

## #38 (IAN STANIER)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

The *Reducing Crime* podcast features influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers. During his extensive policing career, Dr. Ian Stanier was head of the HUMINT unit at the UK's national counter terrorism policing headquarters and has been an informant source handler, controller and authorizing officer. We talk about covert HUMINT intelligence sources and the challenges of their management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hi, I'm your host Jerry Ratcliffe and welcome to Reducing Crime.

It's time to bring the curtain down on the guest theme bit and next month we will be back to the original theme, which was the outro to the classic British police show, *The Sweeney*. But before wrapping it up, I thought I would leave you with the guest theme you just heard. This antipodean police drama might just be one of the longest running police shows you never heard of. Starting in the early 1990s and running for 12 years across an incredible 510 episodes - the first season alone had 45 episodes - the series was set in a small Australian town and featured young police officers who are, according to a review in one newspaper, thrown into the deep end where they are left to sink or swim. Yeah, that sounds about right. Did you guess the show? I'll give away the answer next month. As for last month, well, if you're like me, you're of a certain age and that was an easy one, being the unmistakable *Kojak*.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

This month, I had a chance to catch up with an old friend who actually graduated from Hendon Police College in the same cohort as I did many moons ago. During a much more illustrious police career than I had, spanning over 30 years, Dr. Ian Stanier developed specialist intelligence in several operational areas. He was the head of the HUMINT unit of the UK's national counter terrorism policing headquarters and has been a covert informant source handler, controller and authorizing officer. He was instrumental in the development of the UK national intelligence model and the College of Policing's authorized professional practice in intelligence management. In his chair at the National Police Chief's Councils' Intelligence Practice Research Consortium and an academic advisor on the National Crime Agency's HUMINT academic hub. He retired from policing as a superintendent and Ian is now a senior lecturer in the university system where he runs graduate programs in covert investigation, specialist intelligence and counter terrorism.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

In the following chat with Ian, we talk about a couple of his recent publications with co-author Dr. Jordan Nunan who is now a serving metropolitan police officer in London himself, covert source recruitment and management and dedicated source units. Those are the groups within British policing that handle informants. He also touches on Guantanamo Bay, the east German secret police and British spy Kim Philby. The most meaningful contribution I make to the conversation is a brief anecdote about that one time I met a bloke in the pub and a thrilling tale of finding a book in a library. Good grief.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And hello mate, it is nice to see you.

**Ian Stanier:**

It's great to see you. It's got to be 32, 33 years now hasn't it? When we started.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, mate. 36 years.

**Ian Stanier:**

Gosh, it is. Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

This is the part that I think is incredible is that you and I were at training school at the police academy at exactly the same time 36 years ago and you went on to have this illustrious career as one of the leading people in the country on covert HUMINT information sources and I fell off a mountain after 10 years and ended up in academic in the states. It's the weirdest career paths for both of us, do you know what I mean?

**Ian Stanier:**

You've done pretty well I'll have it though.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, you've got a lot more hair than I have, you bastard.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, but for how long? It's all starting to turn grey now... so there you go. But it was a really great career. I'm sure you enjoyed it. Was it Limehouse you were at? Was it H?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, H district in the east end of London. But I mean, you went on to become superintendent.

**Ian Stanier:**

Well, I suppose I better turn the clock back a bit. When I first joined, obviously I was like anybody else, uniform, patrolling officer in the West Ham in the east end, on shifts. And I moved toward crown analyst when it used to be done by police officers. My career pathways tended to follow the area of intelligence. So I've been England football intelligence, public order intelligence, prison intelligence, handler of informants, a controller of informants. I think you're getting the message here Jerry, I tended to stay in that area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, stop being a generalist and can you focus on something for your career for once will you? So after west midlands, what happened?

**Ian Stanier:**

After west midlands, my final posting there was I was the incumbent to London. So I was working at New Scotland Yard. I then left, retired, and I went into academia and I run program lead for a number of terrorism, security and intelligence related courses but I did a number of secondments, I ended up as the head of the counter terrorism policing HUMINT unit.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I imagine we have some brand new undergraduate students listening. Explain to them what HUMINT is.

