

Research and Innovation Podcast – “Work in Progress”

Episode 4 – High-Stakes Conversations: What Organizations Can Learn from Hostage Negotiations

Speakers: Dr Sanjay Papat and Nigel Taberner

[00:00:05] **Sanjay:** Hello and welcome to the Work in Progress series as part of the Research and Innovation podcast. My name is Dr Sanjay Papat, and I'm a chartered psychologist and research fellow specializing in mental health at work. Today I'm joined by Nigel Tabner, a former member of one of the most important and often overlooked professions in the field of influence, a hostage negotiator.

Nigel spent 10 years working as a hostage negotiator and successfully resolved over 130 life at risk incidents in the UK and abroad. He now shares his experience about communicating under pressure and negotiating when you have nothing to offer, with businesses and organizations. Nigel, great to have you here. Really excited about this conversation.

[00:00:48] **Nigel:** Hey Sanjay, it's really good to be with you.

[00:00:51] **Sanjay:** Thank you. So, Nigel, the reason we wanted you on the podcast and the reason that I thought this conversation would be of interest to our listeners, is we're doing a lot of research at Leeds about stress in high-pressure occupations. So I've done some research with doctors, I'm also involved in a project with police officers, but I can't think of many more high-pressure situations than hostage negotiation incidents.

So I have a lot to ask you about your own processes of managing that. But before we get started, I wondered if you could walk us through what a typical hostage situation might have looked like, if there is one. And if you can recall any particularly high stakes incidents that you were involved in?

[00:01:30] **Nigel:** Yeah, so we've been deployed to a number of different types of incidents, going from fast-moving, high octane, kidnapping situations to suicide intervention. And to the sort of sieges that, that you see on TV every now and then where somebody's barricaded into a house with a gun holding somebody hostage. So there's this broad range of, of different, situations that as negotiators that, that we could be deployed to and that we need to be prepared to deal with. I suppose the, the overwhelming number of, of situations that we will be sent to will be dealing with somebody in crisis, which a lot of people don't recognize, and that brings a lot of worry and, and stress itself for the negotiator.

And that's where the risk sits. If you said to me, you've got a choice, you can deal with a, a failed bank robbery with four guys in there with stockings over the heads and, and 60 hostages. Or you can deal with somebody on a bridge at four o'clock in the morning,

which do you want? I'm gonna take the failed bank robbery 'cause that's not where the risk lies. So, so they've all got their own different nuances, their own different risks, and different pressures that you are under as a negotiator. But a typical situation would be, a domestic argument that's turned into a siege, maybe some alcohol or drugs involved, a degree of domestic violence, you know, a not a good family background. And it all gets completely outta hand one night and before you know it, somebody's barricaded into a house, with a knife or, or a gun, with an ex-partner and two children hostage. And, we as negotiators get a phone call at three o'clock in the morning when we're on call and fast asleep in the comfort of our own bed saying "Nigel, can you just go up here and have a chat with this guy?"

[00:03:23] **Sanjay:** Thank you for explaining that 'cause I'm sure we all think of what we see on tv, but actually I can imagine the, the reality is really quite different from that. And what's really standing out to me there is you're managing the stress of other people, you're managing the emotions of other people, but you're also an employee doing a job, and you have your own emotions and your own stress.

So what's happening psychologically to you in those high-octane situations?

[00:03:47] **Nigel:** Yeah, it's weird 'cause people seem to think that we as negotiators, because we're, we're highly trained because we've, we're experienced and we've deployed to, to a number of these situations that we don't get the same physiological responses as everybody else. And, we do - when I take that phone call at three in the morning, my heart is thumping out my chest. You're struggling to pick your phone up because your hands are shaking. You still get all those physiological responses. I'm still getting that intense kind of butterflies. But I've gotta be able to manage that. I've gotta get beyond that and I've, and I've, I've gotta be able to commit. So, so that I'm gonna feel it, but it's not gonna affect the way I perform. So there's, there's a variety of different sort of tactics that we would use in, in, in order to overcome that. But, you know, as I'm hurtling towards this, the, the scene of this incident in a police car, in excess of 150 miles an hour, do you know what, I'm all over the place. I'm trying to sort all the practical things out that I need to do.

