



# the Open Line

WESTERN STATES HOSTAGE NEGOTIATORS' ASSOCIATION - TRAINING CRISIS NEGOTIATORS SINCE 1986



SUMMER II 2026

## RAFFLE TICKETS DO GOOD

The 2026 host committee, Spokane PD presents a check for \$10,000 to Venessa Behan. WSHNA continues to serve our communities, on & off duty.



## TRAINING FUNDS



WSHNA has training funds available for members in good standing. We have money for you in the form of Training Day lunches, coffee, donuts, etc. We also have money for you in the form of a \$500.00 Individual Scholarships. You can read all the guidelines on the Training Page at [www.wshna.com](http://www.wshna.com)



## REID TECHNIQUE

WSHNA Members who are in good standing receive a discount at John E Reid Technique. POC is Toni Overman, [toverman@reid.com](mailto:toverman@reid.com).

## WHY SHOULD YOU BE PART OF WSHNA?

- Annual Training Seminar provides leading presenters in our specialized field.
- Fantastic networking opportunities.
- One of the best HNT Competitions in the United States.
- Team Training Funds & Individual Scholarship opportunities.
- Membership allows access to the NCNA Website.
- Discounts at John E. Reid Classes.
- Support the WSHNA Mission.
- Lots of quality 'negotiator time'.

## MEMBERSHIP PORTAL

If you attended the training seminar in Spokane 2026, then your membership is valid until the start of Salem 2027. If you want to join now and see the benefits of WSHNA membership, here is a link at [www.wshna.com](http://www.wshna.com).

## RESEARCH TOPICS

Have you ever wondered if somebody else has previously researched a topic you are

now tasked with researching? Well, WSHNA keeps a database of subjects that have been previously explored by WSHNA members. The list is an on-going collection of topics, and we realize that some of the contact persons/emails are no longer valid (retirement, left law enforcement/correction). But it is a good place to start. There is a link on the home page of [www.wshna.com](http://www.wshna.com).

**41<sup>st</sup> Annual WSHNA Training  
Seminar & HNT Challenge  
April 2027 – Salem, Oregon**

## **The White, the Gray, and the Black: The Dual Roles of the Hostage Negotiator**

### **By Joe Miller, President WSHNA**

Hostage negotiators do not just talk to people. They are vital pieces of a larger emergency operations team. Their jobs change based on danger, intent, and safety.

This article explores the three worlds a negotiator lives in: the White, the Gray, and the Black.

#### **The White: The Mission of De-escalation**

The "White" represents missions where the main goal is communication. There is little to no immediate threat of serious physical injury to the person in crisis, victims, or responding officers.

#### **The Scenario**

A lone person barricades themselves inside a room. They are having thoughts of suicide (suicidal ideation). They have the tools to hurt themselves, but they lack the actual intent to do it.

#### **The Negotiator's Role**

In the White, the negotiator acts as a bridge back to reality. The person in crisis feels invisible. They believe this extreme act is the only way to make the world listen to them.

The negotiator's focus is on active listening and validation. By providing a safe space for the person to express their grievances, the negotiator reduces the emotional intensity of the crisis. This process aims to resolve the incident peacefully and transition the individual to appropriate support services.

#### **The Gray: The Zone of Uncertainty**

"Gray" represents situations that are fluid and unpredictable. While there may not be an immediate act of violence, the potential for escalation is present, and the individual's motives may be unclear.

#### **The Scenario**

A domestic disturbance where an individual is barricaded with family members.

No direct threats of violence have been issued, but the emotional climate is highly volatile.

The presence of hazards or weapons within the environment is a possibility, though they are not currently being used.

### **The Negotiator's Role**

In the Gray, the negotiator functions as an information gatherer and a stabilizer. Every interaction is used to assess the individual's state of mind and identify the underlying stressors driving the behavior.

The negotiator coordinates closely with the rest of the emergency operations group to ensure a unified response. The goal is to steer the situation toward a peaceful "White" resolution while remaining prepared for a shift in the crisis level.

### **The Black: The High-Threat Crisis**

The "Black" designates incidents with a high risk of immediate harm. There is a clear and active threat to the safety of hostages, bystanders, or responding personnel.

### **The Scenario**

A high-stakes situation where an armed individual has taken hostages.

The individual is expressing a willingness to use force and has established specific demands.

The environment is unstable, and the threat of physical injury is imminent.

### **The Negotiator's Role**

In the Black, the negotiator's role is integrated into a broader protective strategy. The primary objective is the preservation of life through the management of the individual's behavior and the environment.

The negotiator maintains a continuous dialogue to minimize the immediate danger and prevent further escalation. Information gathered during the negotiations such as the number and condition of individuals involved—is vital for the safety of everyone on the scene. In this phase, communication is a specialized tool used to create opportunities for a safe resolution under high-pressure conditions.

### **Selection: Finding the Right Mindset**

Not every police officer or emergency worker is built for negotiation. Teams use strict screening to find people who can handle the pressure of the White, Gray, and Black.

The White (Empathizers): Selection focuses on high emotional intelligence and patience. Candidates must be excellent active listeners. They need a natural ability to connect with people experiencing severe mental health crises without judging them.

