

## TRUST

Built before it is needed. Cannot be manufactured in the moment of need.

## CONTINUITY

A single conversation is not enough. Navigation is ongoing — not a one-time intervention.

*Crisis navigation is not a program you launch. It is a practice you build.*

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

Crisis negotiation skills are not emergency-only tools — they are communication principles with broad organizational application.

2

The translation from scene to system requires deliberate effort. It does not happen automatically.

3

Peer support, leadership, and organizational wellness all draw from the same core skill set: listening, empathy, regulation, pacing.

4

Individual resilience is insufficient when the system itself creates the conditions for harm. Structural change matters.

5

The most effective intervention is often a supervisor or peer who stays present, asks the right question, and resists the urge to fix immediately.

# The skills are already there.

The question is whether we deploy them only in emergencies — or every day.

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*Questions?*

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