I'm trying to get myself in a, in a position, so, I know exactly what I'm gonna do when I'm gonna get there. I know what the strategy is, I know what I'm gonna say. I know what I'm gonna sound like 'cause I'm practicing it. And I'm dealing with, with those nerves as well. But when we drive around the corner and I see that, that house at the end of the street - jacket's on, cameras rolling, I'm getting exactly the same feelings as as everybody else. But I've gotta be - that, that little voice in my head has gotta be telling me good things. That is not the moment to be having an identity crisis, you know. In that moment, I'm not a hostage negotiator, I'm *the* hostage negotiator. And that voice has gotta be telling me that. And afterwards, yes, we debrief, we work out. We could have, I could have done things better, but in that moment, I'm everything that I need to be. And that's the biggest thing for me is, is mindset and that little voice telling you, do you know what you've got this. Just get stuck in, it's a conversation. The bottom, you know when,

when you reframe this, this guy waving a gun around and, and threatening people and hurting children and stuff like that inside this house. My job is very simple. I gotta go there. Get him talking. Keep him talking. Listen like a life depends on it. It is just a conversation with a purpose. So don't tie yourself in knots thinking "I've gotta negotiate with this guy". Hostage negotiators rarely negotiate. You know think about it. Those, those guys in the bank, whats the negotiation? I'm not gonna say to 'em, "you have 30, I'll have 30" I, I've gotta win.

So I've got to get 'em to like me, get 'em to trust me, so I've earned the right to be able to influence 'em. It's all about influence. It's all about persuasion. It is not about negotiation. It's about having a meaningful conversation, a conversation with a purpose. And when you go in with that mindset, that actually changes everything.

[00:06:47] **Sanjay:** That's so interesting. And you talked about your ability to kind of switch off when you reach the scene, but what about later on, you said sometimes you, you, you process it later on. How do you stop the stress from building up so that you don't reach a breaking point and it doesn't take a toll in the longer run?

[00:07:03] **Nigel:** Yeah, I think there's a...well, first of all, I don't think you can stop it taking a toll in the longer run, and that's something that I've learnt since I've finished negotiating. In the moment, it's all about having that hot debrief, making sense of what's happened and, and starting that process of, of filing all that thing, all those things in your head. So that you actually know what's taken place and getting that initial learning from it. It's about returning to, to normality as quickly as you can, you know at the end of it, i'm a hostage negotiator, yes, but I'm also a husband and a father. So I get in the car and, and I'm being driven back, and very often, Amanda, my wife, would ring me up and, and she'd say, "have you finished that job yet?". And I'd say, "yeah, yeah, I'm on my way back now". And she'd say, "oh brilliant. Can you get a two pint of skimmed milk on the way back?" It's about being grounded. And it's about thinking, do you know what- that, that I do, that role as a negotiator – is a small part of what I do. It's not who I am. It doesn't define me.

It's a role that, that, that I do and being quite practical and pragmatic about that. But that only protects you to a certain amount, to a certain degree. So I retired from the police in 2021. About 18 months later, I was walking around Aldi with Amanda. And my phone must have done a restart or a reset in my pocket. Must have had an update. And somebody rang me and when it, when the phone went off, it was the original dial tone when I got the phone, so it was my negotiator dial tone. And the physiological response that I had, stood in the middle of Aldi, shocked me. You know, my heart rate - boom, it went through the roof, my hands were shaking.

I couldn't get my phone out of my pocket. I was getting butterflies and, and it was my mum on the phone. But it, it scared me because I never, hand on heart, I never experienced that as a negotiator.

[00:09:15] **Sanjay:** Hmm.

[00:09:15] **Nigel:** And, and, and looking back I'm thinking what actually, what impact was it having on, was it having on me at the time? Was I just, was I just shielding myself from it? Did I just not appreciate what was happening? So I don't think you can actually go through that kind of - 10 years I worked as a negotiator - I don't think you can come out of it completely unharmed. You can manage it at the time, but you're always going to get that chemical cocktail every time you get sent to one of these incidents. And, and that does have an impact. But yeah, that shocked me because I, I never, looking back, I never once felt like that deploying to crazy situations.

