

PHOENIX TRAINING GROUP

UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

When involved in a volatile or violent interaction between you and an attacker, there is usually two types of behavior being displayed during the process. The first is the **Instrumental**, or Attention-based behavior and the second is **Expressive**, or the Emotional-based need behind the behavior that is being exhibited. Identifying and understanding the differences between these psychological responses from the attacker, then responding appropriately, can actually help to defuse the situation before it becomes escalated further, or out of hand altogether.

Instrumental behavior is characterized by superficial demands and clearly recognizable objectives that, if attained, will benefit the subject, such as the individual with a gun to their own head, that propels you or anyone else present to realize that you need to pay attention to the individual because this is serious and therefore should try to give the individual what they demand. Another example would be the attacker who is threatening you with a knife...The same dynamic will apply where you need to give the individual what they demand or they are going to hurt you, so in essence, it is the behavior that brings attention to the individual and to the seriousness of the situation so much that you realize you most likely should meet the attackers demands.

The negotiator can best address this goal-directed behavior through the strategies of bargaining or initial problem solving. Another example would be an individual who begins yelling aggressively at you, stemming from a minor problem that seems inappropriate for the real issue at hand and threatens to escalate further if he or she does not get what they are demanding, or if you don't do something that they want at that moment. Sometimes when the situation becomes even more threatening, such as an individual becoming violent, or a danger to themselves, responding appropriately by understanding these principles becomes even more important if you are to avoid or defuse the situation.

Expressive behavior, on the other hand, is designed to communicate the subject's frustration, outrage, passion, despair, anger, or other feelings that are sometimes stemming from a long-term histrionic dynamic, where the individual feels as though they have not been listened to or understood to the point where they exceed their normal coping abilities. The actions of a subject who is in an expressive mode often appear illogical and highly emotional, given the lack of substantive or goal-oriented demands. Moreover, the critical incident itself may be of a self-destructive, or lashing out nature. Expressive behavior stems from the subject's need to ventilate and be understood and is best addressed through a strategy of active listening and long term problem solving.

No matter what behavior the attacker exhibits, there is nearly always something that is going on behind the Instrumental Behavior that is driving the behavior toward you, so once you tap into the Expressive Behavior that is the real cause for the Instrumental Behavior, then the need to exhibit the Instrumental Behavior becomes unnecessary and thus, the individual feels little need to display the aggressive, or self-destructive behavior.

The key is not to absorb the behavior as a personal attack, but instead, realize that in most cases this is an attempt to communicate to you, or the world around them in the only way they know how to do since they have no, or an impaired ability to communicate their needs in an appropriate way. The job of the negotiator is then, is to realize that the individual is trying to communicate to you and the world and to find out what it is that is really causing the aggressive behavior. Once you have shown the individual that you are trying to help them and have discovered the true reason why the attacker is upset, then the individual will more likely become calmer, realize that you are actually on their side and turn their behavior around to be more cooperative. In an attempt to communicate these dynamics, the victim should not focus on the behavior itself, but instead focus on what it is that is making them behave this way, in effect, what is the emotional cause that is propelling the behavior toward the victim. This tactic can act as a redirection technique to steer the situation back on the attacker's emotional need for the outburst and therefore satisfies that need and as a result, negates the need to act out on the victim.