What Makes Traitors Tick?

Psychology of the Insider Spy

By David L. Charney, M.D.
Psychiatrist Specializing in the Mind of the Spy
Spying: Still A Big Problem

- What’s being done to manage the problem?
  - Initial screening
  - Reinvestigations
  - High-tech detection
  - Counterintelligence/Security

- How is it working?
  - Detection rarely works
  - Dirty little secret: Cases are usually solved when someone defects from the other side

- What’s been missing?
  - Better understanding the mind of the spy
How I Became An Expert in the Mind of the Spy

- Training in Psychiatry
- Air Force Psychiatrist
  - Strategic Air Command
  - Andrews AFB
  - Treated NSA Personnel
    - Received a Security Clearance
- Thought about becoming a consultant to the CIA
  - Application too intimidating — so I’ll wait and try “maybe later…”
Down the Rabbit Hole by Happy Accidents

- Solo Psychiatric Practice, Old Town, Alexandria
- Group Practice that needed staffing up
- Just one more Social Worker—and I’m in!
- Decade of treating CIA and other IC personnel
- Squash game leads to Earl Pitts, my first spy case
- Luck of practicing near the Rocket Docket
Access is Key

- Government psychologists and psychiatrists have access
  - Only do evaluations, adjudications
  - No long-term therapy

- Defense Team also has access
  - Affords freedom to intensively engage with captured spy

- No one else is allowed access
  - They don’t have the clearances
My First Meetings with Earl Pitts

A bargain struck:

- "I’ll be your guinea pig"
Deepening the Knowledge - More Than One Case
Growing the Relationship

- Listening is the key
  - All other contacts either do all the talking—or hate you
  - What I do that’s different: I keep my mouth shut and I’m nice

- Nature of the Relationship
  - Forensic Psychiatrist?
  - Doctor-Patient?
  - Therapist?
  - Confidante?
  - None or all of the above?

- Our Explicit Agreement
  - Spy will open up—to partially atone for his spying crimes
  - Reveals thinking to help us manage spying going forward
  - I can use my findings for educational purposes
  - Use of “Composite Spy” to preserve some confidentiality
Parameters of the Relationship

Predictable and Consistent

- Same Routine
- Same Location
- Same Clothing

Intensity of Contact

- Visits for up to two hours
- Weekly
- For a whole year
First Lesson:
A spy is the loneliest person in the world

- Loneliness empowers the handler—who exploits it
- My role may partially mirror the handler—but *without* exploiting it
- Tone we built: Mutually cooperative enterprise
Starting Assumptions About Motivation

- Intelligence Community’s preferred spy motivations:
  - Greed and Money
  - Of MICE and Men
    - Money
    - Ideology
    - Compromise
    - Ego
Conventional Theories of Motivation? Not What I Found!

“To every complex problem there is a simple answer. And it is wrong.”

— H.L. Mencken

- Importance of asking: Why?
  - More than once, like a 4 year old
  - After the first easy answers, it gets progressively harder
  - For example: Consider the following Question and Answer…
  - Are you satisfied with the answer?
Why do people eat in gourmet restaurants?
Because they’re hungry.
Are you satisfied with that answer??
Why do people spy?

For the money.

Are you satisfied with that answer??
Why Does it Keep Happening and Why Can’t We Find Them?

- Bell-Shaped Curve of Life
  - An unlucky few get stuck at the bad tail
  - But which ones?
- The Law of Large Numbers
Finding Spies Subject to Iron Law of Economics

- Law of Diminishing Returns
  - More and more effort is required to get back less and less results
Tradeoffs in Screening for Spies

- False Negatives — Missing some spies
- False Positives — Wrongly accusing others
- Problem — Too much investigation hurts morale
But there IS hope:

I’m a Doctor—

I Discover the Genetic Marker for Spies!
Dr. Charney’s Genetic Marker for Spies:

- The Y Chromosome!
- 95% of spies are male
- Male pride and ego
Core Psychology of the Insider Spy

An intolerable sense of personal failure as privately defined by that person
Male Psychology based on Pride and Ego

- The Dynamics: Projection and Externalization
  - I feel bad inside about myself; I’m a Loser/Failure
  - No! I’m not the Loser/Failure; it’s Them!
  - Those b----------ds! I’ll show Them!