[00:09:58] **Sanjay:** Do you think the fact that you never felt it in the, in the days that you were doing it - was that just you putting it off? Or do you think, you were tying it to the outcome? Why do you think there was such a difference in the moment and in the longer run when, when you had this experience, when you were shopping?

[00:10:13] **Nigel:** I think there's a couple of things. I mean, one of them is you, you're a police officer. You, you're relatively target hardened to this sort of stuff. You know, I worked in Moss Side for 10 years. I worked in the riot squad. I worked in counter-terrorism policing - so this wasn't my first rodeo. It was kind of additional responsibility and you're kind of used to working under pressure. So there was, there was a degree of, you know, I kinda lived on the edge of chaos. It's where I lived. It was, it was just what life was like. But the other thing, and it sounds really bizarre, is it was exciting. There's definitely, you know a thrill to deploying to that sort of incident, but, but also knowing that you were getting a positive impact from that. I mean, I joined the police for two reasons: I wanted to fight crime at the highest level and I wanted to protect vulnerable people. And this was the only role that I had within policing that I felt fulfilled that, that I, that I was actually able to do both of those things.

So, one, there was a sense of fulfillment, but I enjoyed it and, and I got a thrill out of it. If there was it, it's a crazy will - but if there, if there was an armed siege this afternoon and the negotiators all received a WhatsApp call saying "who is available to deploy now to speak to this guy?" - they would be fighting to get that job.

There'd be nobody taking a step back thinking, "do you know what, I think I'll sit this one out". They would, the elbows would be out, because everybody would want that job because that is the mentality within that team.

[00:11:55] **Sanjay:** That's so interesting 'cause both things can be true, can't they? It can still be very frightening, and you have this physiological response, but you're also very engaged and you want to do it and the thrill is there. So yeah, I think people don't necessarily see those two hand in hand, but they really can be.

And in business research and psychological research, we often talk about control. And how control in a situation can influence our wellbeing. So thankfully nobody died in any

of the incidents that you were involved in, but did you have to make peace with the fact that you can't ultimately control the outcome no matter how hard you try?

[00:12:30] **Nigel:** Yeah, I mean ultimately it's, it's big boy games. You know, the final decision about whether he pulls that trigger, whether, whether she jumps, whether they'll let the hostage go. It, it's out of, it's out of my control.

All I can do is control the controllables. All I can do is make sure that I'm well prepared. That I know what the negotiation strategy is. I know what my role is within that strategy, and that I'm doing everything that I can based on the training that I've had to, to get everybody out safely. There's no, there's nothing I can do other than that. A lot of it is down to, you hear sometimes negotiators tying themselves in knots, having an argument with somebody who's inside a house over who is in control, who's in charge. You have a hostage taker with three hostages saying, "come on, you tell me who is in charge". And some negotiators are terrified of saying, "well, well you are the one with a gun and the hostages. You are in charge. You're also responsible, but you are in charge". But the start, "well, well obviously we're in charge 'cause we've got you surrounded". It's just, what does it matter? It's a conversation. It just boils back down to that it's a meaningful conversation between two people. Why make it more difficult than it needs to be?

[00:13:50] **Sanjay:** And you spoke there about your training, and I've heard you say in other podcasts that it's a balance between that intuition, but that you also do learn some concepts, some, some models. What do you use, what concepts are you drawing on? I've heard you talk about unconditional positive regard. Is that the main one? Are there other ones? What are you going in there to balance with your intuition?

[00:14:09] **Nigel:** Yeah. So the main thing when I get there is, and it's probably the hardest bit of the whole thing, is get them talking, keep them talking.

So it's about conversation management. So if I'm negotiating with you, my turn of the conversation has got one purpose - it's to make it your turn again. So I'm gonna manage that conversation using active listening skills. So I'm going to be echoing things that are, are of interest to me, summarizing what you're saying, but doing it in quite a succinct, quick way, to literally bat that ball back over the net again and make it your goal. because ultimately, I want to get you to tell me stuff.

