

“Truly unique, incredibly thorough and comprehensive.”

— Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, US Army (ret.)

SPOTTING DANGER BEFORE IT SPOTS YOU

**Build situational awareness
to stay safe**

GARY QUESENBERRY

FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL

Foreword by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, US Army (ret.)

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When it comes to martial arts, self-defense, and related topics, no text, no matter how well written, can substitute for professional, hands-on instruction. These materials should be used for academic study only.

For my brothers and sisters in arms, both military and law enforcement. Your sacrifices will always encourage and inspire me.
Keep fighting the good fight.

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IT'S BEEN A LONG, winding road from the outset of this book to the actual finished product. At no point did I have a “eureka moment” when thoughts and feelings flowed directly from my mind, through my fingertips, and onto the page. The contents of this book have taken a lifetime to compile, and I’ve had plenty of help along the way.

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Foreword

YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS AN AMAZING BOOK, unlike any other on the subject.

Many good books have been written about the critically important topic of detecting danger and protecting yourself and your loved ones from violence, books like Patrick Van Horne and Jason Riley's *Left of Bang* and Gavin de Becker's *The Gift of Fear*. Gary Quesenberry has integrated the best of such leading works with his own world-class expertise to create a uniquely useful resource. A work that is greater than the sum of its parts, and unlike anything else available on this critical topic.

This book also stands out because of Gary's incredibly thorough and comprehensive presentation of the main subject of this book: the art of *situational awareness*, a life-saving ability to spot danger in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones. The many case studies, drills, and exercises provided in this book will help to ensure mastery of this vital survival skill. I have read many books on the subject, and I can honestly say that no one has even come close to matching *Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* when it comes to teaching situational awareness.

This fundamental skill is key to surviving and overcoming the array of threats that confront the average citizen in the world today.

Finally, Gary Quesenberry is uniquely qualified to write this book. As a US federal air marshal, Gary lived and breathed situational awareness as an essential part of his daily life for decades. He has been there and done that. Gary's knowledge has been, as he puts it, "forged in the fires of real-world experiences." And he now passes that knowledge on to you in a powerful, masterful, and entertaining way, as all great teachers do. With all my heart I encourage you to study and apply the knowledge and techniques in this book to your own life.

As we love our families, as we love our nation, as we love our way of life, we must all rise to the challenges of the age. Armed with the skills taught in this book, you will not need to live in fear; you will live instead in a state of awareness and readiness. You will truly be "spotting danger before it spots you."

Dave Grossman

Lt. Colonel, US Army (ret.)

Author of *On Killing*, *On Combat*, and *Assassination Generation*

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Lt. Col. Dave Grossman is a former West Point psychology professor, professor of military science, and an Army Ranger Lt. Col. Grossman's work has been translated into many languages, and his books are required or recommended reading in colleges, military academies, and police academies around the world, including the US Marine Corps Commandant's reading list and the FBI Academy reading list. His research was cited by the president of the United States in a national address after the Littleton, Colorado, school massacre, and he has testified before the US senate, the US congress, and numerous state legislatures. He has served as an expert witness and consultant in state and Federal courts, including *United States v. Timothy McVeigh*.

He helped train mental health professionals after the Jonesboro school massacre, and he was also involved in counseling or court cases in the aftermath of the Paducah, Springfield, and Littleton school shootings. He has been called upon to write the entry “Aggression and Violence” in the *Oxford Companion to American Military History*, three entries in the *Academic Press Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, and has presented papers before the national conventions of the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. In addition, he has written extensively on the current threat situation, with articles published in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* and many leading law enforcement journals.

Preface

Situational Awareness in the Age of COVID-19

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, I think it's necessary to address how some unforeseen circumstances can affect the way we use situational awareness. We've recently made some radical changes in the way we live our lives. People now walk around wearing masks and use terms like "social distancing" and "reemergence" in their daily conversations. Most of those conversations take place through video conferencing software or over the phone since more than a few people in one room are now considered a crowd and a health hazard. The COVID-19 virus fell upon us like a ton of bricks, and even now, as the pressure begins to lift, we're still trying to figure out new ways to live our lives and keep ourselves safe. The one question I've been asking myself is, "How does this new threat to my personal safety affect the way I manage situational awareness?" The answer is simple. The techniques that you'll learn in this book are specifically geared towards

helping you spot and avoid predatory violence, but danger can mean a lot of different things to people, especially now. Luckily, situational awareness is an adaptable process. Yes, it can be used to help you evade dangerous people, but it can also help you to identify and avoid situations that you believe may pose a threat to your health.

Situational awareness is the ability to identify and process environmental cues to accurately predict the actions of others. This requires us to be familiar with what is known as baseline behaviors (those actions that are considered normal in any given environment). By knowing what is deemed to be reasonable and appropriate, we can more easily spot the people that seem out of place and raise our suspicion. Then we can evaluate that person's actions, and with practice, accurately predict their behaviors. This is how situational awareness works, and it allows us to get the jump on dangerous situations so that we can respond appropriately. We're going to go into greater detail about these things later on, but there are a few points I'd like you to keep in mind as you read.

- Situational awareness always increases your level of personal security. This stands true whether you're concerned about violent predators, or the guy in aisle three who refuses to cover his cough.
- Before COVID-19, if you were standing in line at the bank and someone walked in wearing a mask, you would have probably panicked, now it's perfectly normal. The baseline for normal behaviors has shifted dramatically. Because of that, we each need to reconsider how we define danger. My definition may be much different than yours, but neither of us is wrong. If you spot something that you judge to be threatening, avoid it. The techniques you'll learn in this book will help you to do that.

- You are your own last line of defense. You must stay focused on the things that matter most when you're out and about. Although the COVID-19 virus requires us to practice specific protective measures, your personal safety extends well beyond the threat of getting sick. Whatever you do, don't allow yourself to become so focused on whether or not the person behind you in the checkout line is wearing a mask that you miss the fact he's holding a knife.

These are trying times, but in the end, we'll all get through it. Keep in mind that as we progress along the road to situational awareness, the next threat to our safety could be just over the horizon, and no one knows what shape that threat may take. No matter what other people may throw at you, be it a criminal or Mother Nature, you must maintain your concentration and keep focused on the end goal, ensuring the security of yourself and those you love. It's a big crazy world out there, and things are always changing. Stay safe, and always keep your head up.

Introduction

“If, then, I were asked for the most important advice I could give, that which I consider to be the most useful to the men of our century, I would simply say: in the name of God, stop a moment, cease your work, look around you.”

—LEO TOLSTOY

I AM A FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL. That’s the career path I chose, and for the past nineteen years, I’ve had a first-class ticket into the world of covert surveillance, surveillance detection, and self-defense. If I had to assess all the training I’ve received throughout my career and pick one essential skill I could pass along to everyone I care about, it would be situational awareness. Why awareness? Shouldn’t it be something along the lines of precision marksmanship skills, or some high-speed, quick-finish self-defense technique? No. The bottom line is you can never fight what you can’t see coming. For that reason, being mindful of your surroundings and capable of using what you see to accurately predict the actions of others are crucial skills when it comes to guaranteeing your personal safety.

