

Tips for Realty Security

By Robert Siciliano

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We have all heard about the real estate agent who has become a crime statistic. Most of you figure it's not going to happen to you. You're right, chances are it won't. However, real estate is considered by security experts and law enforcement to be a "high-risk" profession. Agents are mobile, usually work alone, frequently interact with strangers and visit unoccupied properties.

1 - Be suspect of everyone. There isn't any benefit in being paranoid; however being a little guarded can keep you from getting into a vulnerable situation. Don't just be wary of a man showing up unaccompanied. Expect him to show up in a nice car, well dressed, maybe with a wife and kids tagging along. He might have a business card saying he is a doctor or a lawyer. Don't let your guard down. It might not be until the second or third meeting that he decides to make his move. He likes to gain your trust. You feel comfortable carrying cash and jewelry, and then he decides it's safe to move in.

2 - ID and pre-qualify at your first meeting. Whether you are at your office or meeting at a property get some form of identification. Also, it is to your benefit that a potential client buying a home is pre-qualified. Someone who is pre-qualified by a lender and meets you at the office is less likely to be a predator. Create a file with the client's identification and include information, such as license plate number and employer contact information.

3 - Stay in communication with the office. Before showing a property, make it known to your co-workers, a spouse or a friend where you are going and when you will be back. Have this person call you at a designated time to check on you. It is helpful to have this person set an alarm on their pager/cell-phone as a reminder. A system where you call in has its advantages, too. Have a designated in-out file. Use a clip board, cork board, e-mail or voicemail system that everyone has access to. Consider a Nextel system with direct communication.

4 - Have a plan for safe open houses. Take a friend and bring a cell phone. Spend a few minutes considering all of the vulnerable points located within the home and how you would escape if necessary. When someone walks in say, "I'd be happy to show you the benefits of this home and in a few minutes. My partner, Rocco, will be along to assist me." When a couple comes to preview the home, require them to stay together. Often, they split up, one has your attention, the other raids jewelry boxes and medicine cabinets for narcotics. In high crime areas consider hiring an off duty police officer to watch the property during a showing.

5 - Use predetermined code words to alert your office of distress. Utilize the colors of a traffic light: green, yellow and red to alert your caller of your levels of distress. For example, say to your caller, "It's in the green folder" letting your caller know you are fine. Or, "it's in the yellow folder" alerting your caller that the situation is shaky and you might need assistance. Also, use an acronym for help such as **Have Emily Leave the Papers at 35 Cherry St.**

6 - Conduct safe personal marketing. To a stalker, your photo on a sign or in print is a personal ad. He determines if you have the “look” he is seeking. Keep your photos “professional” as opposed to overly “attractive.” Home phone numbers and addresses give a predator everything he needs to stalk his prey. Use P.O. boxes and voicemail systems and keep your personal phone number unlisted.

7- Implement a buddy system. Whenever possible bring along a co-worker. There is strength in numbers. Predators thrive on isolation. By paring up you reduce the chances of being attacked.

8- Dress for safety and success. Don't wear expensive jewelry. A \$3,000 to \$5,000 diamond buys a lot of drugs. Dress professionally as opposed to too provocatively. Scarves and loose fitting “flowy” styles of dress can give attackers something to grab onto. Wear shoes you can run and kick in and won't hinder your fighting back.

9 – Don't take predators for a ride. Driving your client to a showing is a great time to determine your client's needs and move along the sale. Don't allow the client to ride in your car if you don't know who he is. Properly identify him. Make sure this is a client and not a predator. Make sure you have taken the necessary precautions ahead of time before you are put in an isolated situation. If he makes you feel uneasy, let him follow you and bring along a buddy. If he does get in your car and make attempts to control you, put your seatbelt on and ram a parked car.

10 - Pay attention to your intuition. Trust your gut and don't discount any troubling feelings you might have about your new client. If anything seems wrong, then it is wrong. Cancel if necessary. When the hair on the back of your neck stands on end, your sixth sense is signaling you, pay attention! This feeling is a survival mechanism and you must use it.

11 - Know how to defend yourself. You are worth fighting for. We don't think about hurting others because we have been conditioned not to. However, there might be a time when it is necessary to defend yourself. Go for the eyes, throat, groin and the instep of the foot. Fighting from the ground is an advantage that few people realize they have. Kicking the knees and groin is very effective from the ground. Scream, gouge, bite and fight with whatever you have. Have a pepper-spray in your hand or a coat pocket. Have a ball point pen ready to jab. In previous studies, 80% of women who fought back in an attack situation got away. You have more power than you think.

Crime Protection Tips

By Joseph Rosner

General Information

- Read "The Gift of Fear" by Gavin DeBecker.
- Investigate self defense options.
- Check the Sex Offenders Register every few months.

ON THE STREET

- Stay alert. Be aware of your surroundings (360 Degrees!) and who else is there.
- Project confidence and alertness. Don't slouch and walk in a purposeful manner.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel unsafe in an area, leave or stay out.
- Avoid dark areas or places.
- Walk facing traffic.
- Keep your hands free. Do not overload yourself with packages.
- Wear your purse under your jacket.
- Do not use a "Walkman" type headset or get too involved in cell phone conversations.
- If followed, get to crowded areas, reverse direction, cross street or walk in middle of street.

IN YOUR CAR

- Keep your car in mechanical shape. Never go below ¼ tank of gas.
- Always lock car doors and start engine quickly when entering vehicle.
- Park in well lit areas.
- Look for persons under your car or in nearby vehicles.
- Know where you're going.
- Check vehicle interior before getting in.
- Check around car before getting out.
- Do not leave purse or valuables on seat or in sight.
- Leave space between your car and the car in front of you.
- Join a motor club.

AT HOME

- Have a professional locksmith or local police check your doors and windows.
- Change or re-key locks when moving in.
- Landscape to avoid creating hiding places.
- Install motion sensor lights.
- Do not use door chains! Install a peep hole instead.
- Introduce yourself to the neighbors.
- Do not use initials or female name on door. Use a similar male name instead. (John for Joanne)

Travel Safety

- Know where you're going.
- Get hotel/motel rooms near front desk.
- Have the clerk write your room number, not say it out loud.
- Place a door stop or chair under your door at night.