

Safe Selling

A Practical Guide
for Preventing Crime
without Sacrificing
the Sale



RealSafeAgent

Written by Lee Goldstein & Dave Legaz

For Agents

Written by Lee Goldstein & Dave Legaz
Edited and Compiled by Real Safe Agent

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OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

The real estate industry has undergone dramatic changes in the past 50 years. It has seen radically new business models and practices come about every 15-20 years. Unfortunately, real estate agent safety has NOT changed.

The same policies and practices developed by people with no crime prevention experience 50 years ago have been repeatedly recycled without ever asking key questions:

1. What type of crime is crime against real estate agents?
2. Are the policies and practices that we have been using for all these years effective at preventing the crime?
3. Are we providing effective training?
4. Can we prevent crimes against agents?
5. How is behavior and culture influenced?

This book answers these questions and more. We will start with an examination of how the industry has handled crime against agents and the impact of the mistakes it made, go in-depth into the nature of crime against agents, the offenders, safety products, what agents should be learning, behavioral and cultural change, and a plethora of other topics.

There are those who will read this far in the book and read no further because they believe existing “industry standard practices” are enough. For the most part they are not. For example, “Let the office know where you’re going and what

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time you'll be back" ... Does this keep you safe, or tell the office where to start looking for you? Keeping the office informed is a good practice but it DOES NOT keep you safe.

This book lays out a new approach, based in behavioral science and criminology, for preventing crime against agents.

No products will be mentioned or endorsed in this book.

THE INDUSTRY'S MISTAKES AND THE CONSEQUENCES

The real estate industry's attempts at improving safety have been largely ineffective over the years. The reason for this ineffectiveness is that the industry made 3 critical errors in dealing with crime against agents:

Mistake 1 - An Inaccurate Assumption

The industry made an inaccurate assumption about the nature of crime against agents. It assumed that crimes against agents were similar to opportunistic street crimes. With rare exception, crime against agents is predatory crime and meets all the classic predatory behavior patterns. To reinforce this point, consider what someone must do to attack a real estate agent:

1. The predator must "shop" for a victim.
2. The predator must choose a victim.
3. The predator must research the victim.
4. The predator must pick a site.
5. The predator must come up with a plan for how to get the victim alone with him/her at the site.
6. The predator must come up with a plan for how to get the victim isolated where he/she cannot be seen or heard while they are together at the site.
7. The predator must execute on all those plans.

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8. The predator must make an attack.

Clearly, these are not opportunistic crimes committed by impulsive criminals. Additionally, for the overwhelming majority of predators, this is an obsessive-compulsive behavior pattern, quite literally an obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The effects of making an inaccurate assumption about the nature of crime against agents have been devastating, particularly in the area of safety training. With one notable exception, the safety training for the real estate industry is based in situational awareness training. Situational awareness focuses primarily on being aware of the impact of your environment or surroundings on your present situation. Situational awareness training was originally designed for combat operators and then adopted for police. It was later scaled down, simplified, and taught to the general public to help them avoid being victims of opportunistic street crime, where your environment and surroundings have the greatest impact and provide the means and opportunity for the crime. However, crime against agents is predatory crime and situational awareness does not address issues and topics pertinent to preventing predatory crime specific to the real estate industry.

Furthermore, as a result being taught that crime against agents was like opportunistic street crime, many agents assumed that the people committing those crimes were similar to the types of

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individuals we associate with street crime. However, those are not the people committing crimes against real estate agents.

The overwhelming majority of attacks on agents are committed by white men between the ages of 30-55, who are middle to upper middle class, are typically employed as either white collar or professional trade and are typically in a long-term relationship. This profile further reinforces the nature of crime against agents considering that it's the typical profile for a predator. The net effect of the industry's error has made it easier for predators to attack agents, because the very nature of the predator's profile sets the agent at ease and makes it easier for the predator to make an attack.

Another byproduct of this mistake has been the teaching that if an agent meets the prospect at the office and gets a copy of the driver's license, this will keep the agent safe. Due to the obsessive-compulsive nature of predatory behavior patterns and high rate of unreported crimes against agents, this practice DOES NOT deter a predator or prevent a crime. Every year there are agents who have been attacked despite meeting the prospect at the office and obtaining a picture of the prospect's driver's license. To be clear, this is not a bad practice, however it should NEVER be used as a measure of safety with a prospect.

Mistake 2 - A Limited Approach

The second major mistake the industry made was taking a limited approach. The industry saw every agent as a lone entity and operated under the paradigm that anything can happen to any agent on any day. This may be a true statement, however, if this is the approach that is taken, there is no way to prevent crime from occurring. It is only possible to report the crime after it has occurred or is so imminent that nothing can be done to prevent it. The ONLY way to prevent predatory crime is to adopt a paradigm of cooperation and collaboration.

This siloed approach has guided two very ineffective types of products into the hands of agents; personal safety apps and instant background check products. Neither of these solutions are effective at preventing the crime from occurring. Personal Safety Apps are by their very nature reactive and not proactive. Instant Background Checks are proactive. However, between errors, unreported crimes, and other issues, the overwhelming majority of results are unreliable. Additionally, considering that US courts have ruled that criminal background checks are inherently discriminatory, their use presents risks in the practice of real estate. The issues surrounding Personal Safety Apps and Criminal Background Checks will be discussed at length later in this document.

The other negative effect of taking this siloed approach is that the industry made it substantially easier for predators to “hunt”

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in an area. Predators always meet with multiple agents prior to making an attack. The industry also made it easier for predators to hunt by not adopting a safety paradigm of cooperation and collaboration.

Mistake 3 - A Minimal Change Model

The third and final major mistake the industry made when trying to improve safety was using a minimal change model. The industry attempted to influence agent behavior and culture through public information campaigns. Public information campaigns inform, but they do not change behavior. Changing behavior requires positive reinforcement and making those changes permanent requires changing culture. The National Association of REALTORS® did a brilliant job using these principles to make RPAC one of the most (if not the most) prominent features in the industry culture.

The primary damaging effect as a result of the industry's adoption of a minimal change model has been a reactive attitude toward safety. When there is a high-profile crime against an agent, the efforts to influence safety rise and some agents increase the frequency of safety efforts. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter habits return to the status quo until the next high-profile assault, rape, or murder.

We can use the same techniques used to influence behavior and culture as it related to political fundraising to bring about

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permanent, meaningful change as it relates to safety in the industry culture.

That being said, it's up to each agent to promote these cultural changes inside their local association, state association, and national association. Crime against agents is almost entirely preventable, but only if agents are taught the correct information, adopt that information individually, and the industry makes the cultural changes needed to place the same level of importance on safety as it does on other more prominent areas of concentration.

UNDERSTANDING CRIME AGAINST AGENTS

As an agent, it's important for you to have an understanding of the primary types of criminals you are likely to experience, as well as the criminal's pathologies and patterns. By taking the time to understand crime and criminals, you are better able to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies, tactics, products, policies, etc. Previously, a lack of understanding of the crimes committed against agents and the people who commit those crimes, as well as a number of incorrect assumptions, has led to a slew of ineffective education, policies, practices, and products.