When people think of situational awareness, they usually relate it to some spy movie they've seen. I always think back to a scene from *The Bourne Identity*. If you've seen the movie, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about, but if you haven't, here's a quick summary. The captain of a fishing boat finds Jason Bourne floating in the ocean. He has a bullet hole in his back, a mysterious bank account number embedded in his leg, and no recollection of who he is or how he got there. Although he has completely lost his memory and identity, he still possesses some pretty extraordinary abilities, two of which are some ninja-level self-defense skills and an almost superhuman capacity for situational awareness. In the scene I'm referring to, Bourne (who doesn't know that's his name yet) is sitting in a diner waiting for a female friend. When she comes in and sits down, they strike up a conversation about the best way for him to regain his memory. The woman tries to explain away Bourne's exceptional abilities, but he becomes frustrated and says, "I come in here and the first thing I'm doing is I'm catching the sidelines and looking for an exit . . . I can tell you the license plate numbers of all six cars outside. I can tell you that our waitress is left-handed and the guy sitting up at the counter weighs two hundred and fifteen pounds and knows how to handle himself. I know the best place to find a gun is in the gray truck outside . . . now, why would I know that?" I love that scene, but I think a lot of people have the misconception that that's how situational awareness actually works. Realistically it would be next to impossible to take all of that information in so quickly, but the good news is that these things aren't superpowers; they're basic skills we all possess, and once learned, they'll help you think more clearly and critically about your surroundings and how you interact with them.

My goal here is to take what's relevant in the world of situational awareness and personal safety and boil that information down to its simplest terms, which can then be easily implemented in your daily life. The techniques and exercises I'll have you practice work for everyone—parents, small children walking to school, teenagers going off to

college, and whole families headed out on summer vacation. It works universally. When properly applied, this system of situational awareness will help improve your general understanding of how, when, and where violence occurs. It will also increase your chances of successfully detecting and avoiding danger no matter where in the world you may find yourself.

As a federal air marshal, my primary area of operation was Europe. At the time, there was a general feeling of unrest in that area that often turned violent. Knowing this, situational awareness played a central role in how I performed my job on the ground. Not every incident can be immediately identified and controlled, so it was essential to have specific skill sets that allowed me to spot potentially life-threatening situations before they occurred.

- March 2012: A gunman claiming links to al-Qaeda killed three Jewish schoolchildren, a rabbi, and three paratroopers in Toulouse, southern France.
- January 7, 2015: Two brothers stormed the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* (a satirical newspaper) killing eleven people at the start of three days of terror. Another radicalized Muslim later shot and killed a policewoman before shooting more people at the Hyper Cacher market in Paris. The attackers were later killed in stand-offs with police.
- November 13, 2015: One hundred and thirty people are killed and hundreds wounded in a series of attacks by gunmen and suicide bombers at cafes, a rock concert, and a stadium in Paris. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.
- March 22, 2016: At least thirty-one people are killed and one hundred and fifty injured in three explosions at the Brussels airport and at a downtown metro stop.¹

1. Belgium's federal prosecutor confirms that the incidents were suicide attacks.

- March 22, 2017: A man drove an SUV into a crowd on the sidewalk along the Westminster Bridge in London, killing at least four. After ramming the car into a barrier outside the House of Parliament, the driver exited the vehicle and stabbed a police officer to death before responding officers shot and killed him.
- June 3, 2017: Eight people were killed in two terror attacks in central London before police shot three suspects dead. The violence began when a van swerved into a large group of pedestrians on London Bridge. The suspects then jumped out of the van and proceeded on foot to nearby Borough Market, where witnesses say they produced knives and slashed indiscriminately at people in restaurants and bars. At least forty-eight people were injured and taken to hospitals, according to the London Ambulance Service.

These are just a handful of the attacks that happened during my time covering Europe, but they didn't "just happen." The attackers carefully surveyed and selected their targets. They made plans and conducted rehearsals. Unfortunately, some people have the mindset that "nothing will ever happen here" or "that would never happen to me." Air marshals don't have that luxury. We have to assume that every day could be the day and every place could be the place for the next attack. It's crucial you adopt that same attitude if you want to improve your situational awareness.

Before we begin, I think it's important to understand what you're up against when it comes to the frequency of violent encounters. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program describes violent crimes as those offenses that involve force or the threat of force such as murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. In 2017, there were an estimated 1.25 million violent crimes committed in the United States. That breaks down to an estimated 383 violent crimes per one hundred thousand inhabitants, or a little over two violent crimes committed per minute. Aggravated assault accounted for

65 percent of those crimes. Robbery took up 26 percent, rape 8 percent, and murder accounted for 1 percent. The report also shows that firearms were used in 73 percent of the nation's murders, 41 percent of robberies, and 26 percent of aggravated assaults.² According to data collected by the National Crime Survey and the Bureau of statistics, 73 percent of women and 89 percent of men will have been victimized by a violent crime in their lifetime.³

Given these statistics, I think it's safe to say that bad things happen and, unfortunately, bad things can happen to good people. We usually don't like to think about that fact because it makes us uncomfortable. Comfort is important to us, and we equate comfort with safety, but that way of thinking carries with it a fatal flaw. Turning a blind eye to the physical threats of the world so you can feel more secure is dangerous; it changes the way you act and carry yourself. It causes people to slip into patterns of behavior that are easily identifiable by criminals and, in their eyes, make you look like an easy target. It softens defenses, diminishes levels of awareness, and in the worst case, leaves you completely unprepared should you find yourself in a bad situation. Trust me, I'm speaking from personal experience.

Spotting Danger Before It Spots You—Build situational awareness to stay safe is broken down into three easy-to-follow phases:

1. Understand the threat.
2. Build your situational awareness.
3. Develop personal defenses.

Each phase will walk you through the various steps of developing awareness. At the end of each chapter you will find a refresher of the

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, *Crime in the United States*, 2018 report, Fall 2019, 1–2.

3. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization, 2018*, by Rachel E. Morgan and Barbara A. Oudekerk, September 2019, 13.



PHASE ONE—Understand the Threat

“I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.”

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

1

The Basics of Predatory Behavior

THE FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL SERVICE started out small back in 1961 with only a handful of agents. Back in those days, hijackings were fairly common. Between 1968 and 1972, there were 130 hijackings on American air carriers alone. The hijackers were typically driven by personal gain or just looking for safe passage to places they weren't supposed to go. They would demand that a flight take them to a place like Cuba and then ask for hundreds of thousands of dollars in ransom money before they would release the passengers. For years, airlines mostly gave in to these demands because they felt customers would find enhanced security at the airport more of an inconvenience than the possibility of a hijacking. Things changed significantly after four commercial aircraft were taken over by al-Qaeda terrorists and used as steerable weapons of mass destruction on September 11th, 2001. Now air marshals number in the thousands and serve on both domestic and international flights to detect, deter, and defeat acts of terrorism within the aviation domain.

As an agency, we thought we had a pretty good grasp of what the threat was, but in fact, we had become complacent. As we sat back waiting for the next cookie-cutter, standard-issue hijacking, the enemy

was moving right under our noses, surveying targets and conducting dry runs for an attack we had never imagined. The signs were all there, but we missed them because we failed to give up on our old points of view.

Real situational awareness requires a shift in perspective. It's not enough to just walk around in a state of hypervigilance, thinking that nothing within your line of sight will go unnoticed. You have to be able to see yourself and others from the perspective of a predator. This isn't easy for a lot of people. For the most part, we all want to see the best in others, and the fact that someone else could possibly view us as a target of opportunity is hard to imagine. The unfortunate truth is that there are predators among us, and unless we can change the way we think, we may look like easy prey without even knowing it.

