

SURPRISED—Don't Ever Be

All about situational awareness— seize the element of surprise!



By David Kenik

When I was recently asked what my thoughts were on training someone to become situationally aware, I became, quite honestly, puzzled. It seems to me that it's not a skill that needs to be taught—that it's quite intuitive.

I believe that recognizing human predatory behavior is hardwired into our psyche. Over time, wild animals have been replaced by criminals as our predators. Just as a dog raises its hackles in a confrontation, the hair standing up on the back of our neck is a sign—an instinctual warning that something is amiss.

We interpret many unusual social behaviors as predatory behavior. Survival instinct tells us that when a group of kids split direction, they may be attempting to surround a potential victim just as a pack of wolves do. We find ourselves concerned with stout eye contact by strangers. These skills kept us alive as cavemen and continue to this day, albeit in a different form.

The more I thought about whether or not there is a need to teach specific awareness skills, the more I realized that while the capability of being aware of your surroundings is probably instinctual—the desire to do so needs to be instilled.

From my observations, the vast majority of people do not maintain a vigil of awareness. I find that it is because most people are not motivated to do so, and that is because they have not yet realized its importance.

Most who carry a gun believe they'll be able to stop any attack with their firearm. After all, that's why they carry a gun. Like most people, I did not realize that a defense is not likely to succeed if it is a reaction to violence that has already commenced. It took several exercises of testing my skills in real-life situations for me to recognize that in a direct, personal attack, it is not possible to respond in an effective manner without advance preparation. If it's a surprise attack, I will most likely not prevail! Even knowing an attack was imminent, I found myself behind the time/power curve because action beats reaction.

With a dummy gun or airsoft replicas conduct realistic situations to test your reaction time. One good scenario is to have a bad guy hold you up demanding money. Have him point his gun at a companion then draw your weapon to see if you can shoot him before he turns and shoots you.

A road rage incident is another good scenario to test. Seeing the driver get out of the car in front of you with a weapon, how long would it take you to get to cover and/or get your gun? Once these lessons of action/reaction are convincingly instilled, you'll realize there might be no viable defense in a direct attack—that situational awareness to avoid the encounter is your only key to survival.

By definition, defense is a reactive response. Because of reaction time, the victim is thus in a weak position once an attack has commenced.

It takes less time for an attacker to move four feet to stab someone than for the victim to move their trigger finger a quarter of an inch. The victim's brain needs to first perceive the attacker's motion, interpret its meaning, determine if it is a lethal attack, determine a reaction and then actually move the body. In reality, the victim can be stabbed well before he can fire his gun, and more than likely, he will be stabbed even before he even realizes what is happening. The Tueller Drill demonstrates that an average attacker can transverse 21 feet faster than the average person can perceive that the attack has commenced, draw, and fire a handgun. If you are attacked while your gun's still in your holster, chances are it's far too late to use it. Therefore, your best chance to successfully fend off an attack is to anticipate the encounter and prepare.

Situational awareness encompasses several main elements: looking for potential attackers, knowing the locations of cover and concealment, finding exits and seeking lanes of egress. Being aware of your situation and surroundings can benefit you threefold. 1) You can escape trouble by simply avoiding it. If you are watching your surroundings and you see what looks

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like trouble ahead, stay clear. 2) Knowing about trouble ahead of time can give you time to prepare a plan, seek out cover and concealment, and ready your weapons (retrieve pepper spray, open your knife, place hand on gun,

etc.) 3) If the assailant knows you're aware of him and prepared for an encounter, he may decide to find an easier victim.

On a walk downtown, some friends and I saw some street punks up ahead walking our way. It looked like they didn't have the best of intentions in mind. Not in a position to avoid the situation, we made it quite clear that we were aware of their presence and we would not be easy victims by moving the two women to the protected side of our group and making stern eye contact with the potential trouble makers. As soon as we did that, you could see the punk's attitude change. They were no longer loud, obnoxious, and dominating, but quietly just passed us by. Had their presence not been detected early, the situation might have turned out very differently.

Criminals most often don't select a victim at random. They seek someone they can dominate. Rather take \$10 from an easy victim than fight with a victim over \$50.

In the 1960s, street thugs would often seek out hippies to victimize, since they would surrender their valuables without a struggle and would not report the crime to police. Today, nothing has changed. Criminals seek victims who are similarly unaware and unprepared.

Best be always aware of your surroundings. Remain vigilant and alert. You can live your entire life in a watchful state without any psychological harm. Demonstrating alertness tells the criminal who's watching you that you are aware of your surroundings and his presence. The assailant will get a sense that you're not the easy victim he seeks. ●

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