	Predators	Thieves
Motive	Power, Control	Profit
Crime	Assault, Rape, Murder	Burglary, Robbery
Emotional	Yes	No
Goal	Isolate You	Be Isolated
Decision Making	Fill an emotional need	Potential Gain vs. Potential Risk

The chart above lists the primary characteristics of predators and thieves, the types of criminals you are most likely to

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UNDERSTANDING CRIME AGAINST AGENTS

encounter in your capacity as a real estate agent. Although this document will cover thieves, our main focus will be on predators and how they function.

Predators vs. Thieves

A thief's primary motive is profit, and there is no emotional component to the crime. The obvious exception to this is kleptomania, however, this document will not delve that deeply into the subject of thieves. As a result of the fact that thieves' motive is profit and there is no emotional component to their crime, they make their decisions the same way any business person decides. Thieves make their decisions based on potential gain vs. potential risk. The higher the perceived potential gain and/or lower the perceived potential risk, the more attractive the target and situation is to the thief; conversely, the lower the perceived potential gain or the higher the perceived potential risk, the less attractive the target and situation is to the thief.

By far the most common type of thief an agent is likely to run in to is someone who is going to steal property from the showing or open house or use the showing or open house as a way to "case" the house as part of preparations for a burglary. One of the most important characteristics about thieves you need to remember is the environment the thief needs in order to commit the crime; a thief needs to be isolated where he/she cannot be seen or heard in order to commit the crime. This is why thieves are more likely to be found at open houses.

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Just as a thief needs to be isolated where he/she cannot be seen or heard, a predator needs to get the victim isolated where the victim cannot be seen or heard. This is why showings are much more dangerous than open houses, despite the common misperception that the opposite is true. A showing is much more conducive to a predator getting the victim isolated and open houses are much more conducive to a thief being isolated.

Predators are a very different animal than thieves. A predator's motive is power and control and there is an emotional component to their crime and all the activities that lead up to their crime. For a predator, their crime and all the activities that lead up to their crime are part of an obsessive-compulsive cycle. They make their decisions to fill an emotional need, they actually get a "high" off each activity involved in their cycle. Their behavior is similar to that of a binge alcoholic, "getting the high" is what's important and they will do anything that helps them achieve that high. Remember that a predator needs to get the victim isolated where he or she can't be seen or heard in order to commit the crime. It's much easier to do this if the agent is feeling comfortable and confident with the predator. This is why meeting at the office and getting a copy of a driver's license does not deter a predator or prevent the crime. To the predator this is an opportunity to gain the trust and confidence of the victim. Furthermore, because 80% of crimes against agents go unreported and a typical repeat rapist will have on average 11 victims before he is arrested for any sexually based offense, the predator is not that worried about the potential victim knowing his identity. In many cases

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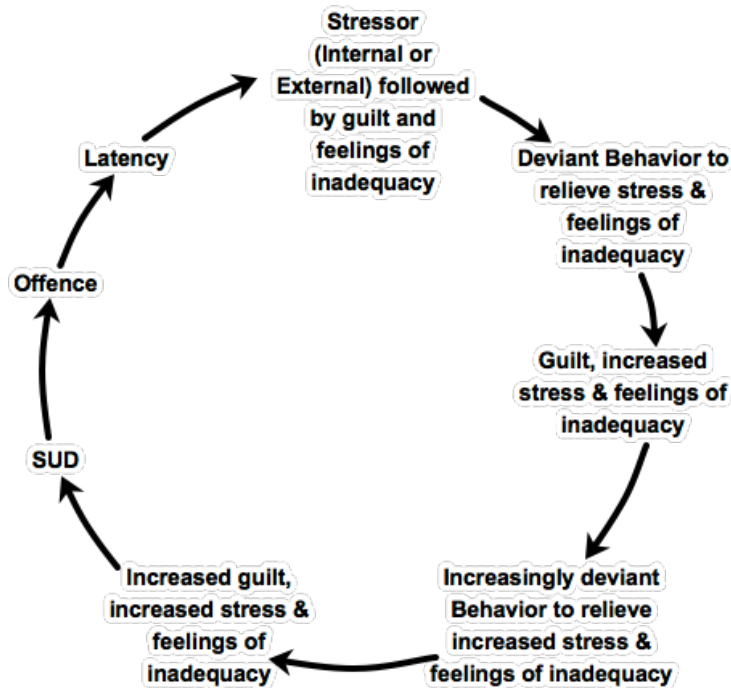
where the victim got the driver's license of the predator, the predator provided his actual license.

Since a predator's motive is power and control, he is attracted to weakness, subservience, and vulnerability. Exercising power and control over another person is how the predator achieves the high, so it's perfectly logical that weakness, subservience, and vulnerability would attract them. This is why being dominant can deter a predator and one type of smile versus another can make the agent less likely to be targeted by a predator.

The Offender Cycle

Earlier we mentioned that a predator's crime and all the activities that lead up to the crime are part of an obsessive-compulsive cycle. This cycle is known as the Offender Cycle. It's important to understand that most people have seen this cycle before in friends and family that are alcoholics, particularly binge alcoholics. An alcoholic will stop drinking for a time before a trigger of some kind will occur – this event could be external such a bad day at work, a fight with a significant other, etc. or could be purely internal. This trigger will cause stress and start the obsessive-compulsive pattern. To relieve the stress and remove the obsessive thoughts they will start drinking. They may start with one drink a day for a week. They say “well, I can have one drink, that will be okay”

The Offender Cycle



and they can control it to one drink a day for a while. However, at some point one drink is not enough to keep the bad thoughts and feelings at bay. To further compound the issue, the addict starts feeling guilty about drinking again. Then it escalates to three drinks a day, then five drinks a day, and then he/she is passed out every night.

This is the same type of pattern that a predator goes through. They have something happen that triggers the beginning of their cycle, this trigger may be external or internal. The one thing we do know is that it's almost always associated with feelings of inadequacy or worthlessness. To get the bad thoughts and feelings out of their head they engage in an initial

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behavior; this is usually looking at pictures of agents on real estate portals or some other space on the web. These are stress relieving behaviors, not unlike that of “normal” people. It’s important to note that we all have things we do when we are stressed - some read, some exercise, play with the dog, watch a movie, etc. The predator goes through the same thing, however, after they are done with the behavior and the “high” subsides, they feel guilty over the behavior which makes the feelings of inadequacy more intense, requiring them to engage in even more devious behavior to relieve the stress and gain temporary relief from the bad thoughts and feelings, as well as the obsession. Typically, the predator’s offender cycle will move on to a research stage where, after choosing several potential targets, the predator will begin learning more about each potential target.

Next, the predator will enter their fantasy stage. During this stage the predator’s research will take on a much more personal nature and will focus on social media and other more personal sources. The predator’s fantasies are usually not violent; they are usually quite loving and gentle. It’s important to remember that at each stage in the cycle, the feelings of inadequacy and obsession become more intense and therefore require increasingly deviant behavior to relieve those feelings. The guilt becomes more intense because the predator knows that their behavior will eventually lead to the crime, but they don’t want to commit the crime. However, the behavior that will lead to the crime is the only way to they get relief from the stress and pain of the feelings of inadequacy and obsession.

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After a while, the fantasies are no longer enough to satisfy and that is when the predator hits the SUD - the Seemingly Unimportant Decision.

