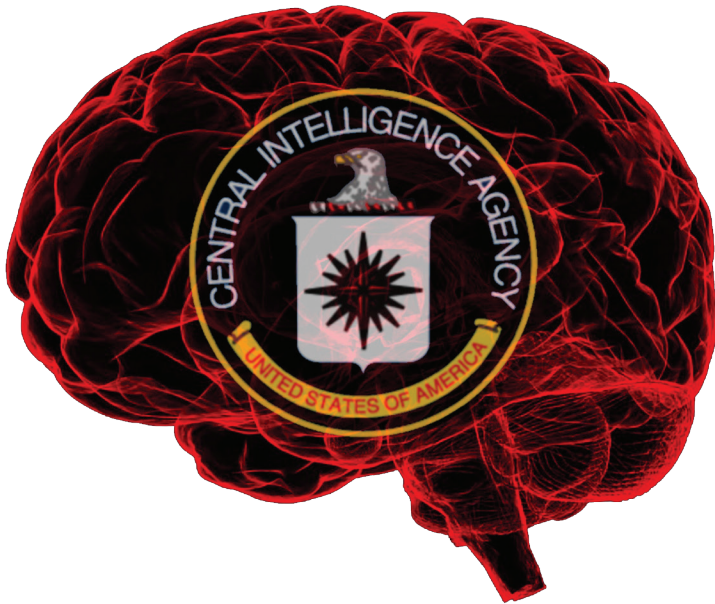

THE

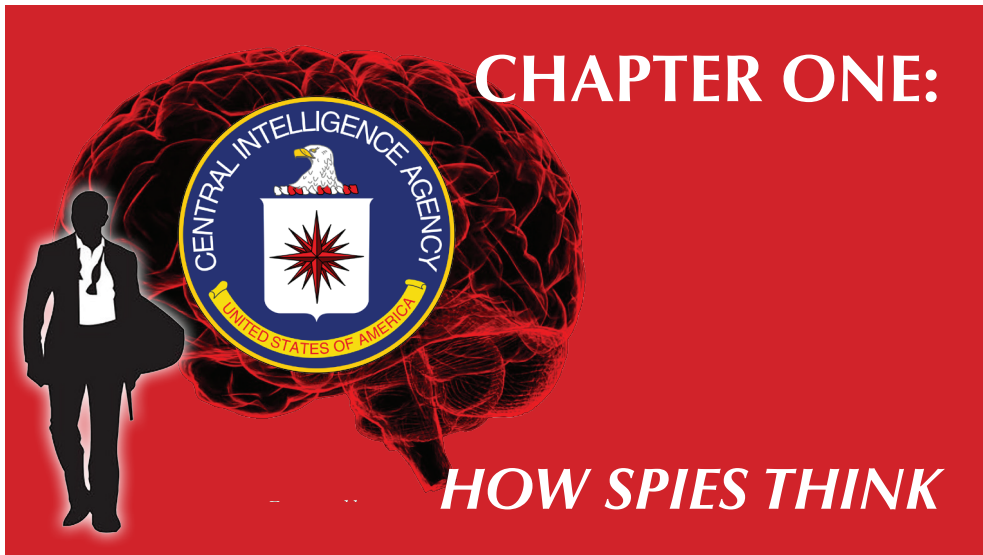
CARVER MINDSET

HOW TO THINK LIKE A SPY



*Foreword By Leo "The Godfather of CARVER" Labaj
Retired CIA Bomb Tech*

LUKE BENCIE



From infancy on, we are all spies; the shame is not this but that the secrets to be discovered are so paltry and few.

—John Updike

In the 2001 espionage thriller *Spy Game*, there is a classic scene where Nathan Muir, a veteran CIA case officer played by Robert Redford, is training Tom Bishop, a young recruit played by Brad Pitt, in the timeless techniques of human intelligence (HUMINT) and tradecraft. In spy parlance, tradecraft is a term that has been around for decades and refers to the practice, method and technologies used in modern espionage. It includes skills such as elicitation, casing, “dead drops,” surveillance detection and recruitment.

