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ROLES--NOT RULES--FOR THE POW

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DR. EDGAR H. SCHEIN

Professor of Industrial Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As a Captain in the Department of the Army's Office of Research at Walter Reed Hospital during the Korean War, Dr. Schein supervised the major Army research program in POW behavior. His book, Coercive Persuasion, Norton, 1961, contains a follow-up on a select group of Army returnees. Dr. Schein's current research is in small group organization, social interaction and social influence.

ROLES--NOT RULES--FOR THE POW

Problems with Rules

I would like first to make some very general observations about the problem of being a prisoner of war. First, usually a prisoner of war is in captivity for one or more years, and it is difficult for us to conceive what this long time span means in terms of finding a consistent pattern of adaptation. Anything a person might try to do by way of resisting or coping with the stresses of imprisonment has to be something which will work, not only for today or tomorrow, but which will work consistently--day after day--for a period of as long as three to five years. Consequently, what we should be thinking of is not giving the prisoner rules, but rather giving the prisoner what we might call a role. By a role, I mean a consistent, over-all strategy in terms of which the prisoner can organize his daily existence. And it should be a strategy which will permit him to maintain himself for a long period of time.

Secondly, being a prisoner of war means that you are, for a long period of time, completely without power while the captor has total power. This means that whatever resistance role the prisoner adopts--if it is to be effective--it must be one that can withstand the varieties of things the captor could do to upset it. For example: We might tell a man that he should confess to whatever a Communist interrogator

requires him to confess. This kind of a role is useless because if the Communist interrogator points out to him that sincerity is the very thing they want, then for the prisoner to continue to make false confessions in terms of whatever the interrogator seems to want is in itself being insincere. Consequently, the prisoner would constantly feel a strain between what the interrogator in actuality wants--namely that the prisoner be sincerely and truly himself--and what the role demands of him, which is a series of false confessions.

As we know from police cases, false confessions rarely work anyway, because the interrogator immediately begins to ask for details and in a variety of ways is able to break down the false confession.

In the case of the Chinese Communist prisoners, some were actually more severely punished when they were caught making a false confession than for any other crime (by the prisoner of war camp rules) that they might have committed.

Now, let us examine a little bit further the implications of the fact that the captor has complete control over the prisoner situation. Supposing we tell the prisoner not to communicate with the captor in any way whatsoever. Usually when we formulate a rule like this, what we have in the back of our minds is that any communication with the captor will eventually lead to saying things that the prisoner wished he had not said. This seems a valid enough reason to lay down as a rule having no communication. For example, "Whatever he asks you, tell him only your name, rank, and serial number."

The fallacy of this rule is that, first of all, many communications are necessary simply in terms of all kinds of day-to-day living arrangements. A captor may provide some choice of food or may inquire which of several work details the prisoner wants to go on. In other words, the captor will ask questions which demand communication in a large variety of areas which are crucial to the day-to-day operation in the camp. It is perfectly obvious that the prisoner cannot under these circumstances be expected to remain mute and simply say "the only thing I will say to you is my name, rank, and serial number." If the captor guard says, "Do you want a second helping of bean paste?" it is going to do the prisoner very little good just to respond with his name, rank, and serial number. The point is that some kind of communication with the captor is necessary in a captivity situation. The problem is developing a role for the prisoner, developing a strategy for him which will enable him to communicate about those things which are necessary for survival without communicating about those things which will either reveal military secrets or put him [the prisoner] at a disadvantage with respect to whatever exploitation the captor may attempt. We will get to the particular role that I have in mind later.

My conclusion, therefore, is that (1) the experience of captivity is one that likely lasts for a very long time which means that the role of silence without communication is psychologically impossible and (2) that the captor has complete control of the situation which means that he can involve the prisoner in a variety of necessary communication situations.

There is another aspect to the problem of the captor's control of the situation. We often assume, based on our recollections of the German POW camps, that large groups of prisoners will be kept together under the control of a few guards, that communication between prisoners will continue to be possible allowing the communication needs which the person may have to be fulfilled by his fellow prisoners. But we have learned from the Chinese Communist approach to handling prisoners that their understanding of man's need for communication has led them to deliberately structure into their control situations experiences which are very difficult for the prisoner to handle. One thing they do is to isolate the person completely for as much as six months to a year so that by the time several months of being able to talk to nobody has passed, the person is desperate to talk to even the interrogator.