Until they reach the SUD, they can exit out of the cycle, although it will restart. Once the SUD occurs, the predator no longer has the ability to resist, and he will commit the crime. The “SUD” is typically “I’m not going to do anything; I just want to meet”. The plans will be made, the sites selected, and the meetings arranged. The guilt over being unable to control their compulsions is what pushes them to the next level of behavior.

It’s important to understand that the predator may not attack the first, second, or even 20th agent he meets with, but the attack will occur.

The Timeline of a Crime

Most people think that when an agent gets attacked, the crime started when the predator met the agent. However, the reality is that the crime may have started months or even years before. The important thing to keep in mind is that in each step in the predator’s progression, there are opportunities to prevent the crime from occurring. Regardless of the specifics of a particular predator’s offender cycle, the following is the common progression of the pre-cursor (or hunting) behaviors:

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1. **Initial focus** - The crime begins when the predator first notices the agent(s). This typically occurs through photographs. Avoiding certain types of smiles can reduce the agent's risk of being targeted.

2. **Focusing behavior** – The predator is in the research stage, typically focusing on professional information. During this phase, the language and information an agent has on his or her website may encourage or discourage the predator staying focused on the agent.

3. **Fantasy** – The predator begins to fantasize about the agent. During this phase the predator is using personal information, typically collected from social media, to insert elements of the agent's real life into the predator's fantasy life. During this stage, the agent has the opportunity to encourage or discourage the predator staying focused on the agent depending on how the agent structures and handles his/her social media. This stage may also involve physical stalking behaviors, but typically will not involve contact.
 - It's important to note here that the predator is typically focused on several agents simultaneously during phases 1 – 3.

4. **Plan the meeting** - At some point the Fantasy and stalking no longer provide the “high”, and the predator

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will plan a meeting, more than likely a showing. It is at this point that they will decide on a location.

5. **Execute the plan** - The first step in executing the plan will be to arrange the meeting by calling and asking you to show him/her a home. This will likely be your first opportunity to assess the risk of the prospect.
 6. **Meeting** - The predator will meet you at the prescribed location, it is possible that he/she will “no show” depending upon their state of mind and/or comfort level with their urges.
- It’s important to note that the predator will repeat phases 4-6 on several agents. Predators always meet with multiple agents prior to making an attack. There are 2 primary reasons for this. The first is that the predator may be working up to an attack. Remember that the predator gets a “high” off all the activities leading up to an attack. Consequently, at any one particular meeting, “feeding” off the agent’s discomfort and anxiety may provide enough of a “high”. At some point that will not be enough, and the attack WILL occur on one of the agents that the predator is going to wind up meeting. Once the predator has progressed to this point, he/she will still

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likely meet with several more agents. The second is that part of the “high” the predator seeks is that the situation needs to meet a plan or vision he has.

Dominant agents, agents bringing accompaniments, agents not putting themselves in isolating situations, or other factors may interfere with the predator’s plans and cause the predator to move on to the next target.

7. **Stage setting** - During the showing the predator will seek to isolate the agent where he/she cannot be seen or heard by others. They may ask the agent to look at something in the closet or bathroom, show them the basement, the garage if the door is closed, or to close the blinds because they want to see how much light the fixture throws off, etc. By following certain guidelines and strategies, the agent can prevent an attack by not allowing him/herself to be isolated where he or she cannot be seen or heard by others.

8. **Offend** - When the stage is set the way the predator wants it and you are isolated; the attack will come. During this stage the predator will begin to display outward signs of an increase of adrenaline. By understanding those signs, the agent can exit before the attack occurs as opposed to attempting to escape after it has occurred.

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AN EVALUATION OF PERSONAL SAFETY APPS AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

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As we have previously discussed, an attack on an agent is not an impulsive act by an opportunistic criminal, it requires planning and patience. Crimes against agents are entirely different than random street crimes or home invasions, and the tools that can help in random street crimes or home invasions DO NOT work in the case of crimes against agents. To further complicate the issue, as an agent, you must sell, often meeting with people you do not know in empty residences and often feeling uncomfortable. Unfortunately, your livelihood depends on staying with those individuals even when you feel uncomfortable.

Staying safe means preventing the crime in the first place, and once you are alone with a prospect, the only way to prevent a crime without sacrificing a legitimate sale is to have another individual casually show up at the house within minutes of when you start to feel uncomfortable. If the individual is dangerous and it takes someone 20 or 30 minutes to arrive, then it's too late. If you wait until you feel scared instead of just uncomfortable, then an attack is imminent and it's too late. If you alert police when you're uncomfortable and the prospect is not dangerous, then you will have surely lost a sale.

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Many features of personal safety apps are mobile app-based versions of the same safety procedures the industry has employed for years; “tell people where you’ll be and how long you’ll be there”, and “call/alert a friend, family member, or colleague if you’re in trouble”. Unfortunately, these policies only let people know that you have been attacked; neither one of these policies prevent an attack from occurring.

Let’s for a moment take the typical scenario, that you have been contacted by someone who does not seem threatening over the phone and you meet the individual alone at the property. At some point during the showing, you become uncomfortable. Keep in mind that at this point you are just uncomfortable, but you do not know if the prospect is dangerous, socially awkward, or thinks himself a Don Juan.

Now that we have set the stage, let’s look at the various types of personal safety apps and devices being marketed to real estate agents:

Personal Safety Apps/Wearables/Features that Alert a Pre-Set List of Contacts

These types of features do not keep you safe because they do not prevent the crime from occurring in the first place. The key problem with these is that more than likely the five or so

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“pre-set” individuals may be 30 minutes away, in a meeting, at a doctor’s appointment, etc. There are two scenarios where you might use this feature, issuing an alert when you first become uncomfortable and issuing the alert when you are scared.

Let’s consider the scenario where you issue the alert when you first become uncomfortable:

1. If the prospect IS dangerous, the contacts would need to be close enough to arrive within a few minutes, otherwise they will not be close enough to do anything that can prevent an attack. Also, if they arrive after an attack has started, they will likely be attacked as well if there are no features designed to keep the responder safe.
2. If the prospect IS NOT dangerous and panicked contacts show up at the house while the showing is still happening, you risk losing a sale. After that happens once you will most likely never use it again.

Now let’s consider the scenario where you wait until you’re scared before issuing the alert. In this case the attack is imminent, and no one can get there fast enough to prevent the attack.

Personal Safety Apps or Wearables that Alert a Call Center or Police

These apps or devices allow you to alert police or a call center that in return will either call the police for you or ask you if you need the police.

The vast majority of the time that you feel uncomfortable with a prospect, the prospect is not dangerous. The problem is that you don't know who is and is not dangerous until it's too late. If these systems are used when you are just uncomfortable, you will likely lose every sale where you feel uncomfortable and the prospect was not dangerous. Consequently, these systems are not practical as a means of prevention.

If you wait until you feel scared, then an attack is imminent and it's too late even if the police are called.

Personal Safety Apps or Wearables that Work Off a Timer or Geo Fence

Some apps will notify a preset list of contacts if you have not turned a timer off before the timer expires and/or if you leave a pre-set geographic area. These are also completely ineffective at keeping the you safe because they do nothing to prevent the attack from occurring. If you have not turned the timer off, then you have either forgotten to turn it off or are incapable of turning it off.

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In the case that nothing has happened, but you forgot to extend or cancel the timer....