In the scene, the crusty Muir tells the inexperienced trainee Bishop, “Every room is a snapshot. You need to ask what’s wrong with this picture. You need to see it, assess it and dismiss most of it without thinking. It’s just like breathing.”

The dialogue is a great summation of what it means to think like a spy. Essentially, it is situational awareness. The intelligence officer assesses the baselines and anomalies around him or her while staying keen to danger and opportunity. The concept of “reading the room” becomes second nature. In the case of the movie scene, it means identifying potential strangers as targets of opportunity.

We'll get into that later. For now, you don't need to be a professionally trained covert operative to understand the value of assessing risks and opportunities in everyday life. Those environmental cues are inherent in all of us. In fact, the average person makes upwards of 35,000 decisions per day. They can include deciding what to wear in the morning, giving into the temptation – or not – of eating a donut for breakfast, what stocks to pick for your portfolio, how best to parent your kids, taking advantage of a 2-for-1 sale at the grocery store and so on.

Our human need to make evaluations, as well as determining whether we accept the random prospects that life throws our way, is endless. The Information Age (along with advertisers and social media) has ensured this. Though probably not life or death judgments, we have become a society so consumed with juggling our careers, families and other day-to-day, decision-making realities that sometimes even having James Bond's job might seem like a relaxing break from our own repetitive grind. Who wouldn't substitute their Excel spreadsheets, grumpy bosses and endless feeds of obnoxious Internet ads for a high-stakes game of baccarat against a nefarious arms dealer in Monte Carlo?

For this reason, the craft of espionage has become romanticized, admired and pursued by many people throughout the ages. It is the thinking person's profession, coupled with just the right hint of danger. It conjures images of traveling to exotic destinations, sharing sensitive secrets with a beautiful stranger in a foreign language, adhering to unique cultures and traditions, and engaging in shadowy operations predicated on saving the world. It basically provides the intelligence officer with a front-row seat to geopolitical history ... a history in which he or she can participate directly!

Seriously, does it get any better?

The premise of this book is to provide you with a framework – and a frame of mind – that can assist you with quickly assessing most situations that you may find yourself in. While you might not be responsible for infiltrating Vladimir Putin's inner-circle, it will introduce you to a methodology, called **CARVER**, that will allow you to analyze your environment more quickly and clearly. It will benefit you both personally and professionally.

The Intelligence Mindset

To be a good spy, you must possess what we call the Intelligence Mindset. This means you must have the ability to quickly absorb details (no matter how minimal) from the world around you in order to extrapolate a conclusion and make the best possible decisions you can. It's basically making the most of what you've got. Remember, real intelligence is typically fragmented. Rarely will you ever have the complete picture, and therefore you must learn to fill in the blanks as well as possible – without making the situation worse.

The philosophy of **CARVER**, along with other basic intel models, will provide you with the time-tested tools and techniques utilized by highly trained intelligence professionals to help fill the gaps. And, while all the content is unclassified, it is still the foundation for how spies are educated and is meant to help you think like a secret agent would through various situations. Just a sampling of these situations might include:

- Finding yourself in a dangerous environment (ex: a back-alley in Mogadishu, Somalia)
- Traveling in a foreign country where nobody speaks your language (ex: Tripoli, Libya)
- Negotiating the price of something (ex: buying weapons in the mountain bazars of Darra Adam Khel in Pakistan)
- Deciding on who to trust (ex: befriending a vetted agent or double agent?)
- Needing to persuade someone (ex: recruiting a foreigner to spy for you)
- Determining what course of action to follow (ex: stay in place or move?)
- Making the best possible decision possible on limited information (ex: continue the mission or abort?)

No matter your profession, the need to gain clarity and insight into a difficult (or even mundane) situation will always be relevant. Spies understand this. They recognize that even the smallest bits of information leave clues. Nothing can be overlooked. As Ian Fleming so carefully reflected on his own career as a military intelligence officer in his James Bond novel Goldfinger, “Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. The third time it’s enemy action.”