At the other extreme, the captor goes about removing key figures or key leaders from such social organization as the prisoner may form. We have, I think, the stereotype that the way in which prisoners communicate with their captors is through their formally (or informally) designated prisoner representatives. These leaders supposedly can negotiate all the problems of food, shelter, and what not. The way in which Chinese Communists controlled camps, however, was to remove these formal and informal leaders and thus to reduce masses of prisoners to a relatively undifferentiated leaderless group. I am not concerned at this point whether, in fact, what remained of the prisoners should have been able to organize themselves. What I am trying to

point to is the conclusion that, given that the captor has control of the situation, it is possible for him to structure the situation in such a way that communication possibilities between the prisoners are cut to a minimum, thereby heightening the need to communicate with the captor.

There is also a third feature about which we have learned from Chinese Communist methods of prison control that has to do with whether we give them rules which they reasonably can expect to abide by or whether we give them rules which are ideal standards but which, if attempted in practice, cannot be met. The Communists are exceedingly good at creating "guilt" of all sorts in the prisoner and using these guilt feelings as a lever in beginning to indoctrinate him. By getting him to begin to think about crimes and failures in himself and society, he is led to justify whatever guilt he may feel.

If we give the prisoner a rule that he can communicate with the enemy only by giving "his name, rank, and serial number," we may be creating for him a situation in which he cannot succeed. If he cannot succeed, and in fact, does communicate with the enemy, he has immediately committed a breach of discipline. In his own eyes, he has done what his officers have told him he should not do. As a result, he is wide-open to more guilt feelings. There is adequate evidence that the Communists in USSR as well as China are very good at planting such guilt feelings and pointing out to the person as long as he has gone this far, and as long as he has transgressed the rules he was given anyway, he will be out of favor when he returns to his homeland, and therefore might as well collaborate further.

Some of the dramatic instances of defection could be related to the guilt feelings which the prisoner had as a result of a series of cooperative acts with the enemy. The enemy takes advantage of this situation by saying, "You've committed so many crimes, you're going to be treated as a criminal when you get back. You might as well stay with us." I would submit that our military policy is probably partly responsible for this whole sequence of events having (1) failed to lay down to the prisoner a set of rules which he could reasonably be expected to abide by, or (2) defined situations where he would be permitted to break the rule such that he could be protected from guilt feelings.

In conclusion, I have real misgivings about any rule which states that the POW should have no communication with the enemy except name, rank, and serial number in the event of capture. On the other hand, it is also very clear to me that the opposite extreme, saying to the prisoner, "There are no rules in terms of which you should guide yourself; rather you should at all times use your judgment and make the best possible decision in terms of the situation," is also unrealistic. The use of judgment is unrealistic because we have learned from experimental studies as well as prisoner behavior that when a person becomes very fatigued, starved, and debilitated, his capacity for judgment deteriorates. Since the captor is in complete control of the situation, he can always reduce a person to a physical condition where his judgment is highly questionable. We should therefore very seriously consider never asking the person to rely on his judgment because, again, if he

makes decisions which turn out to be bad judgment (and the captor usually recognizes this), the POW has then a tremendous feeling of personal failure. We say many instances, particularly in the case of higher ranking officers, where very sincere attempts to use good judgment turned out to be disastrous; where there was tremendous disagreement among the higher ranking officers as to what the correct course of action should be. I think it is unfortunate if we create a policy which leaves any captive vulnerable to this kind of debate of disagreement. It makes him carry the burden of using judgment under conditions where rational judgment could hardly be expected of anyone. In those instances, a rule--if we could invent a rule--which could cover all the situations might indeed be much better.

The problem, of course, is that a rule like giving name, rank, and serial number does not cover enough situations to make it possible to be applicable to all situations. For example, how does a senior officer determine whether the Chinese are bluffing when they threaten to shoot one man out of every ten in a POW compound unless the entire group signs a peace petition?

