The Art of Social Engineering

## Recent Security Event

**Teen from Cardinal Newman School in South Carolina was arrested by police two days after being expelled from the school for making alleged threats.**

A 16-year-old student at a South Carolina Catholic school has been arrested for posting racist videos of himself threatening to 'shoot up' his high school.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7328107/Catholic-student-16-arrested-posting-racist-videos-threatening-shoot-school.html>

## Time For a Change?

*Arkansas State University employee arrested*

44-year-old Susan Upchurch is accused of threatening an Arkansas State University employee and calling in a bomb threat to the A-State College of Nursing and Health Professions building on August 5.

<https://katv.com/news/local/woman-arrested-for-threatening-asu-employee-making-fake-bomb-threat>

**The Tripwire**

*A Situational Report of events and research on security matters impacting the United States and its citizens today*

Has Social Engineering (SE) become more prevalent or has social networking, given social engineers a larger platform. I would argue the latter. The art of SE, or merely human persuasion, has been used by salesman, military, law enforcement, and infamous con-men for decades. The ability to get someone to do something they would not normally do or provide information they would typically protect is an art. This persuasion technique takes expertise and a skillset not necessarily possessed by everyone.

Social media sites have given predators, and pursuers an until now inaccessible, avenue to potential targets. Using the skillset of social engineering on-line is even easier than trying to interact with potential victims, who may be strangers personally.

When operating on-line, predators eliminate the need to control the environment. Unlike in-person, body language and location can impact the conditions. Sitting at a computer, the predator only focuses on responses and verbal exchange.

Today's technology has impacted social engineering in many ways and in many areas, including law enforcement and the military.

“Elicitation can occur in a multitude of settings and often comes across as normal conversation, thus being difficult to detect. In a military Human Intelligence (HUMINT) framework, it’s common to think of elicitation occurring only in a controlled interrogation environment. This erroneous notion narrowly scopes possible elicitation application and would ultimately negate the many accounts of social engineers successfully performing elicitation in very much uncontrolled situations.” -*Linnea Biel, MS, U.S. Army*

Social Engineers can come in the form of law-abiding citizens such as businessmen and executives, as well as predators and pursuers. Many predators, in fact, are law-abiding until they are not. A predator or a pursuer can use the SE skillset to develop the consequences and conditions favorable for a dangerous or violent act.

We are a moral and responsive society. Whether on-line or in person, when someone is kind to us, we instinctively want to be nice back. Conversely, when someone is less than courteous to us, we tend to be less responsive — this is a human instinct. The social engineer uses these characteristics to his/her advantage. The predator knows that being nice, cordial, and friendly will be met with a similar response. The social engineer uses this approach to establish a favorable condition for whatever act they are pursuing.

The act may not be violent or even evil, it may be to get access to an otherwise inaccessible area, into an event, an extra portion, etc.

Sadly, the same skillset is routinely used for more evil acts.

 “Positive Assumptive Worldview. On some level, most of us believe that that the world is basically good, that good things happen to good people, and that we, fortunately, are good people. In other words, we believe the world is generally a just and fair place.” – *Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Psychology Today*

The level of victimhood can range from an uncomfortable situation to financial loss to violence. Rapists, serial or otherwise are notorious for using social engineering to get close to their victims.

“Some rapists target women they've met (even briefly) and commit a single crime with little premeditation, but serial rapists are another breed. Typically, intelligent, normal-seeming men, who often have a wife or girlfriend and a demeanor that lets them blend into their communities, they're known for their methodical preparation, their practiced ability to home in on vulnerable strangers, and the compulsive, recurrent nature of their attacks. When it comes to dangerous criminals like these, your best weapon is awareness: The more you know about how they work and who they look for, the better your chances of staying out of their sights.” -*Cosmopolitan Magazine*

There is no perfect science to combat SE. A stranger being nice might be a friendly and sincere person. The ability to keep our ego in check is critical to controlling the situation. Be kind to those who are nice to you but be aware of those that are overly complimentary and won't take a subtle hint or take no for an answer. If the proverbial “nice guy” starts to make you uneasy, trust your gut and change the environment and the conditions.

“Be nice to everyone you meet but be prepared to kill them if you have to.” – General Maddog Mattis

Stat of the Day:

**About 85 to 90 percent of sexual assaults reported by college women are perpetrated by someone known to the victim; about half occur on a date.**

* National Institutes of Justice