Let me put it another way. The field of intelligence is jokingly referred to as the world’s second-oldest profession. But it’s also an imperfect endeavor. Seldom are there ever any absolutes. Unlike law enforcement, there is rarely what’s called a smoking gun, and the case is *never* closed. Intelligence is perpetually cyclical; hence, the term intelligence cycle. The mind of a spy is always aware that though there might be a successful resolution to a problem today (i.e., a terrorist attack has been thwarted), the likelihood of another set-back or challenge or threat is always right around the corner.

In the movie *Pearl Harbor*, actor Dan Akroyd portrays Naval Intelligence Captain Harold Thurman, a fictitious composite of several real-life World War II analysts, including Colonel Rufus Bratton, Chief of Far Eastern Section of Army Military Intelligence, and Edwin T. Layton, a Japanese linguist who stressed the importance of heeding the warnings of Japan’s cracked diplomatic cables (code name: Purple). In briefing the Navy’s Pacific Fleet Commander, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, about what the Japanese fleet might – or might not – do, Thurman explains why predictions in the intelligence world are so difficult. The conversation paints an accurate picture of how intelligence-gathering and analysis are typically incomplete.

Captain Thurman

*The intercepts having missing words and garbled lines.
So, to explain the decrypts we have to try and interpret
what they are going to do.*

Admiral Nimitz

“Interpret?” You mean guess?

Captain Thurman

We guess. It's like playing chess in the dark. Any rumor, troop movement, ship movement, spine-tingle, goose-bump, we pay attention to it. When I was in the Asiatic Fleet the locals used to try to get outside of a problem to see the inside. Well, I see a strike on Pearl Harbor, it's the worst thing that could happen. A blow to Pearl would devastate the Pacific Fleet's ability to make war.

Admiral Nimitz

So, sir, you would have us mobilize the entire fleet, at the cost of millions of dollars, based on this spine-tingling feeling of yours?

Captain Thurman

No, sir. I understand my job is to gather and interpret material. Making difficult decisions based upon incomplete information from my limited decoding ability is your job, sir.

This exchange, between an intelligence professional and a policymaker, is as relevant today as it was over 80 years ago. It demonstrates how intelligence is nothing more than information that our adversaries don't want us to know and is typically incomplete in nature. The true intel officer must do everything in his or her power, with the backing of a support team, to provide a best guesstimate of what the future holds. Unlike football prognosticators, who can give incorrect predictions before big games and still sleep soundly and securely at night, intel professionals must deliver their assessments against stakes that are much, much higher. A wrong guess in intel could mean a dangerous or embarrassing international incident or even a full-blown war.

So, how does one actually think like an intel officer – a spy? What is the secret sauce that separates Jason Bourne from Jason Alexander?

Let me state right up front that it has little (or almost nothing) to do with escaping from duct tape, knowing how to play Texas hold 'em poker, mixing the perfect martini or executing a flawless J-turn in your Aston Martin.

If I've just crushed your dreams, I apologize. Such traits might sound like fun, but real tradecraft is an entirely different animal. It requires a unique set of skills – skills which even Liam Neeson might not possess. I write as someone who has been through multiple CIA training courses dealing with escape and evasion, disguise, and weapons handling. There are indeed some cool exercises intelligence professionals must endure. But at the end of the day, as the old joke in the community goes, "You go in thinking you're going to be James Bond, and you spend more time behind a keyboard than Miss Money Penny." Like any job, the intelligence profession features its boring stretches as well.

You can find countless books on spies, spy operations and "how to think like a spy." This isn't one of them – despite its subtitle. My aim has less to do with espionage and more to do with critical thinking and decision-making. It offers a unique and valuable tool, the *CARVER Target Analysis and Vulnerability Assessment Methodology*. It's a starting point for how to focus proactively on identifying threats, weaknesses and human behaviors in most situations. It is not intended to be dry academic text, however. Rather, it is meant to provide you with a commonsense primer for framing the world around you and what to expect in the future. It is about risk-management and emergency preparedness. Most important, it is about learning to be better attuned to the world around you so you can act accordingly.

