

# Kidnapping Claude

While open trade between countries on the continent is likely to bring increased revenue for all, it also brings with it new and perilous risks.



**C**laude\* is the marketing manager for a South African investment company with a head office in Johannesburg. In a bid to gain a more prominent footprint on the continent, the company was preparing to open a new office in Khartoum, Sudan. Claude was in the city for just over a week when a hooded gang ambushed his taxi. The taxi driver was violently attacked and Claude, although unharmed, was forced into the back of a van and blindfolded. His cellphone, wallet and briefcase were later removed and he spent the next month or so in a blacked out room with no idea where he was or why.

Claude's situation is by no means rare. Kidnap of foreigners for ransom is prolific across the continent but especially prevalent in the north. The gang who kidnapped Claude initially demanded one million Sudanese pounds (about \$172 568) for his release, but fortunately, his company had a kidnap and ransom policy in place.

Upon receiving a call from the gang, the company CEO immediately contacted his crisis response consultants and a specialist kidnap and ransom response consultant was dispatched to the local vicinity. He arrived with other company representatives in Nairobi, Kenya, in less than 24 hours and his priority was to set up an incident management team.

This usually comprises of key employees of the company who are best suited to negotiate and grant undertakings on behalf of the organisation. In this case, most of the incident management team were South Africans who needed to be flown up from Johannesburg to

Nairobi. Claude's company was strategically advised to bring his family in to handle the discussions; by employing this tactic, the ransom demand immediately dropped to 400 000 Sudanese pounds (\$69 027).

"In the event of a kidnapping, the negotiation procedure – and particularly the first few days of the case – are often fundamental to the outcome of the situation," says Andrew Munro, MD of Praesidio Risk Managers. A quick payment to kidnapers with little or no negotiation results in the kidnapers perceiving that the family or company has funds easily available. Preparedness to pay any ransom can ultimately lead to a higher ransom demanded.

## Negotiating skills

"In Claude's case, the crisis response consultants worked out how these particular kidnapers would respond when they realised they were dealing with a family rather than an organisation and made the appropriate recommendations."

The most employers and employees remain grossly inexperienced and untrained in how to go about negotiating a release of colleagues from violent kidnapers, and little emphasis is placed on this in company training exercises. This is why the use of professional crisis response experts, who have experience in handling these events, is crucial. They use tried and tested methods to improve the chances of a safe return for the victim and are well-versed in various negotiating tactics, although this is just the first step, warns Munro.

"There are actually a lot of issues that need to be considered in a ransom scenario. Where

will the money come from to pay the ransom? How does the family or company deal with the police, embassies and the media? Do they need to travel anywhere? Does a company need to suspend operations? And what about psychological counselling for the victim and their family after the event?"

After being severely beaten, having his leg broken and suffering extensive psychological trauma, Claude was finally released after 35 days in captivity, following the payment of a negotiated ransom.

As well as the ransom amount, the company's kidnap and ransom policy also paid out for the costs associated with Claude's family, including legal fees, travel, accommodation, subsistence as well as the payment of Claude's salary for the period he was held, plus 60 days following his release. The travel and accommodation costs for members of the incident management team and the wages of the company employees involved were also covered as well as the temporary security around the project following the case. Medical and psychiatric fees for treatment of Claude's injuries and wellbeing as well as the personal effects that were stolen from Claude while he was in captivity and the expenses for the period for his rest and rehabilitation expenses were also covered.

Besides the large monetary amounts that were covered by the policy, the cover also reassures the affected company and family that the situation will be dealt with by experienced professionals, concludes Munro. Things could have gone horribly wrong in the hands of a less experienced team. 📌

\* Not his real name