The advantage of a rule is to protect the POW organization. If the rule were clearly enough formulated to be applicable to the situation, then at least all members of the unit would know exactly what to do. In the past altogether too many unfortunate incidents resulted from the interpretation of what should be done in given situations by one officer's interpretations differing from the interpretations of another officer.

A Positive Policy

Our search for such all-inclusive rules is based, of course, on the assumption that 100 percent resistance is possible. I do not believe it is possible to expect 100 percent resistance under even ideal circumstances. Historical data from all past wars confirm that no matter what the circumstances for the prisoners, there will always be some collaboration. In view of this fact, I think we should deliberately and consciously abandon the standard of 100 percent resistance and seek instead to offset whatever collaboration, confessions, petition-signing, etc., occurs by taking a national stance--a propaganda-psychological warfare point of view at a national level--which announces clearly to the world that in the event we have any prisoners of war captured by a Communist country, we expect, given the inhuman, brutal, and unethical way Communists treat prisoners, that a certain number of men will give confessions, or will sign petitions. Most importantly, when we repatriate them, we do not consider them disloyal. Instead, we attack the Communists for utilizing methods which deliberately attempt to subvert the political and personal loyalties and the individual autonomy of captives which they may have taken. This <u>has to be a national policy</u>, widely publicized to the world. It requires us to reorient our stance toward those men who, in exercising their judgment or in giving in to specific pressures, make errors from the point of view of what would be the ideal resistance behavior. As long as we continue to take an attitude of "let's set up some rules, and then

let's punish the people who break the rules," thinking about it in these individual terms, I think we will not be able to combat effectively Communist techniques of prisoner control.

So one line toward a positive policy is to change our thinking about the problem of collaboration with the enemy: (1) we should abandon the 100 percent resistance stance; (2) we should take a non-punishing attitude toward those people who did not actually and willfully hurt fellow prisoners by their behavior; and (3) we should mount a considered national psychological propaganda or psychological warfare attack against Communist methods of prisoner treatment.

Now, in saying this, I am not saying that we should abandon any resistance standards whatsoever. In fact, it is important to maximize resistance, since obviously if the Chinese Communists, for example can get an entire prison camp to sign peace petitions, this is something of a propaganda victory for them. So, how do we create for the individual and the group the personal and group strategy of how to resist?

I think one approach to this problem is to build strong cohesive tight groups, long before any people fall into prison camps. What this means is teaching military units how to hang together; how to maintain their unit-solidarity and loyalty; how to organize themselves under conditions of stress and disorganization; how to reconstruct their leadership hierarchy when formal leaders are absent; how to develop communications patterns under conditions where communications are mostly severed by the enemy; how in other words to maintain their

primary orientation toward and trust in each other, even if each man is isolated in a personal cell all by himself.

We know from our civilian prison studies that communication between prisoners by tapping on cell walls is extremely important activity. The counterpart of this--enabling prisoners to communicate with each other when in POW camp--can, even under conditions where the enemy attempts to prevent this, be an extremely important activity which we should train men to be able to do long before the danger of being a prisoner arises. Such training presupposes not that we give the men rules about how to behave, but that we give them maximum information about Communist control techniques and the kinds of vulnerabilities which this creates for prisoners. We should enable them to survive better physically through programs like the Air Force Survival School at Stead Air Force Base, but more importantly help them through a variety of training programs to maintain their sense of identity as a member of the unit, to establish communication channels and generally to maintain their orientation toward each other so that any needs to communicate with the captor are decreased and can somehow even under minimum conditions be fulfilled with each other.

Implementing a Positive Policy

How can we develop a concept of the prisoner and a concept of the training program for becoming a prisoner which will enable our men psychologically to survive for a long period of time under varying captor stresses, without committing acts which can be construed as disloyal or damaging to our military and national cause?

The way of thinking about this that makes most sense to me is to think not about isolated prisoners, but about prisoner groups. Groups do not necessarily have to be physically together. A group can be still a group even though all its members are isolated. For me, the important source of real strength in a prisoner is his knowledge that there are others in the prison camp and back home who care about him and what he does. And that he has at least occasional opportunities to communicate with these important others--to establish a bond with them. We saw ample evidences of this in Korea in the use of idiomatic language between prisoners using phrases the Chinese would not understand which gave the prisoners a real sense of solidarity. We see it in the importance of glances to each other or significant looks which prisoners may give to each other as they pass each other in the corridors of the isolation prisons as in the Moscow Purge Trials. There is more than enough evidence that if somehow prisoners can be taught to maintain faith and contact with each other, this is a tremendously powerful source of resistance.