1. If panicked contacts show up at the house while the showing is still happening, you risk losing a sale. After that happens once you will likely never use it again.
2. If you continue to use the app and forgetting about the timer becomes a habit, then contacts will begin ignoring the alerts because they will become used to false alerts.
3. If contacts start calling you during the showing this could cause a difficult conversation that puts the sale in jeopardy. If the you do not answer the call(s); and either panicked contacts show up or call the police, this too puts the sale in jeopardy.

In the case that you have been attacked and are incapable of cancelling the timer or have been taken outside the area against your will... Clearly in this case you have not stayed safe and the app is merely letting contacts know where to start searching.

Let us also consider one additional scenario; the prospect is dangerous and has, by coincidence, initiated an attack after the timer expired and sent an alert.

1. If contacts come to the house, they have now been put in grave danger because they have no way of knowing that an

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attack has occurred, so by entering the house there is a high likelihood that the predator will attack them as well. Now we have 2 victims and one of the victims is a victim as a result of the safety app because the app did not provide the responder with any information that could be used to protect him/herself.

2. If the contact calls the police, that's great, but the attack has already occurred.

Lethal and Non-Lethal Weapons

Police are trained to use the 30ft rule, if the attacker is within 30 feet, don't use your weapon because there is not enough time to use the weapon. Attacks on agents do not occur from across the room. An attacker will attempt to isolate a victim where he/she cannot be seen or heard and then attack from arm's length away. Consequently, unless you are willing to carry the weapon, safety off, in your hand, you will not have the time to take the weapon out, aim, and fire.

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Background Checks

DOJ Study

Every 2 years the DOJ releases a study on the nation's criminal history databases. The most current study was released in 2018 and provides insights into why commercial background checks are ineffective. The report found that a remarkably low percentage of arrests and convictions are making it into the nation's most complete criminal history database. The following are some highlights of the report:

- Of the 10.7 million arrests in 2016, only 3.6 million were reported to NCIC.
- Of the 3.6 million reported, only 1.4 million had a final disposition. (Final dispositions are necessary for a record to show up in a commercially available criminal background check)
- 2016 was the most complete year in the NCIC's history.

What these numbers show is that even if a commercial instant background check system is using the most complete criminal history database in the country, it will still only have information on 13 percent of the crimes. Additionally, we also need to take into account the estimated 30 percent error rate of

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instant background checks due to variances in the spelling of names, errors in dates of birth, and mistakes that occur in the data entry process.

If a prospect rapes, assaults, or kills a real estate agent, is convicted, goes to jail, gets out, and calls an agent to show him a house and the agent runs an instant background check, the agent has approximately an 8 percent chance of finding out about the crime.

Predatory Behavior and Criminal Background Checks

In addition to the incompleteness of criminal history databases, the very nature of crime against real estate agents makes reliance on criminal background checks problematic. Crime against agents is predatory crime, committed by true predators, and meets all the classic predatory behavior patterns. These are not random opportunistic crimes committed by impulsive, careless people with extensive felonious criminal "rap sheets". Additionally, predatory behavior, including the crime, is a progressive, obsessive-compulsive behavior pattern like that of a binge alcoholic. A predator's motive is power and control; they get an "emotional high" off their crime and all the events that led up to the crime. When visiting with an agent, they intentionally exert "dominance." This dominance is what causes agents to have uncomfortable feelings.

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Studies into various types of predators have shed light into their behavior patterns and lack of any criminal history while committing multiple crimes.

On average, a non-preferential rapist will have 10 victims in his adult life before being arrested for any felony, let alone rape. Source: Repeat Rape & Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists . One individual raped 26 agents in 13 years before he finally got caught on the 27th.

Other studies such as Weinrott & Saylor's Self-Report of Crimes Committed by Sex Offenders, published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*—have found that, on average, a rapist will have 11 victims prior to being arrested the first time and they estimate that unreported rapes range between 68 percent to 92 percent.

Only 37 percent of people charged with rape had a previous felony conviction at the time they were arrested for rape the first time, according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

Legal Implications of Background Checks

A discussion of instant criminal background checks would not be complete without considering the legal issues involved. Aside from the obvious legal implications of inaccurate reporting, according to the Supreme Court, the use of

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background checks may be a violation of the Fair Housing Act. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled on *Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs v. Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.* The opinion, written by Justice Kennedy, said that a party may prove violations of the Fair Housing Act by either showing intentional discrimination or that a certain practice has an adverse or "disparate impact" on protected classes.

In a 2016 article entitled "What the Latest Fair Housing Guidance on Criminal Background Checks Means for Real Estate" about new HUD rulings, the National Association of Realtors said, "While persons with criminal records are not a protected class under the Fair Housing Act, HUD's recent guidance maintains that criminal history-based barriers to housing have a statistically disproportionate impact on minority groups. Because minorities are a protected class under the Fair Housing Act, HUD's guidance says that creating arbitrary or blanket criminal-based policies and restrictions could potentially violate the Fair Housing Act".

When one considers the completeness of criminal history databases, the error rate due to data variances, and the predatory nature of crime against agents, the effectiveness of background check systems in providing agents with "red flags" disappoints. Furthermore, instant criminal background checks pose a potential Fair Housing Act violation. Considering the lack of efficacy and potential Fair Housing issues, if an agent

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chooses to use instant background checks, he or she needs to do so with an understanding of the issues and risks involved.

HOW TO EVALUATE SAFETY PRODUCTS

There are countless “safety” products on the market and without an understanding of crime against agents and how it works, poor decisions and recommendations can easily be made. Staying safe as a real estate agent means preventing the crime from occurring. The following are criteria that should be used in choosing a safety product:

1. The product should support behavioral and cultural change because changing how the real estate community handles agent safety affects ALL agents.
2. The product should be designed to prevent the crime from occurring.
3. Because predators follow behavior patterns, the product should be rooted in behavioral science.
4. If the product is designed to “alert others”, who it alerts should be based on the proximity of the people being alerted to the agent issuing the alert. This criterion is important because their proximity determines how quickly they can get to you.
5. The product should include two different alert types, one alert for when the agent is just “uncomfortable” and does not want to be alone with the prospect any longer, and an emergency alert. This is important because

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predators always meet with multiple agents prior to making an attack and those agents always report feeling uncomfortable. However, because agents also feel uncomfortable periodically with legitimate prospects, they must have a way to get a third person there quickly without having to wait to find out if the prospect is dangerous.

6. The product must be clandestine so you can use it without concern about making a legitimate prospect uncomfortable.
7. Considering the ineffectiveness of background checks and social media checks the product must allow you to see behavior-based “red flags” based on the prospect’s behavior and the reaction of others to that behavior.
8. The product should be integrated with 9-1-1 and should provide the 9-1-1 operator the ability to determine the agent’s location.

WHAT DO YOU ACTUALLY NEED TO KNOW TO STAY SAFE?

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Reducing the Risk of Being Targeted

The first step in preventing yourself from being a victim of a crime is eliminating as many “attractors” as possible. That being said, a big part of marketing yourself as a real estate agent is making yourself and your picture as prominent as possible. This section is about how to market yourself but make minor changes that remove as many “attractors” as possible.

Images

Images are an important part of marketing yourself and your listings. However, they are also often the item that starts the targeting process.