To better understand predatory behaviors, let's start by breaking down and categorizing the different types of predators and their basic motivations. In his book, *Facing Violence: Preparing for the Unexpected*, Sgt. Rory Miller breaks down predators into two groups: resource predators and process predators. A resource predator is looking for tangible items, be it cash, jewelry, or even your shoes. They've decided they need something and they're going to take it from you. Predators in this category include your basic mugger, pickpocket, or burglar. In some cases, if a resource predator confronts you and you just give them the thing they want, they go away.

Process predators, on the other hand, are much different. Process predators aren't interested in your watch or wallet; they get off on the act of violence itself. This category of predator includes the likes of rapists and murderers.

Motivations of the two categories of predators can vary, but violent behavior is primarily driven by one of four things: money, ego, territory, and emotion. Let's take a closer look at each.

1. **Money:** Like it or not, money is a consideration in almost every aspect of our lives. If you want a roof over your head, food in your stomach, and clothes on your back, you're going to need money,

plain and simple. Money is also a consistent factor in the commission of crimes. Some people have plenty of money, but they want more, and they'll do whatever it takes, legal or illegal, to get it. This is where you get your white-collar criminals who end up in jail for tax evasion, fraud, or embezzlement. In those cases, victims may have lost money, but they were seldom harmed physically. More commonly, it's the lack of money that drives people to commit irrational acts. Desperation can creep in, and people will go to any length to satisfy their needs. A friend of mine just sat as a juror on a capital murder case where a twenty-five-year-old man murdered his drug dealer over a forty-dollar debt. Most of us can't even fathom such an act over that amount of money, but money is just the beginning of the problem; the real issue starts when the need for money is fueled by addiction. According to the Bureau of Justice, more than 18 percent of inmates in federal prisons committed their crimes to get money for drugs. In addition, drug addicts committed 26 percent of violent crimes as defined by the UCR.¹ Alcohol, drugs, sex, you name it; if there's a need for it, you can guarantee that money is what gets it. For some people, when money is unavailable, crime is a reasonable alternative.

2. **Ego:** On the surface, this one seems to be a little less common, but we all have egos; it's the part of us that feels the need to be special. People will go to extremes to protect that feeling because it feeds their self-image, which can lead them into some pretty dangerous situations. We've all seen this play out either on television or in real life. Guy number one at the bar backs up and spills his drink on a lady's dress. The lady's boyfriend (guy number two) rushes to her defense and verbally attacks guy number one. Guy number one now has to save face in front of his friends and the other patrons of the bar, so he puffs out his chest and starts

1. Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Drugs and Crime Facts," <https://www.bjs.gov/content/dcf/duc.cfm>.

talking trash. Guy number two isn't about to back down in front of his girlfriend, so things escalate and become physical. Both guys end up bloody, broken, and kicked out on the street looking like fools. Overinflated egos often lead to bad decision-making. If you ever find yourself in a predicament where egos are taking over and it looks like confrontation is eminent, it's best to simply swallow your pride and remove yourself from the situation.

3. **Territory:** Humans are territorial creatures and will fight to protect what they consider to be theirs. An entirely peaceful, law-abiding citizen can become incredibly violent when they feel something within their territory has been threatened. A person's home is their territory. When a mother takes her children to the park, that area becomes an extension of her territory, and she will protect it viciously from anyone she feels poses a danger to her children. The same goes for criminals. They survey their surroundings and stake claims on everything from street corners to door stoops. They become aggressive and often violent when they feel their territory is being encroached upon. To avoid this, it's important that you become familiar with the places you frequent and be aware of any areas where your presence may cause problems.
4. **Emotion:** Violence is frequently driven by emotion. From jealous spouses to disgruntled employees and bullied teenagers, violent crimes such as mass shootings are often triggered by emotional responses. The level of emotion attached to religious beliefs has served as the primary influence behind acts of terrorism and the recruitment of others to extremist causes. Emotion is an incredibly powerful force, and it can be very unpredictable. Violence compelled by emotion tends to be excessively punishing.

Regardless of the motivating factors behind crime, the end result is always the same for the victim. The shock, emotional trauma, and physical damage suffered during an act of violence can resonate with victims

for years. For this reason, it's crucial that you have a good idea as to why you may be targeted. The good news is that predators tend to stick to a specific set of conditions when selecting their targets. Knowing how they think and what they look for in a victim will be your first big step in achieving real situational awareness and go a long way in helping you to more accurately identify and correct your own vulnerabilities.

1.1 How Predators Choose Their Targets—the Seven-Second PROD

Just as criminals can be broken into two categories, criminals and terrorists alike tend to divide their victims into two groups: hard targets and soft targets. This concept applies to both people and places. A place can be considered a hard target when there are obvious countermeasures in place that would deter a possible attack, such as fences, cameras, and barriers that discourage unwanted entry. People can be considered hard targets when they appear aware of their surroundings, carry themselves with confidence, and look like they could handle themselves in a fight. Much like a bank, they are displaying visible defenses against an attack. On the other hand, places that are considered soft targets have no visible signs of security. There are no locks, cameras, or fences, and admittance is open and accessible to everyone. Similarly, people are soft targets when they display none of the outward signs of awareness or preparation. They look easy to approach and ill-prepared to defend themselves. Predators prefer soft targets because they pose the least amount of danger. They carefully measure risk versus reward and will almost always take the easier path. This process of elimination and target selection can be completed in as little as seven seconds. In that short period, a predator can accurately determine the following:

1. Their initial perception of who you are
2. The amount of risk you pose
3. Your observable value
4. Your visible defenses

These four factors, Perception, Risk, Observable Value, and Defenses, are what I refer to as the PROD. It's essential that you become familiar with them because when it comes to a violent encounter, they answer the question, "Why me?"

Ted Bundy was a serial killer in the 1970s who killed more than thirty women. Once he was finally caught, he sat for years on death row where he conducted nearly thirty hours of taped confessions. In these confessions, he laid out the types of women he targeted and the techniques he used to lure them in. At one point Bundy stated, "I can spot my victim by the tilt of her head as she walks." Since predators target those they perceive as weak, you must become the most unappealing target you can be. This all begins with proper situational awareness. Someone who carries themselves with confidence and purpose, who appears to be alert and aware of what's going on around them, will not be as appealing a target as someone who seems weak and oblivious.

Now that you know the basics of what predators look for in a target, let's start breaking down each element of the PROD.

1.2 Perception

How do you think other people view you? Do you come across as outgoing and independent, or are you more introverted and shy? How others perceive us has everything to do with the way we are treated, and it is a key element in how criminals target their victims. In 1981 there was a study conducted by sociologists Betty Grayson and Morris Stein that cast new light on how criminals picked their victims. Grayson and Stein hypothesized that potential victims were signaling their vulnerability to attackers through their gestures, posture, and exaggerated movements.

The researchers set up video cameras on a busy intersection in New York City and recorded people walking by between 10:00 a.m. and noon for three consecutive days. The tape was later shown to inmates who were incarcerated for violent offenses such as armed robbery, rape, and murder. The inmates were instructed to rate the people in the

videos on a scale of one to ten, one being an easy target and ten being someone they would altogether avoid. When reviewing the results, two significant facts stood out.

1. There was a consensus about who would be easy to overpower and control. Every inmate chose the same people.
2. The choices were not solely based on gender, race, or age.