In another pivotal scene from "*Spy Game*," where an agent (informant) has been abandoned and left behind for execution by the enemy, the idealistic, almost wet-behind-the-ears Bishop (Brad Pitt) tells the veteran Muir (Robert Redford), "You can't just use these people like they're baseball cards. This is not a game!" To which Muir responds, "Oh, yes, it is ... and it's not one you want to lose."

Utilizing the principles of the **CARVER** Methodology, to be introduced in the next chapter, you can gain a better sense of how to prevent yourself from being traded like a baseball card.

Welcome to the world of intelligence!

CARVER CASE STUDY #1

The Man with a Briefcase



Following the terrorist bombings of three American hotels in Amman, Jordan, in 2005, I was sent to the Hashemite Kingdom to assist the locals with the investigation. It was a tense time in the Middle East. The war in Iraq had recently gotten underway and the al-Qaeda terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (so-named because he was from the Jordanian city of Zarqa) was stirring up trouble in the Levant.

One evening, after a long day at work, I was having a drink in a bar less than a mile from the U.S. embassy. I was approached by a man in his 30s, claiming to be an Emirate citizen, who had an “export business” in the region. Like any smart U.S. government official overseas, I was always extra reticent with people who approached me unexpectedly. You never know if they intend to do you harm, ask a favor or try to bribe you. In this instance, it was the third category.

Within 60 seconds of conversation, after I had quickly gone through the **CARVER** checklist in my head, I recognized his game. He had the audacity to offer me an unseen briefcase with fifty-thousand U.S. dollars if I would help him obtain a U.S. visa. Keep in mind that I did not even mention that I worked for the U.S. government, nor was I dressed in any typical American garb (which we Americans are so often – and rightly - accused of). The situation initially triggered the following thoughts in my head:

- Other than sitting in a bar near the U.S. embassy, how did he know I worked for the U.S. government?
- Have I been under surveillance since arriving in-country?
- Was I being set up for a blackmail or coercion scenario by a foreign intelligence service or terrorist organization?
- Was this person trying to elicit information from me?

- Was he really an Emirati, or was he a different nationality?
- Was he alone, or did he have accomplices?
- If this was something more than a casual conversation, did I have a commo (communications) plan if I need to call for help?
- What was my emergency-exit strategy if this was something more than a random bribe attempt (such as a kidnapping)?
- Did this stranger have access to anyone or anything of intelligence value? Could I reverse-pitch him? (a spy term usually associated with a counter-recruitment of an individual – usually another intelligence officer – trying to recruit me to do something illegal)

I kept my composure and did what I was taught to do. I turned the tables and begin asking him questions. Using **CARVER** as my guide, I inquired:

- Why do you think I work for the U.S. government?
- Whom do you think I am?
- Who exactly are you?
- Why do you need a U.S. visa?
- Why can't you get a visa through the normal application process?
- Where do you live?
- Do you have a family?
- Do you have a business card or any ID you can share with me?
- Do you really have a briefcase of cash on you? (I didn't see it and wasn't about to walk out to his car, even if he said it was there)

The man provided convoluted answers to my questions, while I gave little to nothing in return. He didn't have any ID and insisted that I provide him with my cellphone number. I refused, of course, but offered to take down his number. He also refused. At an impasse, I informed the stranger that I would be back again tomorrow night, and we could discuss his situation further. In the meantime, we should just enjoy our cocktails.

I ordered myself, and my new "friend" another drink from the bartender. Then I excused myself to go to the restroom. I headed to the back of the bar and found an exit. I discretely slipped outside and away to my vehicle. I drove back to my hotel, mindful of any surveillance teams that might be following me.

The next morning, I informed my chief of the incident. His first question was, "Did the guy have any access?" A standard question. It meant, "Could we recruit him to spy for us?" I told my boss that I didn't think so. He instructed me to notify the security folks, who would in turn notify other U.S. government people to be on the lookout.

This is a simple example of an overseas scenario routinely facing intelligence professionals and diplomats. It also demonstrates how, given the right training, you can quickly assess your situation and the people you encounter unexpectedly.

To think like a spy, you, too, will have to train yourself to be ready for such impromptu situations. I'll give more expansive examples in the coming chapters.