- Context is key
  - Tip O’Neil: “All politics is local”
  - Anger, revenge flow to familiar, nearby, handy targets
  - If you work for the Post Office…
Falling Down (1993)
A middle-aged man dealing with both unemployment and divorce, William Foster (Michael Douglas) is having a bad day. . . .
Spies are Unhappy

- An intolerable sense of personal failure as privately defined by that person
- Most are not “recruited” and don’t volunteer until after 30 years old
  - After they have had time to try—and fail
Gender Differences in Motivation

- **Men**—
  - Men need to be viewed as career successes and good providers
  - Men can’t risk losing respect of wife

- **Women**—
  - Women may feel like failures if they don’t have a loving companion
  - Women who become spies may be trying to fill in what’s missing
Chasing The Holy Grail: Perfect Profile of the Spy

- A blind alley
- Spies are not born; they’re made

- Think Movie, Not Still Photo
  - Not static: Not one Perfect Profile, like a snapshot photo
  - Dynamic: More like a movie that unfolds over time

- Epigenetic Theory
  - Life happens
  - Events, experiences, bring forth hidden tendencies: the Good ones—but also the BAD ones
Ten Life Stages of the Insider Spy

1. Sensitizing Stage
2. Stress/Spiral Stage
3. Crisis/Climax/Resolution Stage
4. Post-Recruitment Stage
5. Remorse (Morning After) Stage
6. Active Spy Career Stage
7. Dormancy Stage(s)
8. Pre-Arrest Stage
9. Arrest and Post-Arrest Stage
10. Brooding in Jail Stage

- ● = Windows
- ★ = Convergence
Stage One

SENSITIZING STAGE
Nearly everyone experiences adversity

If early adverse life experiences always produced spy outcomes
- 85% of all Law Enforcement, Military and Intelligence Personnel would have to be let go!

Adversity is sensitizing—but not determinative
Stage Two

STRESS / SPIRAL STAGE
Acceleration

- Things start to pile up six months or more before decision to spy is made
- Sometimes even faster – as little as 2 days

“Psychological Perfect Storm”

- Too many bad things stacking up all at once
- Feels like drowning
Stage Three

CRISIS / CLIMAX / RESOLUTION STAGE
“Personal Bubble Psychology”

- Cornered, desperately reaching for a Survival Strategy
- Aha! Epiphany of a Solution
- Context is key
- Going “Postal”

**BUT**

**WITH**

**ACCESS**
Stage Four

POST-RECRUITMENT STAGE
What Makes Traitors Tick?

- Euphoria
- For a month or two
- Busy learning new tradecraft skills
Stage Five

REMORESE / MORNING-AFTER STAGE
“What was I thinking?!”

The signature statement that retroactively defines “Personal Bubble Psychology”

Recognition of being stuck and trapped: No turning back!
What Makes Traitors Tick?

Imagining trying to get out of your deal with the Mafia Don!
Turn Yourself In? Not likely. Sharks in a Shark Tank
Christopher Boyce, “Falcon and the Snowman” Spy, commenting on his Stage Five:

- “For whatever reason a person begins his espionage, a week after the folly begins, the original intent and purpose becomes lost in the ignominy of the ongoing nightmare.”

- “Where was the despair? Where were the sweaty palms and shaky hands? This man said nothing about having to wake up in the morning with gut-gripping fear before steeling yourself once again for the ordeal of going back into that vault.”
More From Christopher Boyce

- “None of them knew, as I did, that there was no excitement, there was no thrill. There was only depression and a hopeless enslavement to an inhuman, uncaring foreign bureaucracy.

- “If a person knows what espionage would mean to him, what kind of life he would have in the future, it’s just so totally an unattractive thing to be into—you’re never going to get away from it and it’s never going to end.

- “I would tell them they are going to regret it, that there just isn’t anything about it that is how it’s pictured in the public’s mind. There’s no exit from it.
28 YEARS LATER—Boyce’s Stage Five is STILL on his mind
"If I were him, I would at this point probably be having second thoughts. Asking myself: What did I do? What have I brought down upon my head? Did I really do this?"
More from Boyce on Snowden (but really talking about himself)

- “He can never come back home. He's totally separated from everything he has ever known, from his family. He is always going to be a fugitive, until they get him. And eventually, they will.

- “He will never see his family again. The only way that he can truly hide is to abandon his whole past, his entire life.

- “When he realizes that, he's going to be racked with depression. I would imagine that his stress levels are at a point where they could actually make him physically sick. I'm sure everything is gnawing at him. And he's isolated.
Chris Boyce on Committing Espionage

“I realized immediately that:

- There was no stepping back
- I was doomed
- My life would never go back to the way it was before
- I was surrounded by an impending sense of doom, knowing this was something that could not end well. . . .
- What you’re really doing is just walking into a buzz-saw.”