If I can get you talking and keep you talking, you will tell me things that you never intended. Because no matter what anybody tells you, you can't control what comes outta your mouth. If I give you room in the conversation, you are gonna fill it. And all the time as a negotiator, I'm thinking, what did he say? What did he mean? How can I use it? And, and it is no different when you're, you're in a business context. And, and you've got commercial negotiations or you're dealing with members of your team, getting people to do things differently within the organization. It is no different to me as a negotiator. Get 'em talking, keep 'em talking. The stuff will come pouring out the mouth. And knowledge is power. All I have got to do is get you talking, keep you talking and listen

like your life depends on it. People will say to me very often, what's the key skill of a hostage negotiator? And, and my answer is absolutely unequivocal - the ability to listen - because we're not good at it. You can always tell when somebody's not listening, 'cause they'll say to you "go on, I'm listening".

You know, if you've gotta say that, you're clearly, you're clearly not. Listening is the hostage negotiator's superpower. It's what makes them different. The number of times that I've been to an incident and inexplicably after 40 minutes, somebody's said to me, "can I put the knife down now? Can I come down now? Can we end this now?" And I said, "yeah, sure. Come on". And as we're walking back to an ambulance or a police car, I say, "if you don't mind me asking - why, why did you change your mind?" And the number of times that people have said to me - "because nobody has ever listened to me like that before". Really paints a picture about how we value listening, as, as a society. But that is what makes hostage negotiators as effective as they are because they're able to listen, even when they don't agree. We teach them not to jump in with questions. Just get people going and just tick 'em over and let them tell you their secrets. And especially if, if they're emotional about something, all bets are off. They will tell you things that they never intended, that they never would if they were actually in that balanced state of mind.

[00:17:03] **Sanjay:** That's so powerful, and especially what you said about listening in, in context of, you know, you can tell when someone's not listening. That's so powerful. And did it, did it change over time? Did it get easier? So at Leeds, we are looking at repeated exposure to these incidents. What was the difference between your first incident and your last one? Was the stress different, or did it just depend on the context?

[00:17:24] **Nigel:** So the first one, I was absolutely terrified. It was an arm siege, guy in a house. He said he'd got a baby hostage in there. He'd got petrol pulled around the house. It turns out that he hadn't got a baby in there, but that was by the by. We didn't know that at the time. I was being driven to this incident and the other negotiator rang me up. He was an experienced negotiator, 10, 15 years experience, taught on the negotiator's course. He was a senior officer, and the first words outta his mouth were "Nige, are you gonna be taking the lead on this one?" And everything within me wanted to say, "no it's all right. I'll, I'll watch you this time". And I just have this out of body experience where I just went, "yeah, sure, I'll take it". And then I was immediately, what have I done? What, what have I said? And I got there my knees, you know, my knees were knocking behind, behind the, the, ballistic shields that was speaking to this guy. Fast of forward 10 years, I mean, obviously you got a lot of experience. But I think the main thing that differed between the first and the last one was I just became unapologetically myself. I stopped being that hostage negotiator. And started being myself, but using the skills that I'd been taught and I'd learned and I'd practiced over, over the years. Most people fail hostage negotiators courses because they try to be a hostage negotiator.

They play the stereotype and they fall flat on their face every time. And I, and I just became unapologetically me. And don't get me wrong, every now and then I fall foul of it. I get, I get burnt for being over familiar or calling somebody Steve when their name is Steven or whatever it is. But I just go, "do you know what? I am so sorry. Can we start again?". Very rarely does anybody turn around and say, "no, let's carry on. I'm enjoying this". You are always going to get that opportunity. But 19 times outta 20, probably more, we clicked. Cause all I've gotta do is connect with somebody. All I've gotta do is, is get 'em talking about themselves, find out something that, that we have got in common, find that commonality, and, and just be unapologetically myself.

And that was the biggest difference. You know, so I very often say to business leaders now, "Take yourself to work. Don't play the stereotype. Don't play. If you're a solicitor, don't play the solicitor. Don't play the teacher." Just be who you are because people will find it much easier to connect with you". And negotiation is just a conversation between two people.

[00:19:59] **Sanjay:** I love that. And you were saying there about business leaders in organizations, and you said very, very early on in your career that many of the skills that you were using were also effective in the running of a business and organization. And as we're part of a business school, I thought that would be really interesting to kind of drill down on.

The main one and you've kind of touched on this already - was communication. But could you just expand a bit on how your experiences as a hostage negotiator, what can organizations and businesses learn about it in context of communication?