A predator’s motives are power and control and they will therefore be attracted to characteristics such as weakness, subservience, and vulnerability. Your professional photos can act as an attractor to the predator by conveying vulnerability. Typically, an agent’s headshots fall into one of two types... a personal smile (right picture) and a professional smile (left picture).

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A personal or intimate smile is the smile one would expect to see when someone they love says I love you. It's typified by a slight tilt of the head, eyes that appear more oval than round, and a flatter smile where the ends of the mouth are pointing towards the lower connection of the ear. In pictures, as in real life, intimacy is vulnerability, and an intimate smile is more likely to attract the attention of a predator.

Conversely, a professional smile will make an agent less attractive to a predator because it projects power, confidence, and authority. A professional smile is typified by the head being straight, the eyes wide open but not strained, and a big smile where the ends of the mouth are pointing towards the upper connection of the ears.

It should be noted that by projecting confidence, power, knowledge, and authority you will attract more buyers and sellers. Basically, personal smiles increase the likelihood that you will be targeted by a predator and less likely that a buyer or seller will contact you. At the same time, a professional smile makes it *less* likely that a predator will target you and

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increases the likelihood that a legitimate buyer or seller will contact you.

To reduce the risk of being targeted by those with a power motive:

- Avoid full body pictures.
- Wherever possible, use photos that are above or right at the shoulders.
- When using pictures that include the upper body:
 - Be professional.
 - Wear a shirt that goes no lower than the top of the breast bone.
 - Don't wear anything form fitting.
 - Wear professional colors.
 - Wear a jacket when possible.
 - Be aware of facial expressions.
- Professional, authoritative smile and expression – We smile differently towards a client than we do towards a loved one. A professional smile is a facial expression that establishes a “boundary”, whereas a personal smile is a facial expression that is softer, warmer, and conveys vulnerability.
- Look straight into the camera.
- Keep your head vertical, no tilt to one side or another.
- Use professional eyes (relaxed and fully open, but not “strained open” as if you are surprised).
- For women, your make-up should be natural and understated.

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To reduce the risk of being targeted by those with a profit motive:

- Avoid pictures that depict you with an expensive vehicle.
- Avoid jewelry if possible.
- Jewelry should be minimal and understated.
- Wedding rings visible in photos should be a simple wedding band.

A predator's initial focus will almost always be from an image. However, once the initial targeting has occurred, the predator will go through a progression of behaviors that will typically start at professional research based in the target's website and other "professional" information and eventually progress to researching personal details of the target primarily through social media. These behaviors are part of the predators "offender cycle" and provide the predator with the emotional high they seek. The increasing depth of their research and eventual fanaticizing is a reflection of more shallow activities no longer being satisfying in the same way that the alcoholic or drug addict builds a tolerance.

If targeting occurs, an agent can increase the likelihood that the predator will cease to focus on him/her based on factors such as the language and information used in marketing and how social media is used.

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Marketing Language Matters

The words used in your marketing messages have connotations, which is to say that they have emotional value over and above the literal meaning. Those who commit crimes with a power motive are attracted to subservience and weakness because the “power high” is what they seek. Those who commit crimes with a profit motive are also attracted to subservience and weakness because it represents lower risk.

Agents should be aware that the language they choose in their marketing materials and website set the tone. Choosing words and messages that convey power, control, knowledge, authority, etc. will reduce the attractiveness for a predator.

For example:

“Here to serve all your real estate needs”

vs.

“Experience to handle the entire real estate process”

Notice that the first statement implies servitude, whereas the second statement implies confidence, authority, and power. It’s important to point out that authoritative language attracts more legitimate prospects and detracts predators.

Information to Avoid in Marketing

Earlier we mentioned that stalking behaviors give a predator a “high”; in addition to potentially planning an attack. Consequently, you’ll want to ensure that information included

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in marketing does not “feed the stalking high” or help a predator plan an attack in the event that someone does fixate on and target you. By limiting the “high” a predator can achieve through online stalking, you can increase the likelihood that the predator will lose interest.

For several years, agents have been told to include personal information in their marketing efforts. This is the wrong approach; a prospect does not care about your family, where you live, or what schools your children attend. What they do care about is that you are competent and are an expert in the area where he/she wishes to live.

An effective way of achieving this “expert” status without revealing personal information is to provide lifestyle information about specific areas. For example:

- “If you are looking at homes in these areas, there are 3 supermarkets nearby, this supermarket is typically less expensive, this other supermarket has a great organic section, this other supermarket has great meats.”
- “If you are looking to live in this subdivision and you have kids, there are 2 parks; this park is great for little kids, but this other park has a tendency to be popular with teenagers.”

Avoid including the following information:

- Do not include if you have children.

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- The neighborhood you live in - For example: avoid “I’m the expert in the Hills Subdivision, I’ve lived here for years”; instead use “I’m the expert in the Hills Subdivision, I’ve lived in the area for years
- DO not include pictures of your family.
- Your favorite places-restaurant, club, exercise, store, etc....
- Do not mention specific PUBLIC networking groups to which you belong.
- Do not mention specific neighborhood or school groups to which you belong.

Social Media

In today’s day and age, social media is an important marketing tool for the real estate agent. Unfortunately, it is also an important tool for predators and those who stalk. Remember, if you catch the attention of a predatory or obsessive individual, your best chance of having him lose interest is to give the predator little or no material of interest on which to fantasize or “feed the high”. The more personal information a predator can get on a target, the more he will fantasize about the target and the higher the likelihood that he will continue to progress through his offender cycle and eventually commit the crime.

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Social Media Do's:

- Have separate personal and professional pages and make sure that no personal information appears on your professional page and vice versa. Use different emails to create the pages. There should be NO shared information or images between the two.
- Abbreviate your last name or use a nickname on your personal pages, use your full name on your professional pages.
- Use different images on your personal and professional pages.
- Periodically, use search engines to search for yourself to see how difficult it is to find your personal pages.
- Use the social media site's security to help ensure your personal site information is hidden to all who are not your direct friend or contact.

Social Media Don'ts:

- Don't use location tracking.
- Don't post your habits (i.e. "I love this coffee shop, I come here every day").
- Don't post information that could be used to identify your children's school, spouse's workplace, etc.....

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Additionally, you should periodically search for yourself on the internet to test how difficult it is to find your personal information. You should also use tools such as Google Images® to search the internet for any place where images you use in your professional profiles are appearing.

Pre-Showing

If a predator has targeted you (bear in mind you will likely NOT know) and the predator does not lose interest, then the predator will eventually execute his plan to get you alone with him at the property. This will involve a phone call, and it is in this call that you have the opportunity to reveal “red flags” and raise deterrents to the predator. Additionally, after the initial call and before the meeting, there are specific techniques that can be used to help you differentiate and make better decisions about whether or not to take someone with you on the appointment.

The Initial Call

Using Active Listening to uncover “red flags”

Active listening is one of the most effective sales tools you can have in your toolbox because it quickly and effectively allows you to establish trust and to uncover a buyer’s wants and needs. Active Listening is also a valuable safety tool and can be used to uncover “red flags” that indicate that a prospect may have an ulterior motive.

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Let's take a look at an excerpt from an initial phone conversation:

Prospect: I saw this house online and I'd like to see it.

Agent: OK, what about the house appealed to you?