Grayson and Stein found that their hypothesis was correct and that criminals chose their victims based upon an entirely different set of standards than the ones they had previously assumed. Much like Ted Bundy, the inmates read the pedestrians' body language and used what they saw to make their choices. Basic movements the inmates identified as signals of weakness were:

- Short, shuffling strides when walking
- Not swinging their arms in proportion with their stride
- Exaggerated side-to-side movement when walking
- Head facing at a downward angle when walking

The inmates rated the pedestrians who had these traits between one and three, which identified them as weak and vulnerable. Pedestrians labeled a seven or above the inmates considered too much to handle in an altercation and were to be avoided altogether. They displayed the following characteristics:

- Medium to long stride when walking
- Arms swinging in proportion to their stride
- Body movement in vertical alignment, which was viewed as a strong and determined walking pattern
- Head level and eyes visible when walking

We may view ourselves one way but be seen in a completely different light by others based solely on our movements. Since you now know what physical actions signal vulnerability, you can take steps to protect yourself simply by modifying your body language. Just changing

your posture and stride can make you look more like someone who would be difficult to subdue and who would likely put up a fight if attacked—in other words, a hard target.

1.3 Risk

Predators go through the process of target selection and attack planning to ensure success while minimizing risk to themselves. If they feel they can confront you with minimal danger, they are more likely to act. Some of the things criminals look for when measuring risk are simple enough. Are you with a group of friends? Do you look like the type of person who would fight back or cause a scene? Are you alert and moving with a purpose, or are you distracted? Some signals are more subtle; someone who frequently avoids eye contact, for instance, would be viewed as timid and therefore pose little or no risk to the attacker. That may seem inconsequential to you, but to a criminal, it could be the deciding factor.

Most criminals are looking for victims who will be easy to control. Sexual predators, in particular, look for people they can easily overpower as a means of avoiding risk. Todd Burke, a criminologist at Radford University in Virginia, says, “The rapist is going to go after somebody who’s not paying attention, who looks like they’re not going to put up a fight, who’s in a location that’s going to make this more convenient.” In *Predators: Who They Are and How to Stop Them* by Gregory M. Cooper, Michael R. King, and Thomas McHoes, a convicted sex offender who raped seventy-five women across eleven states is quoted as saying, “If I had the slightest inkling that a woman wasn’t someone I could easily handle, then I would pass right on by. Or if I thought I couldn’t control the situation, then I wouldn’t even mess with the house, much less attempt a rape there . . . Like, if they had a dog, then forget it. Even a small one makes too much noise. If I saw a pair of construction boots, for example, out on the porch or on the landing, I walked right on by. In fact, I think if women who live alone would put a pair of old construction boots or something that makes it look

like a physically fit manly-type of guy lives with them out in front of their door, most rapists or even burglars wouldn't even think about trying to get into their home."

Risk or even the perception of risk is something that the majority of predators will go out of their way to avoid, so take a look at your current situation. What attributes do you possess that would pose a risk to predators? What areas of your life could you change to increase the risk level? Sometimes, little things can make a big difference. When you're out and about, just keeping your head up and looking around makes you more imposing. Walking with a dog is a fantastic deterrent. Traveling with a group or in well-lit areas decreases the likelihood you'll be targeted. The bottom line is this: anything you can do to increase the risk you pose to a predator will be worth the effort.



1.4 Observable Value

When you think of value, what comes to mind? A big house, nice car, and expensive jewelry? We all have an image in our mind of what real value looks like, but value is subjective, and it can look much different to you than it does to a potential attacker. The first thing you have to understand is that the one thing predators find most valuable is their own personal safety. It actually has nothing to do with the car you drive or the watch you're wearing. Criminals find those things attractive, but the real value lies in what they can take from you and get away with free from harm. That's why situational awareness is the number-one deterrent to street crime. If it even remotely looks like you'll see them coming, raise an alarm, or put up a fight to protect what's yours, predators will move along to the next target. That said, sometimes the level of value you display may be worth the added risk of arrest or injury. For example, if a criminal sees someone with an expensive laptop case slung over their shoulder, but they're in a more crowded area or with friends, the criminal may find the increased level of risk worth the reward of getting away with an expensive laptop computer. For that reason, it's important to be aware of how you appear to others. I'm not telling you what to wear out at night or what jewelry is most appropriate in public, but I will tell you that if you have anything of value on your person that's visible to others, it's a good idea to display more outward signs of security by moving with purpose, minimizing your distractions, and staying alert to your surroundings.

1.5 Defenses

Imagine for a moment you're a burglar casing two houses in a nice neighborhood. Both houses have well-manicured yards and give the impression that someone wealthy lives inside. You know you can find something of value in either house; the only question is which one to break into. According to a study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's department of criminal justice and

criminology, the majority of burglaries take place between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. when most families are away at work or school. One of the first things you may do as a criminal is walk up to the house and ring the doorbell to make sure no one is at home. Let's say when you approach the first house you notice home security stickers on the front windows and door and the doorbell has a monitored security camera attached to it. You know right away you're being watched. When you ring the doorbell, you hear a very large dog barking on the other side of the entrance. Now a voice comes over an external intercom asking who you are and what you want. Seeing these visible defenses in action, you know that whatever of value may lie inside those walls isn't worth the risk to your personal safety, so you move on. At the next house, there are no security stickers and the doorbell is broken, so you knock; no dog is barking inside, so you move around to the back door. There are no signs of security, and the rear of the house isn't visible to any of the neighbors. You've found your target. The risk to you is minimal and whatever you may find inside will be of some value, so you break the lock and go to work.

This exact same concept applies to every person walking down the street. If someone is set on taking something from you, the first thing they will do is evaluate your visible defenses and decide on whether or not you have something of value or if you pose a threat to their personal safety. Regardless of the level of value you may possess, your defenses are what will serve as the deterrent to attack.

1.6 Think Like a Predator

When you try to see things from a predator's perspective, you have to flip switches in your mind that you may have never flipped before. You have to forget about social, moral, or religious norms and look at yourself and others as a predator would: a resource. You have to start looking past people's better natures and see their weaknesses. To get

you in the right predatorial mindset, let's take a look at some commonly observed pedestrian behaviors. I'll list the behavior, and you determine if that behavior would make that person a hard target or a soft target.

1. A woman on the subway sleeping with her purse in the seat beside her.
2. A teenager standing in front of the mall waiting for his dad to pick him up. He is standing with a group of friends, his head is up, and he appears to be alert and undistracted.
3. A man walking along a crowded sidewalk. He is walking on the side closest to the doorways. He is wearing headphones and appears to be scrolling through social media on his cellphone.
4. A young woman is walking to her car from her office building. She has parked in the spot closest to the exit and under good lighting. She has her keys in her hand and is walking quickly while continually scanning her surroundings.

So how did you choose? If you chose subjects one and three as soft targets, you're absolutely right. Both of those people have something of observable value, their defenses are down, and the criminal's risk of getting caught or hurt during an attack is pretty low. The potential victims have put themselves in a situation where if they were approached, their responses would be strictly reactionary and driven by panic. The individuals in scenarios two and four, however, have made themselves more difficult to approach. They appear to be alert and aware of their surroundings, their defenses are up, and they look ready to respond quickly to any unwanted advances. This creates a problem for a potential attacker because it increases the risk of being caught or hurt during a confrontation.

There are no secret formulas or tricky algorithms here. As proven by the Grayson and Stein study, predators almost universally choose their victims based on their level of awareness and body language. The good news is that whatever you're doing now isn't set in stone; both of these

factors can be analyzed and modified to improve your chances of completely avoiding a potential confrontation. But there's a process to conducting this self-assessment, which we'll cover in detail during the targeting exercise at the end of this chapter.

