

FEDERAL BUREAU of INVESTIGATION Behavioral Change Stairway Model

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM) is a staple of the high-stakes world of crisis negotiation. The model's applicability, however, is not limited to just hostage negotiations and suicide interventions. It is one of my favorite negotiation frameworks because of its diverse suitability to a variety of conflict settings, and it can be a highly useful model for negotiators working in business and organizational settings.¹

The model's intention is to outline a process for developing a relationship between a negotiator and his or her counterpart, which culminates with the negotiator influencing the decisions of the counterpart. The model has five stages that are to be completed in succession for the behavioral change to take place. For example, a negotiator must successfully listen (Stage 1) before he or she can express empathy (Stage 2). A brief description of each stage is below:

1. **Active Listening:** The first step of the BCSM establishes the foundation for the ensuing steps and involves a collection of techniques aimed at establishing a relationship between the negotiators. Active Listening encourages conversation through the use of open ended questions, suggests negotiators paraphrase their understanding of the other side's story, attempts to identify and confirm emotions expressed by the other side, and utilizes intentional pauses in the conversation for emphatic effect
2. **Empathy:** The intent of the second step of the BCSM is for the negotiator to convey his or her empathy to the other side. Empathy suggests the negotiator has an understanding of the perceptions and feelings of the other side. This is an important aspect of furthering the relationship between the negotiator and the other side, and can be accomplished through a tone of voice that is genuine and conveys interest in and concern for the other side
3. **Rapport:** The third step in the BCSM is established through the negotiator's active listening and expression of empathy, which will lead to increased trust between the parties. The negotiator continues to build rapport through conversation that focuses on face saving for the other side, positive reframing of the situation, and exploring areas of common ground
4. **Influence:** Once rapport has been firmly established, the negotiator is in a position to begin to make suggestions to the other side, explore potential and realistic solutions to the conflict, and consider the likely alternatives available to the other side
5. **Behavioral Change:** The final step in the BCSM is contingent upon how thoroughly and prudently the negotiator walked up the first four steps. If the negotiator has established a solid relationship with the other side, he or she will be able to propose solutions to the conflict that will affect the desired behavioral change

The negotiator working to resolve conflicts in a business or organizational conflict will benefit from utilizing the BCSM process. Though the stakes of business negotiations are usually not as high as that of a hostage negotiation, the psychological basis for diffusing conflict are related between the two contexts. The manager who is negotiating with a frustrated employee or client will be well served by walking with his or her counterpart up the "Behavioral Change Stairway."

Gregory M. Vecchia, Vincent B. Van Hasselb, and Stephen J. Romanoc, "Crisis (hostage) negotiation: current strategies and issues in high-risk conflict resolution," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 10 (2005)