Prospect: I just liked it.

The prospect's answer should serve as a red flag. If someone liked a house enough to take the time to see it, there should be at least one specific thing that was attractive to him/her.

Agent: OK, I'd like to make sure I can answer any questions you may have during the showing. Is there anything about the house or neighborhood that's important for you to know?

Prospect: Not really.

Once again, the prospect's inability to specifically answer reasonable questions should act as a red flag.

Agent: That's easy then, I know you found the house online. How did you locate me?

Prospect: Online, the same site as the house.

Agent: Great, it's nice to know that I'm getting some attention, sometimes it's difficult to evaluate what sites are getting my name out there. What site did you find me on?

Prospect: BigDataRealEstate.com.

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In this part of the conversation, there are no red flags until the agent compares it with information only he/she would know; for instance, whether or not he/she pays BigDataRealEstate.com to promote him/her alongside properties in that zip code. If they don't, then that's an obvious red flag.

Agent: I understand that BigDataRealEstate.com also recommends mortgage providers, have you already been pre-qualified?

Prospect: Yes

Agent: Great, who have you been working with? (You may even tell them it's because as a matter of policy you need to have the pre-approval paperwork)

Prospect: I can't remember.

Obviously, not being able to remember the name of the company or individual that pre-qualified him/her would be a red flag.

Notice that each question built on some aspect of the prospect's answer to the previous question, sending the clear signal that you are listening to what the prospect has been saying, which is the first step in building trust. Practicing so you can be fluid in these conversations, not mechanical is important; thereby not giving the conversation the feel of an interrogation. The primary reason for this is that the vast majority of prospects are legitimate, and you don't want to scare those off. This fluidity can be seen in the following:

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Prospect: I found this house online and I'd like to see it.

Agent: OK, what about the house appealed to you?

Prospect: I've seen other houses in the neighborhood and wasn't thrilled, but I liked the looks of this house.

Agent: Sounds like you've been putting some time into this. Have you seen those houses with other agents?

As you can see, the agent adjusted her line of questioning based on the prospect's response and followed up with a question that was relevant but would still obtain important information for a legitimate sale as well as possibly uncovering red flags.

The above conversation was kept short for time consideration. However, in a real situation, if the prospect was a threat, he would often be more talkative and inquisitive, because he would be trying to increase *your* comfort level and obtain information he could use, thereby making you an easier target.

Using Property and Neighborhood information to deter a predator

Information about the property and neighborhood can be used to uncover red flags and deter a predator. For example:

Agent (spoken to prospect on the phone): I really like that property. The house has a great feel to it, lots of windows, great visibility. I've also met some of the

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neighbors and it seems like a close knit, pretty safe neighborhood.

It should go without mentioning that you should never lie to a prospect. So, if you are a listing agent, take the time to meet the neighbors when you get the listing; not only is it a good sales practice, but it allows you to learn valuable information that can be used both as a sales tool and as a deterrent and “red flag” investigative tool.

Referring to the above example of the agent’s statement to the prospect, the information the agent relayed would likely make the property more attractive and one might expect to hear a positive response such as the prospect’s tone of voice going up. However, if the prospect was a threat, the agent has essentially told them that it will be harder to get them isolated where he or she cannot be seen or heard because of the windows and visibility of the home and that there is a decent chance that someone will be “dropping in” because of the tight knit nature of the neighborhood. If, in listening to the response of the prospect, one detects a drop in the tone of voice or some other change that would indicate a drop in enthusiasm, that could be a red flag that would indicate the agent should bring an accompaniment.

Additionally, listing agents should include safety information in the broker only remarks so that buyer’s agents can see that information. Cooperation and collaboration are the only way to prevent predatory crime.

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The Training Play

During the initial call or follow-up, you will find the “Training Play” a useful tool in assessing the prospect. The Training Play is simple: during the call you mention that the office has asked you to help train a new agent and he will be joining the both of you on the appointment. The prospect’s reaction to that news may provide you with valuable information. You may even describe the new agent “You’ll really like Eric. He’s a great guy, he used to be a pro football player and he’s always telling stories”. If you choose not to bring someone with you on the appointment, you can simply mention that the other agent had something come up or he’s on his way.

Establishing Control

Remember that criminals with a power motive will be more attracted to a victim that is subservient, therefore an agent establishing control of the conversation and the situation can act as deterrent to a predator. This can be easily done with a few simple techniques. For example, when the prospect suggests a meeting time (say 6pm) you should not automatically accept it, instead you should say you need to make it 6:30. Don’t ask if 6:30 is OK, tell them that’s when you can meet. You are establishing power and control, thereby making yourself less attractive to the predator without sacrificing attractiveness to a legitimate buyer.

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Set the Expectations Up Front

One of the greatest challenges for agents, especially new agents, is setting boundaries without making a legitimate prospect uncomfortable. As an agent, you don't need to be told don't go into the basement, you know to not go into the basement. If you do go into the basement, it's probably because you are afraid of jeopardizing a sale as a result of making the prospect uncomfortable and/or offending them. What you need to learn is how to not go into the basement without alienating a legitimate prospect.

The key to not alienating a legitimate prospect is setting expectations up front. For example: "The house has a finished basement, and during the showing you are more than welcome to explore it. I'll be right at the top of the stairs to answer any questions you may have". By using an authoritative but friendly tone you will not offend a legitimate prospect and will not set him/herself up for an uncomfortable situation where you are telling the prospect as he is walking towards the basement that you won't be going into the basement. Additionally, setting expectations up front establishes power and control and makes you less attractive to a predator.

Avoiding Victim Stance

An important part of establishing control is not displaying "Victim Stance" or expressing that the reason for a particular situation or rule is because of something that happened to you that is beyond your control. For example, you shouldn't say "I can meet at 6:30

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because my car is at the shop and I have to pick it up”. You should instead say, “I can meet you at 6:30”. You shouldn’t say, “I won’t go into the basement because I’ve had a bad experience”. You should instead say, “I’ll wait up here, take all the time you wish”.

You can make yourself an unattractive target to someone seeking to do you harm, without making the legitimate buyer uncomfortable.

Assessing Overall Risk

If you are like most agents, you have heard “just always take someone with you” countless times and it’s had no impact. One of the most important things you can learn is how to assess the overall risk of an appointment, taking into account the property, the prospect, and the situation.

The following are important factors in determining the risk level of the property:

Vacancy – Is the property vacant? A vacant property will increase risk because of the risk of squatters.

Cell Signal – Do you have a strong cell signal? If the signal is weak or non-existent ALWAYS BRING SOMEONE WITH YOU ON AN APPOINTMENT!

Exterior Lighting – Is the exterior of the house well lit?

Interior Lighting – Is the interior of the house well lit?

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Windows – Are there plenty of windows? Do they provide an unobstructed view from the outside of the house to the inside and vice versa? Ideally, you'll want to make sure that you and the prospect are always in view of the outside.

Stories – How many stories does the house have? A one-story house is the safest because they generally have the best escape paths.

Garage – Does the house have a garage? Is it attached? Can you open the door easily? The existence of a garage can increase risk if it's attached and the garage door is closed.

Basement – Does the house have a basement? Basements are a huge risk, and if a predator has targeted you, there is a good chance that a basement will be a factor in choosing the house in which to commit the crime.

