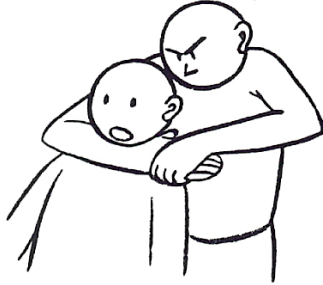


Situational Awareness 101

(By Ron Jones, MS, Historical Kinesiologist, Physical & Health Educator)

I'm not an elite martial artist—or self-defense specialist. I'm a civilian who has had the opportunity to be around some very high-level combative instructors. I've trained with them, learned from them, and also read their suggested references. Here are the most important situational awareness tips I have learned so far. I use these strategies daily—and so should you.



Fight, Flight, or Freeze: *We are wired for survival at birth.* We are born with our “fight or flight” system to flee danger or fight our way out of it so we can survive. By training your mind and body, you can also reduce/eliminate the “freeze response” that gives criminals a major advantage, or better yet, just avoid the whole thing by using the tips below.

- ✓ **Tech “LESS” Tip:** If you are “wired” to your phone and other electronic distractions, you will likely *increase your freeze time* because you won't be ready for what the incoming violence.

Victim Selection: *How does a criminal select a victim?* Your “visual calling card” before you ever open your mouth is important for street survival. How you “look” can set you up for attack or make a criminal keep looking for another victim.

- **Posture:** *How you stand and walk communicates without words.* Upright posture facilitates better overall awareness, enhances peripheral vision (far and wide), and makes you appear larger. Pay attention; don't walk right into a problem.
- **Gait:** *The quality of movement matters!* Prison studies show the #1 reason for victim selection is poor or “asymmetrical” gait. In opposition, symmetrical walking means you are balanced and walk better. Upright posture above should be noted again. Basically, by moving well, you are a harder target.
- **Hands & Holding:** *People are reluctant to drop what they are holding when attacked.* Criminals know this and take advantage of our “holding reflexes.” If attacked, “drop the stuff” unless you can use it for self-defense or combative advantage.

Situational Awareness Basics: *To avoid the need for “physical” self-defense, develop your mental situational awareness.* You must mentally practice to increase your situational awareness and avoid danger. To begin Situational Awareness 101, practice these basic essentials.

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- **360/21:** This means to develop an awareness that is 360 degrees around you (full circle) and know what is in this circle of awareness out to 21 feet away. 360° gives you awareness to each side and behind which is where many attacks originate—not straight into your face. The 21' relates to attack studies that show you need at least that distance for the reaction time to take defensive or offensive actions. Prisoners practice lunge attacks (especially with knives) and get quite good at it. Unless you are highly skilled, anyone closer than 21' away launching an aggressive attack will be on you before you can do anything about it. At least when in *questionable surroundings*, know who is within your 21' attack zone. *Distance is time.* Time gives you more options to react for flight or fight instead of freezing.
- **Adrenaline Amp Signs:** Some violent criminals will exhibit quick and nervous behaviors before attacking like bouncing up and down, pacing, hand gestures, verbal chants, etc. They are talking themselves into it and “amping up”—be prepared. Spot these, and take action.
- **Resource VS. Process Criminals:** Resource” criminals “want your stuff.” *Process criminals WANT YOU.* Know the difference. Jewelry and cash can be replaced but not your life. If they demand stuff—think resource. If they try to get you into the car—think process, and make a stand there without going anywhere because your death is a very real possibility with process criminals and abductions. Many violence experts recommend NEVER getting into a car—period.
- **Witness Check:** Before attack, criminals often will look around to “check for any potential witnesses” before the actual attack. Pay attention and learn to look for others looking around nervously.
- **Body Blading:** Right before a weapon is pulled, criminals will often “blade their bodies” in order to hide the weapon being drawn from out of the potential victim’s view whether it is a knife, gun, or club, or even a fist. If someone looks around nervously then “blades” sideways in your view—it can be a very important sign that an IMMEDIATE attack is coming!

Vehicle Safety: There are many opportunities for criminals to attack unaware motorists. Here are some good suggestions to keep you safer. These tips only take seconds but can save you from experiencing a horrible attack or car theft.

- **Parking Entrance:** Always use your “360/21” awareness as you enter the parking lot or even your own driveway. Scan. What do you see? Is there someone rapidly approaching you? Is anyone doing a witness check? If it does not look or feel right—keep driving.
- **Exiting Vehicle:** Before you jump out into a parking lot, use your mirrors and vision to make sure no one quickly approached as you came to a stop. I use small after-market bubble mirrors on my side mirrors that give me a wide-angle view. I can even see if someone is crouching down low to the ground. Give a quick visual inspection to make sure it’s clear.

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- **Entering Vehicle:** As you approach vehicle, use your “360/21” skills. One of the best opportunities for a criminal to surprise a motorist is right as they are getting into the vehicle. People fumble around trying to put their purse away, put belongings down, get their keys ready, get their seat belts on, and many times they do this without even shutting the door or locking the door. The **FIRST** thing upon entering—**LOCK DOORS!** Do not wait for fancy auto locks to activate as you drive away. Lock your doors immediately. Make this a constant routine—you always do it right away. This is such a simple thing that takes virtually no time but a behavior routine that can save your life.
- **Gas Stations:** I’m disturbed by the amount of distractions built into gas stations today. These distractions make it easier for criminals to surprise people who are distracted by the built-in distractions. Many gas pumps even have TV screens blaring music, news, or advertisements as soon as the pump is activated. Don’t be fooled! Keep using your “360/21” skills even while pumping the gas. Many people get robbed or car jacked while pumping gas, so do not assume these areas are “safe.” Be proactive. Eliminate distractions including the ones built into the gas pumps and music speakers!

Book References: There are many books on self-defense and situational awareness. Here are a few of the better ones that have been recommended to me by people who know violence and how to avoid it. **I recommend starting with “Defensive Living” and “Meditations on Violence.”*

- *“Conflict Communication”* by Rory Miller
- *“Defensive Living”* by Ed Lovette & Dave Spaulding*
- *“Meditations on Violence”* by Rory Miller*
- *“Scaling Force”* by Rory Miller & Lawrence A. Kane
- *“The Gift of Fear”* by Gavin De Becker

The tips above are primarily about mental strategies to keep you safe. Most attacks can be avoided along with the physical damage that WILL result no matter who wins if two people engage in violent combatives. Remember, you don’t need to be a martial artist or combatives expert to use situational awareness. Get on it. There is no time like the present.

It’s more than just “good luck.” Pay attention. *Be aware—not paranoid.* Move as well as possible—even when just walking. Creating “good luck” with personal safety is often just being aware of your situation, so good luck! ☺



Graphic Credit: “Dirty Fighting: An Introduction to the Principles of Combat Without Weapons” by Lt. David W. Morrah Jr. (1941)
*Updated 3.31.21

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