[00:20:29] **Nigel:** Yeah, so knowledge is power in a negotiation. I want to get you talking, keep you talking. Get you to tell me things that are important to you. I wanna find out what your values and beliefs are. Once I find out what your values are as an individual, as a business that I'm dealing with, if I can show you that what you are saying, what you're doing, what you're suggesting isn't in line with your values and beliefs, I can get you to change your behaviour very, very quickly. Cause you can argue against my values and beliefs all day, you can't argue against your own. You're now having a very, very difficult internal conversation. So listening is so so powerful. You know, very often business leaders will say to me, "what's the one thing that I can do to, to become a more effective leader? To become more effective negotiator?". My answer to them is absolutely unequivocal. You wanna become a better leader? You wanna become a better negotiator? Become a better listener. It will pay you back 10 times over. You'll hear things that you have never heard before, so listen to understand. Listen to understand what it's like from their perspective. Listen to their objections so we can actually work out what sits behind that, what's hiding behind that, what's the fear behind that objection? Rather than me jumping in and capitulating in terms of price or quality or quantity or, or whatever it is, and trying to strike a deal straight away to try and deal with this objection. Get them talking, keep them talking, and they will tell you what it's all about if you're giving room in the conversation.

[00:22:11] **Sanjay:** So I think some people listening may say well “if I listen to them really intently, am I legitimizing their actions?”. What would be your response to that as someone that, you know, has been with some very dangerous people?

[00:22:23] **Nigel:** Yeah, no, you're absolutely not legitimizing it. You have to be very careful in, in, in what you're saying. You know, when somebody says something that's a bit outrageous and, and you only guardedly, say something like, "okay". People might see that as an affirmation about what they're saying. So we're very careful about what we're doing.

"Aha. All right. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. That's, that's interesting". But get them talking. Keep 'em talking, and then you can, you can challenge that appropriately. You can say, "you know, do you know what? I can't even begin to imagine what it must be like for you here today. And I think in that situation, I would be absolutely devastated, but I would like to think that I would deal with it in a different way than, than, than you are doing - so let's talk about what we can do to make things different. How can we resolve this?"

And, and it's all about reframing stuff.

[00:23:12] **Sanjay:** Right. Okay. So there, there is a way to balance it, and I think if we all saw you in action doing that, I think business leaders will be really, really, persuaded by that. But the other thing is emotional intelligence, because we hear this as a buzzword all the time. We read about it. What's your experiences with emotional intelligence and what have you learned there?

[00:23:30] **Nigel:** Yeah, emotional intelligence. It's, I mean, that's just so interesting because whose emotional intelligence are we talking about? Are we talking about theirs? Are we talking about ours? Very often we see emotional intelligence as being able to figure other people out, but also, you are 50% of the conversation and there's an element of "know thy self" as well.

So, so, so whereabouts are you in terms of your ability to think rationally because you're balancing that off against your emotions. But it is about getting people to calm down. It's, you've got this seesaw where, if somebody's levels of anxiety and emotion go up - you have this equal and opposite movement that just gets rid of any ability to, to, to think straight, rational thought drops through the floor. That plays out in poor behaviour, terrible decision making. We make terrible decisions when we're emotional. So what I've gotta do is I've gotta rebalance that, that seesaw, I've, I've got to get 'em to a position where actually we've, we've restored that ability to think rationally because now I'm in a position to negotiate. I've gotta deal with a person before I can deal with a problem. So there's a number of ways that we can do that, that, you know, there's a reason why hostage negotiators play for time.

It's because no matter how good you are at being angry, you can't be angry forever. You're eventually gonna calm down. So, so we, we will, we will buy time. We will not avoid the difficult conversations. That is so important. You know, if somebody says to

me, "I don't wanna talk about Dad, don't ever mention his name, we're not talking about Dad". I'm like, "Ooh, who do we need to talk about? We need to talk about Dad". So I'm then gonna do some relationship building that gives me the right to actually kind of work my way back around and start talking about dad again.

Cause he needs to talk about dad. He needs to get it off his chest because that in itself is cathartic. And, you know, so he's immediately start dealing with that. He's, he's gonna start calming down eventually. And then we've restored that rational thought. We can start thinking about reframing things, looking at different possibilities, problem solving, because we've actually, we've earned the right to be able to do that.