The Gray (Problem Solvers): Selection looks for high situational awareness and critical thinking. These individuals must be comfortable with ambiguity. They need to spot hidden patterns, read body language, and notice when a story does not add up.

The Black (Tactical Thinkers): Selection targets individuals with extreme emotional control. They must remain completely calm under life-or-death pressure. They cannot panic when yelled at, threatened, or when hearing violence on the other end of the line.

### **Training: Building Specialized Skills**

Training transforms raw talent into a reliable tool for the emergency operations group. It progresses from communication basics to high-stress tactical coordination.

The White: Training focuses on crisis intervention and mental health awareness. Negotiators learn the Behavioral Change Stairway Model (empathy, rapport, influence, behavioral change). They practice techniques like mirroring, open-ended questions, and emotional labeling to calm suicidal individuals.

The Gray: Training centers on intelligence gathering and risk assessment. Negotiators learn how to interview suspects subtly to extract information. They practice working directly with tactical units, learning how to feed real-time intelligence to the team outside.

The Black: Training involves high-stress simulation and tactical integration. Negotiators practice stall tactics to stall for tactical entry teams. They learn how to deliver demands, handle deadlines, and manage hostage survival psychology (like

navigating the Stockholm syndrome dynamic).

### **Aftercare: Maintaining a Healthy Career**

Negotiation takes a massive psychological toll. To prevent burnout, PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), and compassion fatigue, agencies must provide structured support.

Immediate Post-Incident Debriefs: After any mission, the entire negotiation team must participate in a psychological debrief. This allows them to process the intense emotions of the event before going home.

Peer Support Networks: Negotiators need to talk to peers who understand the unique pressure of the job. Regular check-ins with fellow negotiators help normalize the stress.

Professional Mental Health Care: Regular, mandatory meetings with culturally competent psychologists (therapists who understand law enforcement and emergency services) are vital. This removes the stigma of seeking help.

Rotations and Downtime: To ensure long, productive careers, negotiators must be rotated out of high-stress roles periodically. Giving them time away from the phone helps them recharge and prevents emotional numbness.

Tune into the "Open Line," for a deeper dive into these areas. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.

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### THIRD-PARTY INTERMEDIARIES

For many years we, as negotiators, would not consider the use of Third-Party Intermediaries (TPIs), at least in a speaking role to the suspect. We have always used persons considered TPIs as a source for intelligence gathering.

However, the current thoughts on the subject from the FBI's Crisis Management Unit tell us that we must be more flexible than in years past. Working under the premise that the responsibility for resolving a hostage/barricaded situation rests solely with law enforcement and seeing statistical data show a positive use for TPIs, it is to our benefit to use them.

However, each crisis is unique. Therefore, the negotiation team must take a flexible approach and be able to adapt when necessary. Caution and control should be the two most heavily weighed factors when deciding whether to use non-law enforcement personnel to negotiate.

The following items should be considered. Do not rush to use a TPI. Remember, your suspect needs time to ventilate before he will

be ready to solve the problem. Allow the emotion and tension to subside first. This time will allow the negotiation team time to develop essential intelligence.

Is the subject requesting the TPI, or is the TPI volunteering their services? You should ask yourself, why does the subject want this TPI? Could the reason place the TPI in jeopardy? Why is this TPI volunteering? Does the TPI have proper motives or will he/she pursue their own agenda?

Obtain as much information as possible about the relationship between the subject and the TPI.

The TPI must be thoroughly screened for suitability, interviewed, and briefed before being allowed to communicate with your suspect. Does the TPI appear to be willing to accept direction and coaching?

What is the best way for the TPI to communicate with your suspect? Will it be a written note, audio/video tape, telephone, voice from behind cover, or face to face communication?

Will the negotiation team be able to monitor, control, coach and terminate the contact when necessary?

TPIs can be most effectively used as a stimulus or reward for exiting the crisis site. It may be easier and/or more culturally acceptable for the subject to surrender to a TPI rather than law enforcement.

Surrendering to law enforcement may seem



like total capitulation. The TPI might be able to be looked upon by the suspect as a guarantor of a surrender agreement between the subject and law enforcement. The suspect will often be viewed as being able to prevent law enforcement from harming subject during the surrender.

Third-Party Intermediaries can be a practical tool for your negotiation toolbox, but like any tool, you must use it correctly.



A complete history of WSHNA is linked on our website at [www.wshna.com](http://www.wshna.com). Lots of hard work by Board Member Greg Heun over several years has made this possible.



41st Annual WSHNA Training Seminar &  
HNT Challenge April 2027



## REGIONAL CRISIS NEGOTIATOR COURSE



DATES:  
**SEPTEMBER 14-18, 2026**



LOCATION:  
**SPOKANE POLICE DEPARTMENT TRAINING FACILITY**  
1618 N Rebecca, Spokane, WA 99212



HOSTED BY:  
**FREE** | SPACE IS LIMITED



DETAILS:  
To register, email SA Ingrid Arbuthnot-Stohl at [iarbuthnot-stohl@fbi.gov](mailto:iarbuthnot-stohl@fbi.gov) with their full name, rank, official email, mobile phone number, and supervisor's approval.

# CODE4

## Northwest

Code 4 Northwest is a volunteer-run, confidential crisis response and peer support network for first responders and their families in Washington State.

**425.243.5092**