**Ian Stanier:**

In simple terms, HUMINT is the intelligence that agencies collect from human beings and now they might do that as big as their informants or they collect that because they've been deployed as undercover officers. It might be that they're interacting with people who are prepared to give what was known as queen's evidence. So, assisting offenders in the United States, I believe you call that cooperative witnesses.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, we don't have a lot of queen's evidence over here. It's not a particularly popular term.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. So, HUMINT is an important intelligence collection. It's not the only one as you know, with signal intelligence and the like, but it's an important one and it's probably one of the oldest intelligence collection disciplines that's been around since day one.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I think people underestimate it. Again, we get a little fixated with technology and toys and apps and phones and intercepting email messages. But sometimes you just have to be speaking to somebody who knows villains, right?

**Ian Stanier:**

Definitely. You're right. It kind of falls in and out of favor. For example, in the United States, former CIA head, Admiral Stansfield Turner came in and moved the organization towards technology and satellite and made significant cuts on their clandestine and human capability and I think it's the same in the UK. There's been a marked decline in the number of people who were handling informants. If I put that in perspective, we're talking about Roger Billingsley's research in the 90s, found out in 1995, there were just over 43,000 registered informants in England alone and now we're around about 2500.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Why is this? We've got this fantastic source, we're supposed to be more intelligence lead and yet, it seems like this is just falling out of favor.

**Ian Stanier:**

There was a big uplift in the 90s after the Audit Commission in 1993 spoke about the need for more intelligence and proactive policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was really a review of policing generally that said we need more intelligence on criminals and offenders.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. It was the early days of intelligence in policing which as you know, eventually kind of culminated with the national intelligence model, which you know is a UK business model which focuses on how we manage our intelligence better. But one of the kind of key determinants I think really was the fact that there was increasing concern about how we went about our business in covert investigation, was human rights compliance, there were question marks over some of the issues around corruption and integrity.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, this has always been one of the areas of policing that's been a little bit murky. It's been a bit of a moral maze. It's almost a philosophical question which is, there's going to be intrusion, we're going to be running up against informants who are closer to that ethical line around policing aren't they? Much more so than response policing. Somebody called 999 in the UK or 911 in the US and we rock up and we try and solve their problem. This is us being much more proactive but it also takes us closer to an ethical line. So I suppose that kind of sparks my question, are the benefits still outweighing the negatives in, here we are, what? 2021.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. I think the so called tension has probably been overstated. The reality is that some of the human rights principles which are universal, the kind of principal of proportionality and necessity, making sure what you do is in accordance with law-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, and that sense of proportionality around let's not mount a major surveillance operation against a 13 year old burglar or a 15 year old who does a bit of shoplifting.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, I mean the shoplifting analogy is good actually. If a 13 year old burglar is prolific, then you've got to bear in mind that if he's breaking into two or three houses a day, what harm is he causing to the rest of the community? So the age issue is not so much at play there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You don't think age is going to play a role in that? I just think about it from the public perception standpoint.

**Ian Stanier:**

I think-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Or are there different measures of where we would consider proportionality to kick in?

**Ian Stanier:**

Well, there's been 14 year olds who have been involved in planning to kill people. You remember the Melbourne plot. There's been children suicide bombers. It's each case on its merit. What danger does that 13 year old pose to themselves, to the people around them and to the community? That will be the determinant is whether it's serious enough. Clearly, what needs to be done is can we consider alternative methods? It might be simply a knock on the door. Are you aware of whether just knocking on the door is going to... people on the periphery of organized crime is enough sometimes to stop them from doing something.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, the visit that let's them know that they are known about and that they're not acting in anonymity is an amazingly underappreciated piece of proactive policing that I just don't think enough places think about engaging with. Have you thought about knocking on this guy's door and telling him to fly straight?

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah. There's plenty of ways of skinning a cat, but there are occasions when the criminal activity that is being planned doesn't lend itself to any form of investigative tactic or method apart from covert policing. What's clear is that if there is an alternative method, that will always be embraced first generally because of just the expense. I know surveillance teams vary around the world, but the cost of running 15 to 20 surveillance officers around the clock is extraordinarily expensive if a knock on the door can do the same.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, especially if the goal is to have them desist from crime rather than often the goal is unfortunately output which is can we arrest them? Whereas the outcome, you know what? If we can make them stop committing crime, because

they thought they were flying under the radar and they're not, that's got to be the real goal that I think a lot of people in policing would be happy with.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. And I just probably want to stress there that covert investigation sits on the margins of policing now. When you joined the police-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Hold on a minute. When you and I joined the police back in the Neolithic era, right?