We've not just jumped in and thought, "do you know what? I know exactly what your problem is and this is what you need to do". And, and that is what very often as business leaders, people do. It's certainly what we do as parents. "Oh, I know exactly what the problem is and I know what the solution is". Actually, no, you don't. You have no idea. Even if you've been through remarkably similar circumstances, you will, you still only know what it was like for you. You've no idea what it was like for them. And my job as a negotiator is to get 'em to tell me their story, to get them to articulate, not just what's happened to them, but how it feels to them. And we've actually got that in the open, I've got so much material to be able to play with. We can go on for, we can go on for hours because there's that much we can actually start talking about.

[00:26:31] **Sanjay:** I think you're so right. That relationship building is so, so important and we can't, we can't understand someone's past, we can't understand what they've been going through. So actually building that relationship allows for that buy-in later on. But in a lot of hostage negotiations, there's obviously conflict.

What can business leaders learn from your experiences of conflict? Because people will say, "well, it's not as high a stake in a business environment. If I don't agree with something, well, there's not much at stake there". How can they translate that across from your experiences?

[00:27:02] **Nigel:** Yeah, so there's a couple of tactics that we're able to use. So I mean the first one, as we said before, is buying for time and getting 'em talking. Get 'em to off gas. Give them room in the conversation. Don't immediately jump in offering suggestions or problem solving. It's, it's about exploring with them their point of view. So it's, it's about using good questions. I mean, we, we ask rubbish questions. As negotiators when we're teaching new negotiators how to negotiate, we actually discourage them from using questions, cause we're shocking, especially when we're under pressure, we just revert back to closed questions - "Did you do this? Yes. Was he there, was she there? Did he do that?" 20 minutes in, you're punching yourself senseless and you've still got no information. So as negotiators, they'll start to use what we used to call five WH. So what, when, where, who, how, why? You know, they always used to say, if you're interviewing somebody for a criminal offense, always use five WH.

You can't answer yes or no. They're still rubbish questions because if I said to, to somebody like, how did you get into work today? "Car". It's a nice open question, but it's got me nothing. So we use a, a better structure to question, we call it Ted's pie. So Ted - tell, explain, describe. So Ted's question is good. Tell me this. Describe that to me. Show me that to me. Pie - precisely, in detail, exactly. You pick one from the left and one from the right. Tell me exactly. Explain to me in detail. Show me precisely. If I said to that person - how did you get into work today? I'm gonna get a rubbish answer. If I say - "just explain to me in detail how you got into work today". They're not gonna say " car" 'cause that's not answered the question. So we need to be smart about the questions we're answering. We're asking, sorry. And, and we need to be bouncing stuff back. If I hear something that is really interesting, I wanna know more about, I am gonna resist the temptation to ask you a question about it.

I'm just gonna echo it. So if you said to me, "I'm absolutely devastated". I want the go. Well, "what are you devastating about?" which is the obvious question. "I'm absolutely devastated." "Devastated?" I've taken my turn of the conversation. It's your go again. So when you're in that business meeting or when you're in that business negotiation and somebody rolls that grenade in, don't, don't jump.

Don't sacrifice yourself by jumping on it. Don't try disarming it, just echo it. They have got zero thinking time and it's their turn in the conversation. So you're more likely to get an honest and unguarded response, which is telling you about what is going on behind that objection. So it's about conversation management.

[00:29:52] **Sanjay:** Fantastic. And, was, was it Ted's pie that you said?

[00:29:54] **Nigel:** Yeah. Ted's pie.

[00:29:56] **Sanjay:** I'm gonna use that with my, students as well.

[00:29:58] **Nigel:** Yeah. It'll, it work, it'll work wonders. And, and the other thing is, you know, if they say something that's interesting, don't, don't ask 'em a question, echo it. If they come out with a word and you think "Ooh, what's that all about? You know, if somebody says, "we're supposed to be a team", all I'm gonna do is echo, supposed- "supposed?" They've now got to come good on what supposed actually means instead of going, "well we are, what do you mean by that?" which is just defensive, horrible and doesn't get a lot of information anyway. So yeah, use echoes, summaries, and good questions. And that is how we manage a conversation.

That's how we keep the focus on them. If I'm talking more than 20% of the time in a negotiation, I'm talking too much 'cause if they're, they're talking, I'm learning stuff. If I'm talking, I'm learning nothing.