Escape Paths – Do you have at least 2 escape paths from any point in the house? Multiple escape paths reduce the risk because a predator can't block your escape path if it's needed.

Exterior Doors – Does the entrance have a storm door in addition to main door? How many exterior doors? Storm doors can slow down an escape if needed, the more exterior doors the house has means more escape paths.

Yard – Does the yard obstruct the view into the house from any houses around the property? Does it provide an escape route to another house or the street?

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Fence – Is the front and/or back yard fenced? Does it obstruct views? Is it locked?

No class or guide can anticipate every layout of every house, so be sure you use common sense and think critically. The more visible you are, the safer you are, and the more escape paths, the safer.

EAR Worksheet

The following tool, the EAR worksheet, can be used to assess the overall relative risk of an appointment.

The process is simple. The worksheet contains a list of criteria that corresponds to the evaluation you have already done.

Each of the criteria has a corresponding negative or positive value, depending on whether it increases the risk or decreases the risk. Simply add the numbers together to arrive at an overall risk assessment. The lower the score, the higher the risk, simple. You can add, remove, or change the values to criteria as you see fit.

The following two pages contain a sample EAR Worksheet:

Evaluate the prospect, property, and circumstances

Assess the overall risk

React appropriately

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EAR Worksheet

Prospect

The prospect is a stranger	-1
They found me on the Internet	-1
Cash buyer	-2
Looking for a Foreclosure	-1
From out of town	-1
Referral from a previous client	+1
Close friend or relative of the person that referred you	+2
You confirmed prospect with the referrer	+3
Prospect can't articulate what they are looking for in a home	-2
Prospect can only meet at a specific time that is after dark	-2
Prospect say they are an investor looking for empty homes	-1
Prospect says you can't call them back	-3
Prospect stumbles over lifestyle questions	-2
Prospect is specific about what they are looking for in a home	+1
Prospect is flexible with meeting time/date	+1
Prospect is open to seeing other homes	+1
Prospect freely gives phone number	+1
Prospect says they will be bringing kids	+1

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Property

The property is off the beaten path	-2
There is no or poor cell phone reception	-10
The property is poorly lit	-1
The property has a basement	-1
The property only has one exterior door	-1
The property is in a typical suburban neighborhood	+1
Good cell phone reception	+1
The property is well lit	+1
There are multiple exit doors	+1
One story home	+1
Limited windows and poor visibility	-2
Abundant windows and good visibility	+1

Circumstances

You have an uncomfortable feeling	-10
You need to close a deal	-10
Abandoned property	-10
Total EAR Score	

The overall risk score is not an absolute number, it is a relative number designed only to give you an easy way to determine the risk of an appointment. Furthermore, there are only a few “absolutes” when it comes to when you should ALWAYS bring someone with you on an appointment.

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You should **ALWAYS** bring someone with you on an appointment if:

- There is poor cell service at the property.
- The property is vacant.
- The agent has not closed a deal in a while.
- The agent has an uncomfortable feeling prior to the appointment.

Showing Safely

Meeting the prospect at the House

Arrive Early

You should arrive early enough to the appointment so you can prepare the home and be ready before the prospect arrives.

Expect the prospect to be running early.

If You Can't Arrive Early

If you can't arrive early, you should call the prospect to attempt to postpone the appointment long enough to allow you to arrive early. However, if that's not possible you can easily prepare the home by setting the expectations in a quick phone call notifying the prospect that you are running late. "I'm running a few minutes late. Per the seller's instructions, once I get there, I'm going to need to spend a few minutes inside the home checking on certain things prior to letting you inside."

Parking

The truth is that where the you park is not relevant. The only time the position of a car is important is if the you are being chased, and if you are being chased, then you will not have the time to get your keys, unlock the door, open the door, get in, close the door, and lock the door before the person chasing you is on top of you. You should not worry about getting to the car if you are being chased, rather, you should run down the street screaming "rape". A predator needs to get you isolated where

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you can't be seen or heard in order to commit the crime, and by running down the street screaming, you are denying the predator the opportunity to commit the crime.

Preparing the Home

Preparing the home has two purposes, to maximize visibility and to prepare escape paths should they become needed. The reason for maximizing visibility is to make it more difficult for a predator to get you isolated where you can't be seen or heard, thereby removing the opportunity to make an attack without making a legitimate prospect uncomfortable. Assuming you have arrived early, you will need to prepare the home for safe showing. The following are things you should do:

- **Lights** – Be sure to turn on all lights; not only is it a good presentation habit, but it also makes the inside of the home more visible from the outside which makes you safer.
- **Drapes** – Be sure all drapes and blinds are open and there is maximum visibility into the inside of the home.
- **Exterior Doors** – Make sure all exterior doors are unlocked. There is a substantially higher likelihood of you being in danger from the person to whom you are showing the house versus a random person walking into the house.
- **Interior Doors** – Make sure all interior doors are open.
- **Garages** – Open the garage door if possible, if not possible, avoid entering the garage with the prospect.

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Garages can be particularly dangerous because of the availability of things that can be used as weapon. In these situations, the predator always has the upper hand because he/she knows what he/she is planning, you don't.

- **Obstructions** – Be sure to clear any possible obstructions from potential escape paths.
- **Dangerous Objects** – You should be sure to put away any items that could be used as a weapon. (Easily accessible vases, trophies, bats, knives, pans, etc....)
- **Cameras** – Video cameras, whether fake or real, are great deterrents. Make sure they are very visible, perhaps even place them next to focal points in a room and mention them during the conversation.

There is a school of thought that tells agents to lock the exterior doors during a showing to prevent an intruder from entering the home. Whereas this may be a good practice with an established client, it elevates the risk with a new prospect. Someone who comes up on a home during a showing and enters through an unlocked door is committing a crime of opportunity; crimes of opportunity are usually profit crimes (theft), committed by criminals who are typically inexperienced and therefore easily startled and scared off. They are not looking for a confrontation, they are looking for a quick, easy score. The greater risk to your safety is the new prospect in the home with you.

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Dealing with Vacant Houses

A vacant house may pose an additional danger because of squatters. Sometimes the squatter is not rational due to either mental illness, drug use, or any other condition that affects an individual's ability to think and behave rationally. If this is the case and you startle or act in a way the squatter sees as threatening you run the risk of being attacked.

It's important to remember that in the squatter's mind YOU are the invader. That being said, generally speaking the squatter does not want a confrontation. Consequently, you'll want to provide anyone who might be in the house the opportunity to be out of the house during the showing.

When showing a vacant home, the first thing you'll want to do is walk around the house looking for signs that indicate that the home has been broken into and someone is squatting. If you suspect that individuals are squatting inside the house, you'll need to make sure they are out of the house prior to your showing. Ideally, you'll have the time to call the police and have them remove the squatters. If you do not have the time to have the police remove the squatter, then you'll need to take preventative measures yourself. The key to staying safe in these situations is avoiding a confrontation. Remember that right and wrong, legal or illegal; do not come into play in these situations. The squatter has many different choices:

- Leave peacefully and return after you're done
- Not leave but be peaceful

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- Leave but be argumentative possibly even destructive
- Not leave, be argumentative but not violent
- Be violent

The best way to avoid confrontation is to use the 5 R's – Respect, Reassure, Request, Reward, and Review.