**Ian Stanier:**

Swinging the blue lamp here, but you didn't get to become a detective or join a crime squad if you weren't able to evidence at least one informant that has been working for you and now you might be in a force of many, many thousands of police officers and police staff and maybe only a dozen pairs of officers are running informants. It is on the margins there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what's changed in that regard? I mean, back in the day when you and I joined the job, as I say, no internet, no cell phones, borderline electricity in some parts of east London, but you had a very simple process where it was hardly anybody was really almost registered. If you got an informant, you basically ran an informant. There was a great skipper in the east end of London. I won't mention his name, don't want to get him jammed up even though he's no longer in the job, but I used to go along with him and meet some of his informants over a pint in the Three Tuns Pub and that was just how it was done. It seemed very *ad hoc*, and you just went ahead and did things and now there are all these different types of processes and regulations that have been brought into place, at least in the UK. I can't say for what the situation is in other countries.

**Ian Stanier:**

I think that I'd probably go against what a number of the practitioners are currently doing the role thing here, but I actually think there's some scope for the running of informants outside of a dedicated source unit. I don't think we necessarily need to go back to meeting people in the pub when you can actually meet them in other locations which are safer and more conducive to the elicitation of intelligence.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

In some places in the US, there are no regulations in place for this whatsoever, but there's a very structured system in the UK. So you've got dedicated source units but there's also, you've got handlers, you've got controllers and you've got authorizing officers. This seems awfully bureaucratic.

**Ian Stanier:**

It could become bureaucratic but actually there are significant benefits that fall out of that. So what is a handler? For each informant, there will be two handlers and there's a number of reasons for that. When you meet the informant, you have someone asking the questions, someone taking down the notes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because it's important that they build a rapport with people, right? It's very much a personal... this is a very personal business, isn't it?

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. It's one of those things, it's a professional relationship and it's that fine balance between leaving them with the impression that you're their friend but the reality is you're not their friend. The controller is somebody who oversees, it's normally a supervisory rank who oversees all those informant handlers to make sure they're doing their job right. They will be checking the intelligence reports that are generated as a result of the meetings and at the next level, there's something called the authorizing officer and that's the senior detective, relatively high within a precinct and they're the ones who in essence sign off the legal authority and I think this is quite unique in the UK, is the fact that there's bespoke legislation on covert investigative practice, speaking to colleagues in Europe and the far east and in the states, that isn't actually the case. It's informants or confidential sources are generally regulated through internal policies.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Most places don't have any kind of or very little legislation around this whole area. So it's down to the individual department to figure out what their policies are and when you've got say, in the states, 18,000 departments, you can imagine the majority of them don't really have much in the way of policy around this area.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, I mean what's probably worth stressing, again, what's quite unique is the fact that our single piece of legislation, the Regulatory Investigative Powers Act actually applies to not just law enforcement but all public authorities. So I would've used the same legislation as MI5, MI6, GGHQ, the National Crime Agency.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what's been happening during the pandemic? I mean, the work that you've written about is how informants are essentially pivotal and vital to some areas, especially things like drug supply and domestic extremism and terrorism. I mean, these are not bullshit areas, these are areas of, we could argue are borderline to some degree regional and national security and now one of the major sources of information is drying up to some degree or is becoming a lot harder to manage because of the pandemic. You did this really interesting work where you surveyed and spoke to over 200 people who worked in these dedicated source units. What are some of their experiences?

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, I did it with Dr. Jordan Nunan. I think the first one, the nature of the relationship between the informant handler and the informant themselves changed because previously, the interaction was all about what intelligence could they give them, but what became as important was actually how are they getting on in terms of their mental health, their wellbeing? For some of these informants, the money they got through the provision of information was kind of important to the housekeeping and these brought on additional pressures.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, that's one of the things that I thought was really interesting is, we talk about how much we want policing to be a science, but if there's one area where it's still a craft, I think it's really in this area of informant handling because now a pandemic comes along and you've got these informant handlers who are really looking to get intelligence and information out of their sources but a whole piece of this now becomes, you know, you write about the importance of helping the informant's emotional survivability and financial support. I mean, the financial support, I get, but the emotional support, that really surprised me.