I would like to note that this does not mean giving any rules to potential prisoners. It means instead, developing a role--a strategy for thinking about the total prison experience and its stresses. Rules may be necessary in the backgrounds--the ultimate code--in terms of which prisoner behavior is defined, but those rules should be stated as ideal conditions such as not helping the enemy not hurting a fellow prisoner not undermining the loyalty of the prisoner group, and so on, rather than rules about how best to do this. Where we have gotten into

trouble in the past is where we formulated rules about how to do something. Unfortunately, the enemy can always create a set of conditions in which the particular rules that we have created is inapplicable. Consequently, a rule like "You must not tell the enemy anything except you name, rank, and serial number," makes less sense than a rule like, "You must not divulge to the enemy any military information which you possess." How the prisoner then decides to withhold this information from the enemy is partly up to him and his group, and different people may formulate different strategies.

It was very clear from the Korean episode that some men were able to hide their knowledge from the enemy much better by voluminous talking. Other men were able to hide their knowledge better by refusing to talk altogether. When we formulate a rule of how to do it, we are, in a sense, imposing a strait jacket on people which may fit some but not others. Therefore, my concept is: Create some rules which define the goals which we are trying to accomplish!

What from an ideal point of view should a prisoner try to accomplish? He should try to survive; he should try to resist as much as possible; he should subvert enemy aims as much as possible; he should not divulge any military information from his own side, if possible, and so on. But then provide training which enables men to fulfill these goals in terms of whatever the particular conditions are that they may be facing in the prison camps.

I have a few ideas on the specifics of such training.

First of all, I think that full information about what a man is going to encounter is terribly important. By this I do not mean attempts to simulate the situation by creating artificial POW compounds, having people run through a three-day prison experience. I do not believe this even begins to capture what the experience will actually be like. Rather, what I would like to see is good reading material, case studies, good films, good lectures, good communication to him of what the real dilemmas and problems of being a prisoner are--what it is like to live for year after year in captivity, getting no mail from home; what it is like to be isolated from people, etc; trying really to make this vivid, not by giving a miniature experience but by trying to communicate adequately what the total experience is like.

A second element which should be put into a training program is to put groups of soldiers together to explore fairly deeply with each other their possible reactions to these kinds of stresses and to think through in a group setting the kinds of strategies that might work, given different kinds of approaches the captor might use to attempt to subvert them. I think such discussions would not only enrich each man's thought about his repertory of possible resistance activities, but would also provide the beginnings of a kind of "group strength" which often in military units we do not have. Only if the men can share their thoughts with each other, can share their fears, their fantasies that they may fail as prisoners; only if they can see if others have the same fears and fantasies, can they begin to see that while individually they may be weak, as a total group they are strong.

I would put into such groups trained people who have worked with groups who would help the group confront the genuine issues that may arise for the prisoner. How do we feel if someone fails? How do we feel if someone confesses? How do we feel if someone informs on a buddy? Do we hold this against him? Do we forgive him? By what criteria do we decide? Only a full airing of these issues can we give a man some feeling of how others will react to possible behaviors of his own and can then send him into the potential prison situation with a far richer knowledge of what kind of a group he is in there with. This is the kind of knowledge he needs in order to be able to formulate his own personal strategy of survival.

In addition to this, I would emphasize the concept of unit loyalty; training together; rotational policies which involve rotations of teams, rather than rotation of individuals; leadership emphasis on the leader in relation to the group, rather than the leader as a kind of military symbol. There are a whole variety of approaches which tend to draw the strength out of the group and for me this is important not only in the prisoner situation but has been amply demonstrated to be important in the combat situation. So this would have a dual gain: even if the men were never captured, I would predict that they would be stronger and more effective in their combat role if these kinds of discussions of the fears and problems of battle and imprisonment are fully aired before it actually occurs.

