

## Situational Awareness

Whether there's an active threat of violence or not, it's important to be aware of your surroundings. Recognizing when you may be in danger begins with situational awareness. Knowing what "normal" looks like is critical to noticing when something is just not right. Here's how to improve your situational awareness and why it's essential.

### Notice Your Environment

If paying attention to your surroundings has not been part of your daily habits, look at your environment today as if you were somewhere new. Where are the exits? Try to identify more than one. Note where the nearest emergency equipment is located, such as fire extinguishers, automated external defibrillators (AED), or first aid kits.

### Plan For The Worst

Imagine different scenarios that could arise and how you can respond. The company probably has an evacuation route and fire exits, but what about an intruder or worse, an active shooter? Look for places to hide or ways to prevent intruders from gaining entry. Avoiding dangerous situations is always best; removing yourself before it escalates is the second choice. Fighting back may be necessary, but it is the last resort.

### Take Note of People

Pay attention to the people you see on a daily basis. Do you see the same people at the same time during your commute? Notice how they behave, how they dress and changes in their actions. Don't judge or profile people but heed your instincts if someone makes you uncomfortable.

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### Minimize Distractions

Don't use your phone in situations where it's essential to be vigilant. Avoid earbuds or just use one. If you are with someone and in a conversation, scan the area while you speak. Avoid walking close to places where someone could hide or poorly lit areas. This is especially important in unfamiliar areas. Remember, you may not notice someone who intends to do harm, but they look for people who are not paying attention.

### Trust Your Gut

Your instincts are there for a reason. Don't dismiss them. In his book, "The Gift of Fear," Gavin de Becker says, "Only human beings can look directly at something, have all the information they need to make an accurate prediction, perhaps even momentarily make the accurate prediction, and then say that it isn't so." Take note if you feel anxious, even if you can't put your finger on why. Just feeling like something is off when it comes to your wellbeing.

### Teach Your Employees

While it's important for companies to provide security, don't underestimate how empowering it is for employees to know what they can do to contribute to their own safety, so be sure to advise them on situational awareness as well. Explain what situational awareness is, what to do if something doesn't feel right and encourage them to be aware of signs of danger.

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