**Ian Stanier:**

If you don't have a relationship, I can't see that relationship lasting or being as productive as it possibly could be. So a lot of time is spent on not only developing but maintaining the relationship because if the informant is happy with their handlers, that's when you get the best productivity. It sounds very clinical but you get the best intelligence. If you can use anything to elicit intelligence, be it rapport, then you got to embrace that. Falling out of the scandals around the black sites in Guantanamo Bay and the harsh interrogation techniques, a lot of money was plowed into research around elicitation of intelligence, predominately lead by CIA, FBI and defense of the states.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

In other words, how to get the best intelligence out of people. Do we encourage it out of them or do we beat it out of them?

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, and this might surprise many listeners actually, but you can get far more intelligence by being nice to people, by establishing rapport, by speaking to them. If you're smiling, your shaking hands, you're having a chat over a cigarette, you're conscious of their nonverbals, these all start to contribute towards a more meaningful and fruitful interaction.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, it was interesting to read that even though their motivation is because you have something on them, because there are charges pending against them, in the long term, building that rapport is actually more important for eliciting information out of them. I found it interesting because it goes back to that old TV trope of good cop, bad cop and actually what you really need is you can be more successful with good cop, good cop.

**Ian Stanier:**

Bang on, mate. The issue about coercion, I was reading some research that was taken from the Stasi files-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And just for clarity here, we're talking about the east German secret police back from before the Berlin Wall came down.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. What they found was that when they deployed blackmail or coercive methods, it was probably the least productive. People either escaped over the wall to West Germany or they could see there wasn't genuine cooperation and if you're going to coerce someone, how long is that relationship going to last? It's not going to last very long.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How was that possible given lock down restrictions being reduced capacity to meet? How were informant handlers able to do that to actually keep supporting the people that were providing the intelligence that we needed?

**Ian Stanier:**

Lock down meant those physical meetings were significantly reduced because even some of the venues that were previously used were closed. So, there was a shift towards the use of the telephone. You could still speak to your informant there and there wasn't any sort of health considerations in relation to that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm sure for some people that it was actually easier. Once they had already had a rapport, right? It was easier to sometimes just sneak away for a telephone call than to go for a clandestine meeting somewhere.

**Ian Stanier:**

Why go to the expense of arranging a physical meeting when actually you can ask the same questions over a telephone? It's safer and it's cheaper for all concerned. The one area in which the research did flag up, which is quite interesting, was whereas the rest of society ended up embracing technology, the pandemic acted as an accelerator, it didn't seem to do that for the handling community. I've got 80-year-old plus parents and they were using online shopping and using Zoom, whereas in the informant management community, embracing of digital technology did not appear to take place.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. I've even been able to video WhatsApp with my 90-year-old mother, or to be more accurately, the top of her head because she hasn't figured out where the camera is in relation to her head, but it's a conversation, right?

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, absolutely. So look, and I do appreciate embracing technology isn't as simple as I've just said it there because you can't just embrace any technology. It's got to be secure, because the last thing you want to do is to use poor trade craft and then leave your informant vulnerable as someone looks at their phone or their laptop and there's a sort of audit trail back to law enforcement. That's the last thing you want to do. So maybe that's part of the reason why it didn't move as quickly as the rest of society.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

One of the other things I noted from the article was this actually provided some opportunities, which I hadn't even thought about. So I did the same thing as a bunch of people during the pandemic, it's like, all right, I'm stuck in a house on my own and started reaching out to people that I hadn't really spoken to in a while say, "Hey. Touch base, how are you doing?" Just to increase the scope of people I was having contact with. It was interesting that some of the source handlers saw that as an opportunity as well.

**Ian Stanier:**

Wonderful example of how the informant handlers were adapting to the situation. They said, "Okay, what can I do?" And that might've taken further research of some of the targets that previously had been spoken to. They might've started to plan for future recruitment once the worst of the lock down was lifted. I think they dusted off some of their trade craft methodology that perhaps hasn't previously been used before such as dead letter drops and brush contacts. What do we mean by that? Well, I think if you look at John le Carré's Smiley's People or Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy or-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

My favorite author of all time.