Situational Awareness in Action

The Foiled Millennium Terror Plot

On December 14, 1999, a twenty-three-year-old man named Ahmed Ressam packed his rented Chrysler sedan with explosives and drove onto the ferry from Victoria, Canada, to Port Angeles, Washington.² After clearing customs, Ressam planned on driving to Los Angeles where he would detonate a massive bomb outside the LAX airport on New Year's Day. At the Immigration and Naturalization Service inspection station in Victoria, Ressam presented agents with his Canadian passport. Ressam had torn the Afghanistan entry and exit stamps from his passport to avoid suspicion. The INS agent on duty ran the passport through a variety of databases and allowed Ressam to board the ferry. Later that day, Ressam arrived in Port Angeles in Washington State. He waited for all the other cars to depart the ferry, assuming that the last vehicle off would draw less scrutiny.

Alert customs officers assigned to the port began to notice that Ressam's behaviors didn't seem quite right. Despite the freezing temperatures, he drove with his window down, and he compulsively cleared his throat due to his prior exposure to the caustic chemicals used in making the explosives. He appeared to be overly nervous; he paced the dock of the ferry and was sweating profusely. These agents understood the baseline behaviors of the passengers that frequented the ferry, and Ressam's actions fell way outside of that baseline, so they quickly referred him to secondary inspection. When asked for additional

2. PBS, *Frontline*, "Ahmed Ressam's Millennium Plot," <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/trail/inside/cron.html>.

identification, Ressam handed the customs agent a Costco membership card. As that agent began an initial pat-search, Ressam panicked and tried to run away but was quickly apprehended. Inspectors examining Ressam's rental car later found the explosives concealed in the spare tire well, but at first they assumed the white powder and gelatinous liquid were drug related until an inspector pried apart and identified one of the four timing devices concealed inside a black box. Ressam was placed under arrest, and thousands of lives were potentially saved due to the quick observations of the agents.

Whether it's a terrorist or a common street thug, those who wish to harm others typically go through the process of target selection and attack planning. Ahmed Ressam carefully planned his attack and chose his target based on the number of potential casualties a massive explosion would produce and the amount of media coverage it would receive. During the planning stages, Ressam chose what he felt was a "soft target" for his point of entry. He picked Port Angeles based on the amount of traffic it received daily and the limited number of staff working the port. He knew that if he timed his entry just right, the agents working the port would be nearing the end of their shift and more likely to overlook something during their inspections. What Ressam didn't account for during his risk-versus-reward assessment was the devastating effect one alert agent would have on his well-laid plans.

That's why situational awareness is so important. It's inevitable that at some point during the process of target selection, a criminal will reveal themselves through their own actions. These actions can only be observed and interpreted by those who are paying attention to what's happening around them.

Exercise

Target Selection

This is a great exercise to practice when you're out in crowded areas such as shopping malls, restaurants, or public parks. All you have to do is randomly pick someone out in a crowd. Using what you've learned in chapter one, evaluate them based on the PROD. You don't want to spend a lot of time staring at people; remember, this whole process should only take about seven seconds. Once you've picked someone out, follow the steps below until you've identified someone who lacks proper defenses and could be the potential target of an attack.

- **Step One: Perception:** Evaluate the person's body language, posture, and walking patterns to establish your initial perception of them. Do they appear to be unaware and timid, or confident and alert? If they are confident and alert, move on to another person in the crowd. If they appear to be unaware and timid, move on to step two.
- **Step Two: Risk:** Evaluate the risk involved. Does this person pose a risk to your safety? Do they look like they would put up a fight or raise an alarm if attacked? Are they with a group? If the answer to either of these questions was yes, move on to another person and start over. If the answers were no, move to step three.
- **Step Three: Observable Value:** Does this person have any observable signs of value such as a smart phone, backpack, laptop, headphones, expensive sunglasses, or purse? If they don't, move to another person and start over. If they do, move on to step four.
- **Step Four: Defenses:** Does this person display any visible signs of defenses? Do they look strong and capable? Are they alert to their surroundings and unlikely to allow an unwanted approach? If so, move on to another person and start over. If they display no outward signs of defenses, congratulations! You've found your target.

This is a simple observational exercise that increases your awareness of how others move through and interact with their environments. The more you practice it, the faster the process occurs and in time will take only a matter of seconds to conduct. By identifying those people who could be a potential victim, you also become more aware of your personal patterns of behavior and can more readily correct the weaknesses in your own defenses. Once you've got the hang of target selection, share what you've learned with friends or family members to make this a group exercise. The more knowledgeable those people are in terms of situational awareness, the more you increase your own personal defenses when you're out with that particular person or group.

Key Points

- Start looking at yourself and situations from the perspective of a predator.
- Understand the things that drive violence:
 1. Money
 2. Ego
 3. Territory
 4. Emotion
- Think like a predator (PROD):
 1. Perception: How do others view you?
 2. Risk: Do you pose a threat to possible attackers?
 3. Observable value: Are you displaying outward signs of value to others?
 4. Defenses: Are you displaying visible defenses against attack?

2

Conducting a Self-Assessment

NOW I'M GOING TO ASK YOU TO DO SOMETHING that may make you uncomfortable. I need you to take a long, honest look at yourself and evaluate what you see based upon what you've learned regarding the predatorial mindset. This exercise is known as a self-assessment and I've included a structured worksheet in the appendix to help you out with the process. Be honest about your current level of awareness and then use the PROD method to weigh out how others may perceive you, what risk you pose to potential criminals, your current level of observable value, and your personal defenses. Once that's established, we're going to break this whole process down and identify the four Ws, or the who, what, when, and where of a potential attack scenario. By uncovering your vulnerabilities, you'll have a pretty good idea of where your weak spots are and what steps you can take to minimize them. It's imperative that you conduct this evaluation, find those weaknesses, and make the appropriate corrections, but read through the whole book first. That way you have all the information you need before beginning the self-assessment. Trust me, you never want to put yourself in a position where you're being completely reactionary and making corrections only after the fact. Early in my career as a federal air marshal,

I was forced into a position where I had to completely reevaluate my own personal defenses. Unfortunately, this reevaluation was in reaction to what was regarded as the attempted abduction of my children.

It happened in 2003. I was assigned to the Las Vegas Field Office and primarily covered domestic flights along the Eastern Seaboard. My wife was a stay-at-home mom, and two of our three children were enrolled in the local elementary school. I was on an overnight trip to Baltimore when I got a call from my wife asking, "Did you try to take the kids out of school today? What the hell is going on?" I had no clue what she was talking about, but it was obvious she was distraught. After a few minutes of trying to calm her down, she explained what had happened. She and my youngest daughter (who was not of school age yet) had been out running errands. Instead of going home afterward, she decided to head to the school early and volunteer her time in the office, making copies for the teachers, something she did often. The staff at the school knew my wife well but didn't really know who I was or even what I looked like. When my wife showed up in the office, one of the secretaries made the comment that she was sorry to hear that we were removing our children from the school. Their belongings had been collected, and they were waiting in the counselor's office for their dad. My wife was obviously confused by this information, so the secretary went on to elaborate. A man identifying himself as Gary Quesenberry had called that morning and told the attendance officer he would be coming by the school and picking the kids up early. He said that because he worked for the government, he was being reassigned to a new office and the children would not be returning. The caller knew my name, the names of my children, and that I worked for the government. This information instantly sent my wife into a state of anger and confusion. It took several minutes to convince her that I was really in Baltimore and that I had not contacted the school. To me, this was a clear attempt by someone to get at my children. But who? What could I possibly have done to cause this? More importantly, how did I allow this to happen

in the first place? I immediately called my supervisor and was on the next flight home. I had my wife make contact with the school resource officer and have law enforcement respond to the school. My supervisor, who was a former FBI agent, was on the line with my family walking them through everything that needed to be done. That was the longest flight I've ever taken.