The kinds of activities I have in mind--both the general and the specifics--do involve a lot of time and I would assume at the outset

that one cannot conduct this kind of a training program with a one or two hour I&E lecture. This is the kind of thing that has so much importance both for combat and prisoner effectiveness that I would build it right into the core of military training and would allow from the very beginning ample discussion time among groups of soldiers as to their hopes and fears of being a soldier; the problems of going into combat; the danger of being imprisoned; the problem of isolation from family; etc. If this kind of training were built-in and if adequate information were provided on what the real problems and dangers of both combat and being a prisoner are, then I think the men could build up a personal role--a personal strategy for themselves which would sustain them through even some of the worst stresses.

There is one other element, the final one that I would like to comment on briefly and that is the notion of personal commitment to another person. Fundamentally, I don't believe that people get committed to ideas or causes so much as they get committed to other people who embody such ideas or causes. The fundamental commitments we make are to people with whom we have a relationship--not to abstractions. Thus, a concept like patriotism makes much more sense to me in terms of commitment to people like the President, great leaders we know from our past and present, individuals who somehow embody the values of our society, rather than embracing a word or a concept in the abstract. I do think it is possible to build this kind of commitment to a much greater extend than we do.

For example, if we are thinking of an enemy agent who was going to some foreign territory for some period of time, it would seem to me critical that we give this agent some back-home counterpart--someone with whom he has trained who is his back-home contact; someone who functions as an audience for him who knows at all times what the problems are that the agent faces, who knows the agent very well, his strengths and weaknesses, who in a sense becomes the symbol and embodiment of all the agent is committed to, so that whatever he does, he is not just his own audience, but he is doing it, in effect, for this other person as well and he is maintaining his standards of loyalty, integrity, strength, or whatever, partly to meet his own ideals but more importantly to meet the standards which this other person who is important to him has set for him.

This same principle applies to the POW. To the extent that the individual prisoner is maintaining the standards of his family, of his officers, of his buddies, of various people to whom he is committed, to that extent he is far more powerful than if he is maintaining abstract standards or purely personal standards. I think even the highly individualistic person has his audiences to whom he is playing, and the way in which we can most undermine his strength is to remove the possibility of having such an audience from him.

I do not think it is accidental that the prisoners in Korea were much weakened by the fact they were not permitted to see their mail from home because as the home audience began to take on a more and more remote reality many men began to feel "Well, what's the point of

maintaining standards that make sense back home when no one back home even cares?" If the men know that, even though no mail is getting through to them, that people back home do care, this in itself is a terribly important source of resistance.

Summary

Now let me try to summarize what I have said.

1. The most important idea, perhaps, is to think in terms of a total strategy of resistance and a role for the prisoner that enables him to resist rather than a set of rules.

2. Rules are important but they should be rules which lay out the goals and standards to be achieved by the prisoner. They should strongly avoid being prescriptions for "how" he should meet those goals and standards. He should have freedom to maneuver and to develop his own personal strategies of how to fulfill the goals and standards.

3. We should abandon the standard 100 percent resistance and mount a concerted national psychological warfare attack on Communist methods of prisoner control and state at the outset that we expect a certain amount of collaboration and that we are not going to punish repatriates if it occurs.

4. The way of maximizing resistance, I believe, is to build strong groups rather than strong individuals because individual strength is very much a derivative of group strength. This means certain kinds of training programs which both from the point of view of combat effectiveness and prisoner-of-war effectiveness do a great deal more than

we have traditionally done with helping men to share their fears, hopes and aspirations and enable them to get committed to each other in a way that will sustain them under highly stressful situations.

I would formulate standards of conduct, put these in the form of positive goals to be achieved, and then give maximum training to people in varieties of ways in which they as an individual or as a group can meet these goals.

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This paper was prepared by the author as a consultant contributor to a conference held in 1963 on training programs for required behavior in the event of capture. A case is presented for emphasizing positive standards of conduct required of the POW rather than passive resistance or negative obedience of rules. The author who is now Professor of Industrial Management, M.I.T., was active in the Army research program in POW behavior in the Korean War. His book, Coercive Persuasion, Norton, 1961, contains a follow-up on a select group of Army returnees.

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