**Ian Stanier:**

So, I'm not giving anything away there, just basic trade craft that previously was used but has kind of fallen out of favor. Those two methods offered an opportunity to maintain communication without physically meeting.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So it's worth explaining that dead letter box is a location where you can leave something for me and I can come past another time and pick it up and vice versa. Explain what a brush contact is.

**Ian Stanier:**

A brush contact is kind of as the name is, you transfer a message as you pass someone.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Just in brief passing as if you don't recognize each other and just slip something into their hand or their bag.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. If you look at for example Hanssen, the FBI spy, if you look at how he was caught, you can see the court papers, you can see all the dead letter drop venues or the photographs that the FBI captured. So Robert Hanssen's a good one to actually research when you want to understand what dead drops mean.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, Robert Hanssen, that whole story was featured in a movie called "Breach" if I remember correctly.

**Ian Stanier:**

[crosstalk 00:21:34], okay. I haven't seen that. I'll have to look out for that. The ironic thing is that you can buy dictionaries of espionage, you can look at Wikipedia, you can look at Spycraft on Netflix and see some extraordinary revelations. It's an area that you think is not possible to research but it's kind of all out there. What's secret Jerry is 'who are you actually looking at?' When are you going to look at them? And the specific method you're going to deploy. Again, so that's the thing that is the secret bit. The stuff around it is increasingly out there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

A part of me thinks that it's strange that we're to some degree moving away from the use of informants because I'll tell you, so I was rooting around in Temple University's library back when we... we've got a robot now that goes and finds books without any kind of human involvement but back in the day, we had old school university stacks, just you used to go and walk along and desperately trying to find the book and I couldn't find the book I was looking for. And then right down at the bottom at the back, there was a sort of dusty book and I pulled it out but it wasn't the one I was looking for but I flipped it open anyway and nobody had ever taken it out. It had one of those paper slips in it where you're supposed to stamp the return date.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Nobody had ever taken this book out and it was published in the 1920s by a guy called Frederick Wensley. And he joined the job and worked the same district that you and I worked at in the east end of London like you and I did, but one of the first things he was doing was on the patrol to try and catch Jack the Ripper and he went on to become the head of detectives and the book's called Forty Years of Scotland Yard and he wrote this. "In truth, all the mechanical ingenuity in the world will never stamp the criminal out. The only real method is to employ detectives who know rogues by direct contact, know their habits, their ways of thought, their motives and above all, know their friends and associates. In the vast majority of cases, information can only be gained in this way." And he's writing that 100 years ago and it seems weird that we're moving away from that.

**Ian Stanier:**

That's a fantastic quote. I mean, if you want to go back a little bit further, I know people often quote it, but Sun Tzu talks about the importance of spies. The ironic thing is, in the world of increasing encryption, you might get yourself into a position where actually you're unable to defeat that encryption, you can't break it down. So you actually have to then fall back to informants, the ones who can tell you about the organization's setup procedures and-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Maybe that's where we're going to end up with this, which is, we're going to go full circle from the use of informants. We're going to try the technology route, we're going to get defeated and we're going to come back old school again to just knowing rogues by direct contact, their habits, their thoughts, their motives, their friends and their associates.

**Ian Stanier:**

You're absolutely right. I'm sure that's going to happen.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It was disheartening to read that three quarters of your informant handlers, the people in your survey, said that intelligence declined during the pandemic but also, just recruitment has dried up. It's really hard to recruit people over the telephone.

**Ian Stanier:**

I think if you've had a previous relationship with that person, they previously were an informant, picking up the phone and reconnecting is possible. So there's a chance of re-recruit. But you're right, I think especially the early days of the pandemic, most of the handlers who responded to surveys said there was an almost complete cessation. I think the learning from this pandemic and the future is actually that sort of complete cessation isn't acceptable really. We've got to recognize that we still need to maintain an informant stable. So it needs to be a sort of pipeline of informants. We just need to become more creative about it and it's the handlers themselves who flag that up.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Does that include prison informants? Because prison informants is one of the biggest sources of reasonably good quality intelligence here in the United States and it's one of the areas where I know the Department of Corrections in a number of states and at the federal level have been very successful in gathering intelligence because you have some leverage and you have some options and you have some capacity to provide a reward system. Is that an area that we should seek to keep maintaining when, this sounds terrible, the next pandemic or equivalent comes around?