In those early years of the Federal Air Marshal Service, several agents were targeted for attack by both criminal and terrorist elements, and we had been warned about the importance of protecting our identities and personal information. I thought I was fairly solid on these things, but obviously there were some gaps in my defenses. Looking back on this event I thank God that something moved my wife to show up at the school early. No one ever showed up at the school claiming to be Gary Quesenberry; perhaps whoever made the call saw the police presence and bailed out. There's really no way of knowing what would have happened if the guy would have shown up. We've always cautioned our children against strangers and how they should react if someone unfamiliar approached them. Hopefully, the school's system of identification would have eliminated any chance of someone removing the kids. I had no idea what had happened to cause this, but it was clear to me that changes had to be made. Those changes all started with a self-assessment.

Learning is a process that includes learning new things about yourself, and as you start on your self-assessment, you'll find that you identify and correct your weaknesses in four specific stages.

1. **Unconscious incompetence:** A person is unaware that a gap in knowledge exists. This is where people are utterly oblivious to the fact that they may be in danger. They are situationally unaware and when confronted with a problem have no idea how to react. This is what opens their eyes to the fact that corrections have to be made.

2. **Conscious incompetence:** A person becomes aware that a skill or knowledge gap exists and understands the importance of correcting those deficiencies. It's in this stage that changes can begin and it's why you picked up this book in the first place.
3. **Conscious competence:** A person understands how to use a skill or perform tasks like those you're learning here, but doing so requires practice, conscious thought, and hard work.
4. **Unconscious competence:** A person has enough experience with the skill that it can be performed without conscious thought. Situational awareness now becomes a natural part of their lifestyle and, because of that, a significant weakness in defenses has been corrected.

Regardless of what skill you are practicing, these stages of learning will always apply. Set your preconceived notions about security aside, and open your mind to new things. This is the absolute best way to ensure you're taking everything in and sufficiently developing your personal defenses. Once your assessment is complete and you've identified problem areas, you can begin implementing changes and putting your new-found knowledge to work.

2.1 Who Would Target You?

When the police showed up at our house to take a detailed report of what happened at the school, the first question they asked was about who would want to target us or our children.

“Is there an ex-spouse or stepparent who was still in the picture?”

“No.”

“Is there an inmate from your past job as a correctional officer who may still hold a grudge against you?”

“Maybe.”

“Have either of you made enemies since moving to Las Vegas?”

“No.”

On and on it went, but we were never able to pinpoint a particular person who may have wanted to target my family or me. As you begin your self-assessment, you have to also start with the question, who would want to cause you loss or harm? A recent US Department of Justice report shows that the majority of violent crimes committed each year are committed by people the victim knew.¹ That means you are more likely to be attacked by someone you are familiar with than a perfect stranger. We all like to think we are a pretty good judge of character, but when it comes to protecting yourself and your loved ones, leave no stone unturned; everyone is worth a second look.

Here are some other statistics from the Department of Justice that may help to raise your awareness of who may consider you a target for attack:

- Among violent crimes, robbery was most likely to be committed by a stranger. Homicide was least likely.
- Seventy percent of violent crimes by strangers were committed against males. Seventy-seven percent of crimes by relatives were committed against females.
- Attacks by strangers are most likely to be carried out by more than one attacker, whereas single-person attackers are more likely to be someone known to the victim.

1. Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Violent Crime by Strangers and Nonstrangers,” by A. D. Timrots and M. R. Rand, September 2019. This study concludes the following:

- Persons in urban areas experienced higher rates of violent victimizations by strangers than persons in suburban and rural areas.
- Strangers committed only 9 percent of violent crimes that occurred in the victim’s home.
- About half of violent victimizations committed by strangers occurred while the victims were away from home traveling, shopping, or engaging in leisure activities.
- About 22 percent of victims of violence committed by strangers were injured, compared to 31 percent of victims who knew the offender.

Do not overlook the fact that there are evil people in this world. Frequently we see behaviors in others that we chose to ignore because we don't want to know the truth about their intentions; we want to believe that people are better than they are and that no one would ever have a reason to harm us. Unfortunately, we tend to look away even when the potential offender is someone close to us.

Jeffrey Dahmer was a notorious serial killer who murdered, raped, and dismembered seventeen young men between 1978 and 1991. Jeffrey's father, Lionel Dahmer, wrote a book about his son and his horrific crimes after Jeffrey's trial in 1992. Lionel realized that the way he'd interpreted Jeffrey's behaviors as a young man had been naïve. He essentially knew something was wrong with his son but looked the other way because he didn't want to believe what his senses were telling him. "I allowed myself to believe Jeff," Lionel stated, "to accept all his answers regardless of how implausible they might seem. . . . More than anything, I allowed myself to believe that there was a line in Jeff, a line he wouldn't cross . . . my life became an exercise in avoidance and denial." People are incredibly good at avoidance and denial. We choose to think that those around us have nothing but the best of intentions because that's the way we feel about ourselves. It's very important to open your eyes to the fact that bad people exist, and those people want to either take what you have or hurt you just for the hell of it. I realize you can't go through life thinking everyone is out to get you, but you have to acknowledge they are out there, and they're sizing you up.

As you begin your self-assessment, make a list of the people who may have grudges against you, or raise your suspicion for any reason. Have you made anyone angry lately? Have you severed ties with someone close to you who may still want your attention? Are there strangers in your life who repeatedly pop up in random places? Give it a lot of thought and make your list. This isn't necessarily a physical list of people you plan on systematically cutting out of your life; this is simply

a mental exercise to help you work through the process of narrowing down potential threats to your personal safety. If you should choose to write them down, use the self-assessment guide in the appendix to help you organize your thoughts. That guy who got aggressive with you over a parking spot, he's on the list. The ex who keeps stalking you on social media, put him or her on the list. That stranger who shows up beside you every day at the subway station, he's definitely on the list. Revisit and update your list often, pay very close attention to your personal interactions with others, and make a note of any changes in attitude or behavior. This is another important step in raising your awareness level. If the same person repeatedly pops up on your list for separate reasons, then you should have your defenses up when that person is around you.

2.2 What Would They Want?

Next, you have to ask yourself, "What would someone want from me?" Resource predators see something you have, and they want it. Going back to the section on observable value, personal items such as watches, purses, backpacks, and clothing all hold some value to the resource predator, but in order to get at those items they have to go through a process of observation, decision making, and approach that can give them away well before they make their move. Process predators go through these same procedures, but they want nothing from you. It's the act itself that gives them what they need. It doesn't matter who you are or what you may have of value; their goal is to fulfill some personal desire that we may never understand. We'll get more into that later, but for now, it's essential to recognize that the things you carry with you can sometimes make you a target.

Now it's list time again. Start making a list of the things you have that a predator may find of value. Start with the everyday items you leave the house with: purses, briefcases, backpacks, jewelry, laptops, and similar items. Those all hold some sort of monetary value, but you

carry them out into the world without ever giving them much thought. Now add to the list things you not only hold valuable but also consider priceless—your pets, your home, your family. In my case, someone had targeted my children. For whatever reason, they decided the value I saw in my family could be exploited to further their own needs. As we move through this process of developing awareness, you must note these things of value and see their possible significance from the perspective of the criminal. Only then can you begin to make plans to protect them.