[00:30:43] **Sanjay:** I love that. Amazing. Amazing. And in your experience, what do you think organizations most often misunderstand about people? I think I know your answer from something you said earlier, but I, I just wanted to ask that.

[00:30:54] **Nigel:** I, I think one, one of the things that we fundamentally misunderstand is that, that we think that because we've been through a similar set of circumstances as somebody else, we understand what it's like for them.

[00:31:04] **Sanjay:** Mm-hmm.

[00:31:05] **Nigel:** And, and we don't. You know, the one thing you should never hear coming outta the mouth of a hostage negotiator are the words "I understand". We say it cause it sounds nice. We think we're saying it because it shows empathy, but actually it actually shows the complete opposite. You know, you're talking to somebody in work, you know? "I've broken up with Peter". "Oh, I understand". No, you don't. It's just you broken up with somebody and you knew what it felt like for you and you just project it onto them, you know? "I've been made redundant". "I understand. That happened to me a couple of years ago". Talking to your kids, you know about exam stress. "Yeah, I know exactly how you felt. We've all been through that". No, you don't. This nonsense about walking a mile in somebody else's shoes. It's rubbish. You can put my shoes on, you can walk for a mile. Doesn't matter how far you walk - all you'll ever understand is what they feel like for you. You'd be no wiser about what they feel like for me. And it's the same in business. We think because we've had similar circumstances, we understand. And that is absolutely nonsense. Get them talking, keep them talking, let them articulate it. And at that point, actually we start to understand what it is like for other people.

[00:32:14] **Sanjay:** That's excellent advice. And I completely agree. We take something and we run with it as if it was our own, but actually there's so many variables in this world that our experience of the same issue can be completely different, and I think we really need to be mindful of that.

Just a few final questions to, to finish Nigel. One, one that we ask all our guests, but if your life was a book and where you're at right now was a chapter in that book, what would that chapter be called, Nigel?

[00:32:41] **Nigel:** Oh. Grief. I think, "starting all over again", which I think is probably for police officers, for people who, who are ex-military, particularly ones of us who retire early. I mean, I retired from the police at 51 years old. You know, with the best will in the world. I, I couldn't just go out fishing.

You know, it's like, where, where, where do I go from here? What do I do now? Who am I? You know, when, when I'm reacting to a situation? Is it me? Is it a police officer? Is it a negotiator? You know, actually, you know, where do I start now? And, and, and I was lucky, a lot of police officers leave the police with 30 years' policing experience, but they've got a good set of, a solid base of skills.

But it's like, so what? You know, how is it relevant in other places? I was really lucky that the negotiating gave me, kind of a, a good second career. So now I'm rebuilding myself as a conference speaker and, and, and delivering half day workshops on communication and negotiation. It's given me a fresh, a fresh lease of life. So yeah, that's kind of, that's where, where I am now, starting all over again.

[00:33:58] **Sanjay:** Yeah, and I think that really raises questions of identity. I have, friends whose parents have just retired from being a surgeon or what have you, and who are you if you're not at work? They're going through some of these questions, so I think that's, that's really important to, to consider.

And finally, you've given so much advice today, I'm sure a lot of that will be very useful for businesses and organizations. But if you had to just pick one, your parting advice, what would it be to business leaders, or even just employees in the workplace?

[00:34:26] **Nigel:** Be kind to yourself. We speak to ourselves in ways that we, we would never dream of speaking to somebody else. Sometime that, that internal, sort of monologue is, is always, you know, "you can't do this. You're not capable of this". "You've really kind of, I think you've kind of overstretched yourself here" or, or whatever it is.

We would never say that to somebody else. Imagine saying to somebody else in the office, "honestly, I don't think you've cut out for this", but you'll quite happily say it to yourself. So yeah, just, you know, be kind, to yourself and, and make sure that, that inner dialogue is building you up and not putting you down 'cause very often we're capable of so much more than we actually think we are.

[00:35:13] **Sanjay:** I love it. Love it. Nigel, thank you so much. Really, really appreciate your time.

[00:35:17] **Nigel:** Sanjay, it's been great to speak to you.

[00:35:19] **Sanjay:** Take care.