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. It's a critical area for many jurisdictions. I've traveled and advised in at least half a dozen countries about... including El Salvador which I know that you're a regular visitor to. It's an important area of intelligence, prison informants can provide information on what's happening inside the prison. So you can help maintain good order and discipline and help people rehabilitate while they're inside.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I think in many places like El Salvador and in many of the state prisons in the US, you can help people stay alive because internally in prisons, it can be a hell of a dangerous place.

**Ian Stanier:**

Funny you say that, I taught prison intelligence in Salvador and I went and visited a place.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You are a braver man than I, sir.

**Ian Stanier:**

Well, during the course, there was a prison riot and 31 died. 31 died.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good grief.

**Ian Stanier:**

So you're absolutely right. I remember walking through the prison and it just felt that actually it was the gangs in control rather than the prison staff. And that's one of the problems. If your intelligence system is so poor, you then have to sort of fall back on the prisoners themselves maintaining good order and discipline, which is a recipe for disaster in the long run.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you've written something really interesting on informant recruitment for CREST, that's the Center for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, which I hadn't actually heard of before. Who are CREST?

**Ian Stanier:**

They're a body that funds research into areas around counter terrorism and security. It's one of the best websites I've ever seen in terms of academic papers. They boil it down to bite sized chunks and it's active in a whole series of areas, not just in the area of elicitation of intelligence, sort of about the extreme right wing, online and terrorism.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what I like about this is that you and Jordan Nunan wrote a nice piece that expanded on all the different types of motivations for why somebody would become an informant for the police, which I thought was really interesting because it's a much more expansive list than we've had in the past.

**Ian Stanier:**

You're right. The traditional mnemonic or framework was something called MICE which stood for money, ideology, coercion or ego and these were the sort of main motivational hooks.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Money, ideology, coercion and ego which are pretty much the reasons that I go to work, but yeah. Carry on.

**Ian Stanier:**

So, now what myself and Jordan looked at and felt, look, it's much more nuanced than that. So what we did, we looked at autobiographies by informants and those people who've run informants. We spoke to handlers, we undertook research around why people said they were helping police and we came up with a mnemonic called FIREPLACES. It expands I think considerably why people might be motivated. So for example, for financial reasons, ideological reasons, it might be for revenge.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How can source handlers use an understanding of the motivation? How can they use this better in their work? How can this actually be beneficial? I mean, isn't it just enough to know, okay, they want to be an informant, so tell me what you've got?

**Ian Stanier:**

It isn't enough if you're going to run that informant effectively, you want to retain the relationship, or cessate the relationship when you think something's going on there. So if an informant's motivation to provide information to you is to actually get himself access to the sort of questions that the police are asking about his organized crime gang, you want to know that, don't you? He or she is trying to tap you for information just by listening to sort of questions you're asking around tasking.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what you're saying here is that one of the reasons that somebody might offer to become a criminal informant is simply to gain more intel on the police?

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah. I mean, the informant relationship provides an opportunity for counter penetration, so they're attempting to get into you rather than the police trying to get into their organized crime gang.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's some Machiavellian shit right there, isn't it?

**Ian Stanier:**

Well, would you believe it? It happens. There's been a number of cases where there's been a high level of volunteers, walk ins as they're known, who've provided great information but that access is purely for their own purposes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

As we were talking about John le Carré, one of the lesser appreciated John le Carré novels is *The Russia House* and a whole key part of that centers around a list of questions that British and American intelligence have for an informant and the questions themselves give away so much about what they know and what they don't know that the questions themselves are hugely valuable.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah. Absolutely. And that's what we have to be kind of careful of is that it should be a one-way flow of information.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I should've actually prefaced that with, spoiler alert.