CNN, 2013
Stage Six

ACTIVE SPY CAREER STAGE
Rationalizations to keep going

- I can get away with spying for years and years
- The bad things I do have a good side
- I have no other choice

Constant Agonizing Stress

- Uncertainty
  - Most corrosive mental state for any human being
  - Can’t plan, can’t think straight

- Paranoia
  - Getting caught is never out of your thoughts
  - Fear that someone from the other side will turn you in
What was Exciting is now:

Drudgery, Pointless, Exhausting
Stage Seven

DORMANCY STAGE(S)
- Frequent fantasies of escape

- Puts the lie to the assumption the spy is a Relentless Evil Genius
Robert Lipka: Spied in the 1960’s, Caught in the 1990’s

- “When I first got into it, I didn't realize what it all meant. As I was doing it, I did come to realize and I did try to withdraw numerous times. I’ve lived a life of terror for 30 years that this whole thing would get found out.”
Stage Eight

PRE-ARREST STAGE
Seemingly sloppy tradecraft
Disparaged by counterintelligence professionals as amateurish

(But how come they got away with it for so long right under your noses?)

What it really means:
- I’m not that stupid
- I know you’re on to me
- Let’s just get it over with!
Stage Nine

ARREST AND POST-ARREST STAGE
Return of the Defiant Teenager: Insolence and belligerence
Gives the wrong impression
It’s actually his Third Failure—and his shame is made public too
Stage Ten

BROODING IN JAIL STAGE
• Sadder, wiser, even philosophical

• Unexpected displays of patriotic sentiment, offering gratuitous advice

“Espionage is a crime that not only destroys your future...it destroys your past.”

Earl Pitts
September 1997
Existential Dilemmas of the Insider Spy
Three Existential Consequences

- **One: Failure upon Failure**
  1. Was unable to successfully navigate his own life, so in desperation and panic, he crossed the line
  2. Discovered that his best attempt to solve his worst life crisis turned out to be a—pathetic delusion
  3. Couldn’t even succeed at being a spy—he got caught!

- **Two: Stuckness**
  - State of paralysis
  - Loss of control, unable to steer course of his own life
  - No longer the Captain of his Soul
Three Existential Consequences

Three: *Convergence of psychology*

All spies reaching Stage Five are forced into sharing the same thoughts and feelings:

- Fear of being caught
- Constant grinding uncertainty
- Waiting for the other shoe to drop
- Recognition that perfect tradecraft offers no protection
- Despair and hopelessness about direction of life
- Yearnings for deliverance and relief
Ten Life Stages of the Insider Spy

THE TEN LIFE STAGES

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WHY CURRENT STRATEGIES DON’T WORK VERY WELL
Misunderstanding the mind of the spy

Trying the same old things, hoping for better outcomes

Clinging to the idea of building better technology-based mousetraps

Fig leaf of EAPs
  - Not trusted
  - They won’t go there
What Makes Traitors Tick?

TIME FOR SOMETHING NEW
What Makes Traitors Tick?

NATIONAL OFFICE FOR INTELLIGENCE RECONCILIATION

NOIR
**Negative Consequences of Current Policy:**

- Spies stay stuck in no-win situations
- Spies are forced deeper into the arms of the hostile intelligence services that own them
- Damages to our National Security worsen and accumulate year by year
NOIR: A Way Out

- What if there were a way out?
- What if there were an alternative pathway so a spy could voluntarily turn himself in?
- What if there were a government-sanctioned, safe off-ramp?

- Imagine it.
Reconciliation—An existing word used a new way

- What’s the word for a spy voluntarily turning himself in?
- There is no such word—because it virtually never happens!
- An existing word must be repurposed:

Reconciliation

Now you know the Secret of NOIR:

- Proposed mechanism for managing the safe exiting of spies—
- NATIONAL OFFICE FOR INTELLIGENCE RECONCILIATION
  - Acronym is NOIR
  - If stood up, could add many other linked benefits
The Key Tradeoff

- No jail

- All other punishments are left on the table:
  - Loss of job in the Intelligence Community
  - Loss of Clearances
  - Fines
  - Forfeiture of all monies obtained from spying
  - Lifetime surveillance of finances and activities
  - Possible need to assume new identity and relocate
  - Other punishments, as indicated
SPIRIT OF NOIR

- A hard tradeoff to contemplate
- Not out of sympathy or empathy for spies
- Not out of sweet sentiments

- Strictly to strengthen our National Security
  - Current policies work against our collective interest
  - We live in dangerous times, with growing threats
  - Hostile state-sponsored espionage efforts keep mushrooming

- Time to consider new, even controversial, out-of-the-box ideas
PART ONE
True Psychology of the Insider Spy

PART TWO
Proposing a New Policy
For Improving National Security
By Fixing the Problem of Insider Spies

By David L. Charney, MD

▪ Read the NOIR White Paper

▪ Visit our website:

NOIR4USA.org
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QUESTIONS
What Makes Traitors Tick?

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