Tradecraft Exercise #1

DECISION MAKING

Spies must think on their feet, adapt to changing circumstances, and make split-second decisions. To improve your skills, make (very minor) decisions in under five seconds for one day. For example – deciding what to wear, what to order, what to watch on TV, where to sit in a café, etc. Avoid indecision as quickly as possible. At the end of the day, go back and think about if each decision was acceptable.



Q: I think I would make a good intelligence officer. What are the ideal characteristics of a spy?

There is no ideal blueprint for an intelligence officer. The CIA and the other agencies of the Intelligence Community recruit individuals from various backgrounds and experiences all the time. There are some traits and characteristics, however, that generally are seen as useful. These might include foreign-language skills, a historical and current understanding of geopolitical events, a sharp mind and quick sense of humor, the ability to improvise and be self-sufficient under difficult circumstances and strong written and verbal communication skills. A military background is also useful, but not a prerequisite.

Q: There are so many conceivable things that could go wrong overseas. How are spies trained to think their way out of “worst-case” scenarios?

Contrary to popular belief, there is no magical CIA handbook containing answers to all of life’s operational questions. For example: If you find yourself strapped to a table with a buzz saw over your head, the proper way to escape is... Likewise: If you need to diffuse a ticking bomb, be sure to cut the red wire first. That’s just Hollywood nonsense. Apologies, Tom Cruise and your MI team, the real way intelligence professionals are trained is through case studies, practical (real-life) field exercises and strong mentorship from officers who have already been there and done that. Much like human history, the problems of the intelligence world frequently repeat themselves.

Q: Are intelligence officers trained in the CARVER Methodology the same way you have outlined it in this book?

Actually, I can’t give you a specific answer. Let’s just say you are going to be better prepared than most if you read this book, study its contents and give everything I offer your serious attention.

Note from the Field



Miami, Florida - 0645 hours local

I'm writing from my balcony this morning at the historic Shelborne Hotel on Miami Beach. My wife and I (and baby and grandma) are in town this week to teach another one of our popular **CARVER** Target Analysis and Vulnerability Assessment Training Courses to members of the Toronto Police Department, Belgium Special Forces, as well as a handful of miscellaneous security professionals from different industries. It is already at least 75 degrees, as the orange sun quickly rises over the Atlantic Ocean and the colorful characters of South Beach are beginning to make their way along the busy boardwalk below.

I have been teaching **CARVER** since the months immediately following 9/11. It always amazes me to see the number of security practitioners, risk managers, and organizational strategists who have heard about the **CARVER** Methodology but have never actually taken a course on it. As one of the only authorized **CARVER** certifying bodies out there (at least one that has received approvals from the US Government to teach **CARVER** to international students), it gives me immense pride to share my experience with this universal tool to all those who wish to enhance their quantitative and qualitative knowledge of conducting target analyses and vulnerability assessments.

As we've grown the program, we have partnered with institutions such as ASIS-International, as well as the University of South Florida's Office of Corporate Training and Professional Education, to make the Certified **CARVER** Assessment Professional (CCAP) designation the gold standard in the security industry.

For now, it's off for a run on the beach before class...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



For more than two decades, Luke Bencie has traveled to over 100 countries on behalf of the US Government on matters pertaining national security and intelligence. He previously served as a representative from the CIA's Office of Special Activities to the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Emergency Support Team. In this capacity, he was responsible for immediately responding to terrorist attacks carried out against U.S. targets overseas; subsequently serving in

Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and other global hotspots. He later became a consultant for Raytheon's Intelligence and Information Systems Division.

Mr. Bencie is the Founder and Managing Director of Security Management International, a global intelligence advisory firm, whose clients include Fortune 500 companies, celebrities, the USG, and foreign governments.

In addition to his books, he is a popular speaker on the international lecture circuit, has been interviewed by numerous news outlets (both on TV and in print) and has also written dozens of articles for magazines such as Harvard Business Review, Foreign Affairs, Business Insider, and the Journal of Counterterrorism and Homeland Defense.

Mr. Bencie lives on Siesta Key in Sarasota, Florida with his wife, Sarah, and their family.