**Ian Stanier:**

I mean, I know you like your movies. Have you watched *Zero Dark Thirty*?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yes, the story of the eventual demise of Osama Bin Laden.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. And during the story, you see, based on true facts, somebody dangle themselves in front of American Intelligence Agencies to become an informant, evidence is the fact that he's close to the Al Qaeda leadership and what he was trying to do was secure access. And tragically, once he got access to the base, he eventually blew himself up and killed seven members of the intelligence agencies and wounded many others. Yeah, the mnemonic provides 10 other forms of motivation. Interesting thing about this also Jerry is the fact that it's quite rare for an informant to have just one motivational hook. You might get someone who does it for the ideological reasons or moral reasons but he also is doing it for the money. Informant's motivation changes during the nature of the relationship.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So they could start by becoming an informant for adversarial reasons.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I would tend to be probably suspicious of those reasons if you felt that there was some coercion, but then if you build a rapport with them then their motivation changes, is it something like that?

**Ian Stanier:**

Something like that. For example, they might provide information to get a reduced sentence. Once they've then gone to court and have been given their sentence, what you find sometimes is that a number of those continue the relationship. So their original motivation, which was a reduced sentence, is spent, now they're doing it because they enjoy working for you. They feel as though they're provisioning information, they're productive, and they're also potentially earning money out of it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So it's the far places, people might become police informants for financial, ideological, revenge purposes, excitement, protection, lifestyle, or to get access, which is what we were just talking about, coercion, ego, or sentence, to reduce their sentence as you were just saying but the one that really I found a little fascinating was Walter Mitty informants and these are people who have become informants simply to fuel their own ego. And for anybody that doesn't know, Walter Mitty, that comes from a book originally I believe or a short story but then became a movie that became *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*.

Do you remember the original with Danny Kaye back from the 1940s? And then it was remade as a completely different kind of film by Ben Stiller in 2013 and I will highlight that one only because it has a really good soundtrack. But I mean,

how many times have you run across people who are sort of basically selling out drug dealing networks purely for the Walter Mitty ego sense of being a police informant?

**Ian Stanier:**

Well, I suppose there's varying degrees. I think at one end, the Walter Mitty where they're not quite on the same planet and you'd have to kind of question whether you would be running them unless they gave exceptional information. But there's others who quite enjoy the buzz of providing information and seeing the police response. In fact, there was a recent case as a rural commission in Victoria, in Australia, with the case of Lawyer X and in that case, there was reading around it, the suggestion was that part of the reason why she was providing information was she got a buzz out of the fact that there was an operational response.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Isn't there a risk that you can run into a disproportionate operational response simply to fuel their ego? And I'm partly raising that question because we've had a few instances, have you heard of this issue of swatting in the United States? Where somebody calls in a fake incident to somebody's home claiming they see somebody with a gun or they're threatening somebody just to elicit a response from a SWAT team which has had some fatal consequences, some tragic fatal consequences in a few cases. But isn't there the risk here that when ego is coming into play, that we can get a disproportionate police response because of questionable motivational methods or purposes on the part of the informant?

**Ian Stanier:**

Well yeah, potentially, but I would say that the difference is that you're not going to get an operational response if the information is poor. No law enforcement agency would, I hope, act simply on the word of an informant.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, we would hope, right? Fingers crossed.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, I think-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because things have happened.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, absolutely. But I think now, if you're dealing with... you've got work forces in the UK that are 20% less than they were in 2010, you see that the resources have a sort of scatter guard. So, you're seeking to collaborate and triangulate different sources to make sure, yeah, let's go for that one.

You're absolutely right though Jerry to say, yeah, there needs to be caution. So if someone's providing information on revenge, you could look at that two ways. You could say, "How can we trust someone if they're providing that information for revenge?" Well, you can look at it from the perspective of, if they're so determined to remove that

person from the streets, for example, they might be someone who might be harming them or their family, it's in their interest to provide the best quality intelligence possible for the police to be able to action it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I do remember I was at the east end of London, I was at the recently closed down 'Hotel Whiskey' Bow Road Police Station front counter and a very attractive woman strode into the front of the police station and came over to see me when I was the station officer and said, "I want to speak to a detective." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because my husband's one of the leading drug dealers in this area and he's having an affair and I want to tell you everything about that bastard." That is a solid revenge motivation, but some of the other revenge motivations can be much more specific. You can also be taking out other groups of drug dealers to improve your business and that's more challenging, right?