2.3 When Would They Strike?

Given what you know about the who and what of a potential attack, when would be the best time for a predator to attack you? Take a look at your average week; at what points during that week are you most vulnerable? Is it when you're walking from your car to the office? Is it when you're alone on the bus or walking to school? Write those times down. All of them can be considered intervals of vulnerability, but there are steps you can take to ensure your defenses are up and visible.

The routine activities theory can help us better understand how our routines make us vulnerable to potential attacks. This theory is based on people's behavioral patterns and the situational factors surrounding crime. Basically, the routine activities theory states that a crime will occur when three conditions are met:

1. The presence of a potential and motivated offender
2. The presence of a vulnerable target
3. An absence of effective defenses capable of stopping an attack

The theory of routine activities gives us the perfect picture of when a violent attack would be possible. It's up to you to ensure that these three factors cannot be met. As we move forward, you'll begin to see that proper mindset and situational awareness are precisely what are needed to guarantee potential predators never have that perfect opportunity to attack you.

2.4 Where Would They Strike?

Look back at the times you listed as periods of vulnerability. For the purposes of this book, you are obviously the target, so based on the routine activities theory ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the chances of a motivated offender being in the area you are moving through?
- Do you have visible defenses in place to deter a possible attacker?

The higher the chances a potential attacker may be in the area, the more important it becomes to show the signs of alert readiness that turn predators away. Now I'm going to give you a fictional scenario. From the perspective of a predator, I want you to determine the best place to stage your attack. I know this type of roleplaying makes some people uncomfortable, but it's imperative that you be able to see things as a predator would so you can better identify and correct the flaws in your own defenses.

It's Friday night. You're a college student walking back to your dorm from an evening study session, so you're carrying your backpack and laptop. Along your usual route, you spot a group of students who have obviously been drinking, and the situation ahead appears to be one of unruly misbehavior. This makes you nervous, so being careful not to make eye contact, you hesitantly decide to cut through a narrow passageway and avoid the rowdy group. The passageway is dimly lit but cuts a little time off your route. As you approach the passageway, you decide to text your friends to let them know you're almost back to your room. Once on the other side, you cross a large, well-lit parking lot and proceed up the steps to your dorm room. Once safely inside you again text your friends to let them know you made it back.

Now let's take a look at our fictionalized student from a predatorial point of view and break this scenario down based on what we've learned so far. We'll do this using the PROD.

- **Perception:** Lack of eye contact, hesitation in movements, perceived as an easy target
- **Risk:** Walking alone, lack of confidence, visible level of distraction, poses little risk of being caught or hurt
- **Observable value:** Backpack, laptop
- **Defenses:** No visible signs of defenses

Based on these simple factors, a potential predator could very possibly decide to act against you. Remember, this only takes seven seconds to decide. Now, let's look at the four Ws: who, what, when, and where from the perspective of the student.

- **Who:** Is there someone near you or in the group of rowdy students who may have a reason to approach you?
- **What:** Are you in possession of anything that may be of value to someone else?
- **When:** Are there times you are vulnerable to attack?
- **Where:** Are there places or positions you've put yourself into that could possibly make you more vulnerable to attack?

Based on all these factors, what time did you pinpoint as being the best opportunity to stage an attack? If you chose the period of time inside the passageway when our student was on the cellphone, you're absolutely right. Now ask yourself, what are some steps the student could have taken to minimize the risk of being targeted?

- Have one or two friends from the study group walk back to the dorms with you.
- Keep your head up and proceed along your regular route in a confident manner.
- Place your laptop inside your backpack to lessen observable value.
- Minimize distractions by staying off your cellphone and alert to the situation in front of you.
- Don't let your perception of the group dictate your movements; make your decisions based on observable facts.

Much like our fictional student, by thinking through the seven-second PROD from the perspective of a predator and then asking yourself the questions of who would attack you, what would they want, and when and where would they strike, you will have a better understanding of your situation and make better decisions about your movements. All of this helps to effectively minimize the likelihood you are targeted for an attack.

2.5 Start Thinking Like a Protector

Now that we've conducted our self-assessments, it's time to flip the mindset switch from predator back to protector. I always considered myself a protector, but after the incident at my children's school, I had to take a long hard look at my defenses and completely reevaluate what it meant to provide real safety for my family. I realized I had fallen into the trap of believing I was impervious to attack based solely on my position as a federal air marshal. Complacency was my downfall, and the shock of the event led me to completely change the way I lived and communicated with my family. It was time to not only harden my defenses but also to pass along what I knew to my wife and children so their security didn't start and stop with me. Everyone had to get involved.

In December of 2007 a nineteen-year-old deranged killer entered the Westroads Mall in Omaha, Nebraska, and within six minutes killed eight people and wounded four others before killing himself. Back in 2007, well after the incident at the school, my three children were in their early teens, and like most families with teenagers, we spent a lot of time at the mall. Given what I knew about seemingly random acts of violence, I felt that it was necessary to inform my wife and children about the appropriate responses to situations like active shooter events. "If we're in the food court and gunfire erupts to the left, where do we go and what actions do we take?" "If we're entering a store and someone with a knife starts running toward us from the opposite end, what do we do?" The mental rehearsals provided by these what-if games

were invaluable because they helped us to better prepare for situations we wouldn't normally dream of finding ourselves in. My children are all grown now, but to this day they'll tell you that the what-if games I played with them when they were young have helped them to be more aware and focused in their adult lives. Experts often remind us that "the body will not go where the mind has not been." Regularly asking yourself, "What would I do if . . . ?" and then visualizing your responses to those various situations, is an effective way to raise your level of awareness and decrease your chances of being caught off guard.

There's a great story about a man named James Nesmeth that revolves around the power of visualization and illustrates how effective it can be. James was an average golfer. He generally shot in the mid to low nineties but had aspirations of getting his game down into the low eighties. Unfortunately, his dreams of improving his golf game were interrupted by the war in Vietnam. There, Nesmeth was eventually captured and became a prisoner of war, where he spent seven years locked up in a four-foot by five-foot cell. To occupy his time and maintain his sanity, Nesmeth developed a mental routine in which he imagined playing eighteen holes of golf every day. Without the physical space to move within his cage, he would visualize every aspect of the game in his mind. He imagined what clothes he'd wear. He envisioned preparing his golf bag and loading his car for the drive to the course. When he was on the green, he could see every tree, hear their leaves rustling in the breeze, and imagine how the slight wind would affect the flight of his ball. He would then imagine gripping the club, setting his stance, and taking a few practice swings. Then James would step up to the ball and take his shot, seeing the ball float through the sky until it landed softly in the middle of the fairway. He thought through every step of his game in the greatest possible detail, never rushing and never skipping a step. From teeing off to sinking his putt, each shot was perfect, and every imagined movement was meticulous. He did this every day for seven years.

Eventually, James was released from prison and returned to his home in the United States. Shortly after his release, he decided to go and play a round of golf on his favorite local course. He shot a seventy-four that day, the best game he had ever played. Everyone was amazed that James knocked off over twenty points from his game without actually swinging a real golf club in more than seven years. James, however, knew the truth. He knew that the physical game was the easy part and the rigid discipline of his detailed mental rehearsals was where the progress really came from.