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, absolutely. If I just perhaps revisit what you just said there about the domestic partner, it is revenge but it's also a good example of motivation being nuanced. It's also about protection because by passing that information to the police, what they're seeking to do is to protect themselves from that person in the future. So if we can action the intelligence, put them away in prison, what you've got there is both protection and revenge, haven't you?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, it's cheaper than divorce proceedings, right? Get somebody locked up for 20 years.

**Ian Stanier:**

You sound like a man who knows.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, you know, with age comes experience. So that's one focus to the revenge side, but also we have a lot of tit for tat killings going on in places like Philadelphia and Baltimore right now where you've got different drug gangs and that's an interesting way to essentially take out some of the competition but that's a very different kind of revenge motive from the wronged woman walking into the police station. That becomes interesting from a moral perspective because what you're basically trying to do is to create more space for your own business, right?

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely. And what I would stress here is that, just because you're an informant doesn't mean it's a license to continue to commit crime. An informant who comes on board on that basis will continue to be looked at and researched by the police. If they start to get the impression that is the purpose, it happens all the time that informant relationships are cessated and that becomes clear.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, you've been in the position of being in charge of these things. Is that an easy thing to do, to know when to pull the plug on an informant relation? Say, you know, "We're done. This is getting too risky for the police service."

**Ian Stanier:**

Pulling the plug could be based on a number of reasons. First of all, the informant's access to intelligence dries up. Sometimes we cessate because we've got better informants than them. We sometimes cessate because the risk to themselves is far too great. They might be willing and enthusiastic but actually they're not match fit enough to be able to operate at that level of granularity. So that would be a concern.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've done some work with DEA guys in central America who've lost informants in some of the most horrific circumstances, yes, when they've been discovered.

**Ian Stanier:**

Yeah, and that's really important. That's a good example that you just shared there that actually, it's not the movies, is it? This is the real thing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, whole families getting taken out in the most brutal circumstances possible. It's just heartbreaking.

**Ian Stanier:**

Not just the physical harm. If an informant's identity is compromised, you look at Northern Ireland with the Troubles that go back generations, the fact that someone's dad was an informant or granddad was an informant is still an issue for some members of that community. There are significant consequences for inappropriate recruitment or continued use of an informant.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The nuance around this area, the fact that it's almost more of a craft than a science right now, it strikes me that there's a certain type of police officer that's a good recruiter. Do we know anything about what the skillset or what the personality looks like for those people who are good confidential human source recruiters?

**Ian Stanier:**

I think they naturally display rapport traits. I think they are active listeners.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sorry, what did you say?

**Ian Stanier:**

<laughs> They listen to the person, they listen to their agenda. They're not trying to go straight to the intelligence. It's the same sort of person that you might meet at a party and you instantly warm to them. A good example there Jerry is Kim Philby, one of the top Russian spies of all time in terms of penetration into British intelligence, and he describes the moment when he was recruited by his Soviet recruiter and he talks about this person making him feel like the most important person in the room, not just the room, the world.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So somebody who appreciates the... you have to appreciate the dance before you come in for the kiss.

**Ian Stanier:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Let me say, as one of the few people who is working towards bringing more knowledge and bringing a little bit more science to this, I appreciate the work that you're doing and yeah, it's funny to connect. I know we've met a couple of times in recent years, but to catch up with somebody, we first met when we were but youngsters, teenagers, back in Hendon 30 something years ago. It's nice to see you mate.

**Ian Stanier:**

It was nice to see you and it's been a privilege to be here, to be part of your brilliant podcast series. Thanks very much Jerry.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, that's praise I will definitely be redacting. I'll be leaving it in. Cheers mate.

**Ian Stanier:**

Cheers.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Take care.

**Ian Stanier:**

Thank you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was episode 38 of Reducing Crime, recorded online in August 2021. I'll post links to some of Ian's work on the podcast page at [reducingcrime.com](http://reducingcrime.com). There you'll also find a transcript of this and every episode. If you're planning a lecture or two around the podcast, feel free to DM me @Jerry\_Ratcliffe for a free spreadsheet of multiple-choice questions. Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast and follow @\_ReducingCrime, don't forget the underscore, for upcoming episodes. And as usual, be safe and best of luck.