Australian physiologist Alan Richardson scientifically proved that visualization works when he had college students visualize certain athletic activities. He discovered that a person who consistently visualizes a particular physical skill develops “muscle memory,” which helps them when they physically engage in the activity. Richardson chose three groups of students at random. It’s important to note that none had ever practiced visualization techniques before the experiment. The first group physically practiced free throws every day for twenty days. The second group made free throws on the first day and the twentieth day with no practice in between. The third group made free throws on the first and twentieth day, but they also spent twenty minutes every day visualizing successfully making free throws. On the twentieth day, Richardson measured the percentage of improvement in each group. The group that practiced daily improved 24 percent. The second group, unsurprisingly, didn’t improve at all. The third group, which had physically practiced the same amount as the second but added the visualization element, did 23 percent better, almost as well as the first group. That study can help us to understand better how visualization is essential when it comes to everyday tasks, but it is also an integral part of the what-if games I played with my family. By imagining various scenarios as we move through our environments and visualizing the possible outcomes, we better prepared ourselves to act should the need arise. Over time we all began seeing the benefits of these drills and how

visualization significantly improved our level of awareness. It became our family mantra that it was better to prepare for violence and never face it than to be faced with violence and not be prepared for it. We had all learned that lesson the hard way.

Situational Awareness in Action

The Attempted Times Square Bombing

On a clear evening in May of 2010, a dark blue Nissan Pathfinder slowly pulled into a tourist-crowded block of Times Square in New York City near the entrance of the Minskoff Theatre.² The theatre was filled with visitors about to be released from a showing of the Broadway musical *The Lion King*. The driver of the SUV turned on the vehicle's hazard lights, exited the car while it was still running, and quickly left the area. These actions were so out of place in that part of the square that it quickly drew the attention of three alert street vendors. A T-shirt salesman named Lance, a handbag vendor named Duane, and a Senegalese immigrant named Alioune who sells photographs on the square all witnessed the actions at the same time and focused their attention on the abandoned vehicle. That's when they began to notice smoke coming from inside the car and what they believed to be the smell of gunpowder. All three quickly alerted police in the area. One officer approached the SUV and saw what appeared to be two large smoking canisters inside the vehicle. He immediately evacuated the area and notified the bomb disposal unit and local fire department. Upon arrival, the bomb disposal team used a remote-controlled robotic device to break out a window and explore the vehicle's contents. They found a triggering device made from two battery-operated travel alarm clocks connected by electrical wires to two five-gallon cans of gasoline, over forty M-88 firecrackers inside a twenty-ounce metal container,

2. Al Baker and William K. Rashbaum, "Police Find Car Bomb in Times Square," *New York Times*, May 1, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/02/nyregion/02timessquare.html>.

gunpowder, three full twenty-gallon propane tanks, and a metal gun locker that contained a pressure cooker stuffed with 250 pounds of urea-based fertilizer. Had this bomb exploded it would have sent massive amounts of shrapnel flying into the crowd killing hundreds, possibly thousands of innocent people. An investigation was launched, and within days a task force led by the FBI had zeroed in on the suspected terrorist, Faisal Shahzad, who was arrested trying to flee the country at JFK Airport. Shahzad, who was a naturalized US citizen from Pakistan, had also planned additional attacks on Grand Central Station and Rockefeller Center. Shahzad was convicted in October of 2010 and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Needless to say, the actions of those street vendors saved countless lives that day. These weren't trained professionals like the agents in the story of the foiled millennium terror plot; they were the alert citizens of a city all too familiar with acts of violence. The events of 9/11 had forced them to conduct a deep self-assessment. They understood the ramifications of ignoring what was happening around them, and thanks to their increased level of awareness, they were all thinking like protectors.

Exercise

Using the Self-Assessment

Earlier in this chapter you were asked to conduct a self-assessment in the appendix of this book. Make it a habit to review and update these lists often, then evaluate your personal defenses based on the following:

- **Who:** Are you routinely exposed to the people you identified as someone who may want to hurt you? If so, try to minimize that contact as much as possible.
- **What:** When you find yourself in the vicinity of these people, are you in possession of something they may find valuable?

- **When:** Are there specific times during your daily routines you feel you may be vulnerable to attack?
- **Where:** Are there places or positions you've put yourself into that could possibly make you more vulnerable to attack?

Using these lists, continually identify the people, places, and circumstances that could pose a risk to your safety. When you find yourself exposed to one of these risks, make an effort to modify your body language and behavioral patterns to present a hard target to any potential attackers.

Key Points

- Conduct a self-assessment by asking yourself the following questions:
 1. **Who:** Is there someone near you who may have a reason to approach you?
 2. **What:** Are you in possession of anything that may be of value to someone else?
 3. **When:** Are their periods when you are vulnerable to attack?
 4. **Where:** Are there places or positions you've put yourself into that could make you more vulnerable to attack?



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About the Author

GARY QUESENBERRY was born in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. His love of the outdoors and patriotic spirit led him to enlist in the United States Army where he served as an artilleryman during Operation Desert Storm. Gary later became a career federal air marshal and trainer where he has devoted his life to studying violence and predatory behavior. Now Gary serves as the CEO of Q-Series LLC and has devel-



Photo by Mary Mcilvaine

oped numerous basic- and advanced-level training courses focused on mental toughness, marksmanship, and defensive tactics. As a competitive pistol shooter, Gary has been featured on the History Channel's hit television series *Top Shot, Season 3* and *Top Shot All-Stars*. He has an extensive background in domestic and foreign counterterror training and has worked in both the private and corporate sectors to help educate others on the importance of situational awareness and personal safety "through his "Heads Up" training program."

Make no mistake—in a world filled with crime and violence, you are your own last line of defense.

“The world we live in is full of victims and survivors. Gary teaches you how to be a survivor.” —Burk Stearns, MBA, BS Criminal Justice, California Court Recognized Gang Expert

“A must-read for anyone who doesn’t have the Secret Service doing their danger-spotting for them.”
—LCDR Jonathan Cleck, Navy Seal

“Practicing situational awareness is one of the most important things a person can do to keep themselves and others safe. This book is that important.”
—Alain Burrese, JD, author, personal safety instructor

“This book is mandatory reading for those of you who wish to make yourself and your loved ones a ‘hard target.’”
—Steven M. Kinsey, US Department of Homeland Security

“The book that needed to be written!” —Jamie Franks, US Navy chief petty officer, 22-year veteran

“A vigorous and memorable primer on heightening awareness to prevent or counter danger.”
—Kirkus Reviews

A mother dropping her teenager off at the mall, a young man leaving home for college, a family about to head out on their first trip overseas. What do all of these people have in common? They all have a vested interest in their personal security and the wellbeing of those they love.

Spotting danger before it happens is a skill that can be developed and may even save your life.

Author Gary Quesenberry breaks down the basic techniques necessary to help you develop good situational awareness and increase your level of personal safety. Gary calls upon his extensive background as a federal air marshal to explain these methods in simple terms that will greatly improve your understanding of how, when, and where violence occurs.

He will then take the next critical step—providing you with the tools you need to properly identify and evade danger before it ever has a chance to materialize.

- Recognize the common traits of predatory behavior
- Learn how to conduct a personal “safety check”
- Develop strong situational awareness skills
- Know what to do when you spot potential trouble

“Today more than ever, it is imperative that we pay close attention to our surroundings and learn how to interpret what’s happening around us. Tragic events can often be both predictable and preventable.”



Gary Quesenberry is a US Army veteran and a career Federal Air Marshal. He has devoted his life to studying violence and predatory behavior. Gary has been featured on the History Channel’s hit series *Top Shot, Season 3* and *Top Shot All-Stars*. He has an extensive background in domestic and foreign counter-terror training and has worked extensively educating others on the importance of situational awareness and personal safety. Gary resides in Galloway, New Jersey.

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