- **Respect** – Treat the squatter with respect. Remember that your goal is to get the squatter out of the house for your showing without having a confrontation. Treating he/she with respect as if they had a right to be there is the best way to establish rapport so that he/she will listen and hopefully comply.
- **Reassure** – The squatter will view you as the invader and will react to defend his/her “home” and belongings. Reassure them that you are not there to remove them or their stuff. That you have a job to do and you just want to show the home and leave. After showing the home you'll want to call the police and have them remove the individual. However, DO NOT bring up removal to the squatter at this point.
- **Request** – Explain that you need to show the house in X minutes, and you should be there for Y minutes. Request that he/she leave before you need to show the house so that you can show the house peacefully. Remember to reassure that you will not touch any of their belongings
- **Reward** – Be sure to let the squatter know that if he/she helps you by allowing you to show the home undisturbed

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that you'll say thank you by leaving something on the kitchen counter (This could be food, money, drink, etc...).

- **Review** – Finally, be sure to review the 2 options that exist. Option 1 the squatter leaves peacefully for a while allowing you to show the home and you'll make sure to say thank you with food, money, drink, etc... OR Option 2 you'll have no choice but to call the police in 10 minutes. At this point don't badger the squatter or engage in a verbal power struggle. You've given him/her the options, now allow him/her to make his/her choice and you can react appropriately.

Meeting the Prospect

Greeting the Prospect

As mentioned in a previous section, you should always greet the prospect outside. However, in that section we were talking about greeting the prospect in the event that you are arriving after the client. This section is focusing on the scenario that you arrived early, prepared the home, and are waiting for the client outside.

Keep in mind that the greeting sets the tone, and an authoritative tone makes you less attractive to a predator. If at all possible, "take the high ground". Position yourself where you are above the prospect, so that you are in a dominant position relative to the prospect during the initial greeting. A front step is a great place for you to position yourself. Additionally, you should not come off that high ground to greet, let the prospect come to you.

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Outbuildings

In a previous section we mentioned setting expectations up front. If there are outbuildings, be sure you unlock them prior to the tour, let the prospect know before the showing that you won't be going in the outbuildings. NEVER enter outbuildings with a prospect.

In the Home

While inside the home, there are some guidelines you should follow to help keep yourself safe. It is important to remember that the ultimate goal is to make the situation unattractive to a

predator while not making a legitimate prospect feel uncomfortable.

Every home is different, so you may have to adjust some of the following practices to meet the layout of the home and your particular sales style.

When at all possible you should be sure to position yourself in such a way that you are clearly visible from the outside of the house (effectively removing the opportunity). If a prospect is looking to assault you, he will not want to do it where it can be witnessed.

When moving from one area of the home to another, let the prospect explore before you enter the area with them. "The next area is the kitchen, go in get an initial feel of it and tell me what you think." This is known as a "no influence sales strategy". This strategy is respectful and well received by

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legitimate prospects while still allowing you to keep yourself out of a potentially dangerous position.

You should not enter bedrooms with the prospect, if at all possible. Standing at the edge of the door in the hallway is respectful and attentive while still allowing you to keep yourself out of a potentially dangerous position.

Master Suites – You should be sure to familiarize yourself with the master bathroom because this is an ideal place for a prospect to isolate you. The predator may ask a question as a

strategy for getting you into the bathroom with them. **YOU SHOULD NOT**

ENTER A MASTER BATHROOM WITH A NEW PROSPECT.

If you must enter the bedroom to answer the question, you should stand outside of the doorway to the master bath. Furthermore, you should stand perpendicular to the doorway, this makes you a smaller target and allows for a faster escape if necessary.

General Body Position

- You should always try to stay at least 2-3 arm lengths (approximately 5-7 feet) from a prospect; it shows respect for body space to a legitimate prospect and makes it more difficult for prospect who is a threat to assault you.

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- Wherever possible you should make sure you are visible from the outside of the home.
- You should always position yourself so that the prospect is never between you and the escape path.

Stairs in the Home

Many agents have been told to allow the prospect to go all the way up or down the stairs before proceeding. **THIS IS WRONG, DO NOT DO THIS.** The proper way to approach stairs in the home is as follows:

- You should always allow the prospect to go up or down the stairs first and maintain at least a four-stair difference between the two of you. However, you **SHOULD NOT** allow the prospect to go all the way up or down the stairs before you begin going up or down. The reason for this is because you never want to allow the prospect to be out of your sight, especially when dealing with stairs because landings often provide a predator with an opportunity to hide and then ambush you when you reach the landing.
- You should always allow the prospect to move away from the top or bottom of the stairs (depending on the direction you are going) before completing the ascent or descent.

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- You should remember that stairs are an ideal place for an attack; they are usually hidden from view and it's easy to knock someone off their feet.
- If there is a handrail, you should use it. If a prospect suddenly turns on you, you will have an anchor point to use the prospect's own momentum against him/her.

Reading the Prospect

Some of the most useful tools agents have to keep themselves safe are their ability to read the prospect; body language, paraverbal communication, and verbal communication. When reading the following, it is important to keep a few things in mind:

- If a prospect is meeting you for the purpose of harming you, they will likely look for a place to isolate you, so you are not visible from the outside of the home. If you are following the guidelines, it will be difficult for the predator to do so and therefore, he will become frustrated. Signs of frustration are detectable if you are observant.

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- When someone is preparing for an attack, their adrenal glands will increase the amount of adrenaline in their body. This is also known as the fight/flight reaction. This increase in adrenaline produces observable signs; pupils will dilate, hands may shake, volume will increase, cadence will become faster.

There is no hard and fast way to determine who is and is not a threat, nor is there a single telltale sign that someone has violent intentions towards you. However, the following are some potential red flags:

Body Language

Body language encompasses their body position relative to you, facial expressions, eye movements, hand position, etc. Here are some physical signs that something has changed in the emotional and physical state of the prospect:

- A prospect continually looking out the window
- Invasion of body space, particularly uninvited touching (even if seemingly accidental)
- Lack of eye contact
- What appears to be intentional positioning between you and the door
- Hands in the pockets (especially if they are large pockets on a coat)
- Wearing cool weather clothing in warm weather

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- Look for changes, particularly:
 - Dilated pupils
 - They are no longer paying attention to what you are saying or the house in general
 - Changes in breathing
 - Changes in facial expression
 - Visible veins in the forehead or neck
 - Wiping hands on pants or shirt, or rubbing hands
 - Fidgeting or repetitive body movements such as scratching, tapping, etc.

Paraverbal Communication

Paraverbal communication is all the parts of speech that are not the words themselves, such as tone, cadence (speed), and volume. Changes in paraverbal communication can be signals that something has changed in the emotional and physical state of the prospect. For example:

- Changes in volume when there is no change in the noise level or distance - This will be a subtle change but noticeable and accompanied by other observable changes as well. Frustration is typically associated with elevated volume.

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- Changes in cadence (the speed at which someone speaks) - Frustration is typically associated with increased speed.
- Changes in tone – Frustration is typically associated with a sharper tone, clearer diction, and an emphasis on the first syllable of a word.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication that could indicate red flags include:

- Showing more interest in you than in the house
- Issuing orders (“Come here” vs. “Please come here and look at this”)
- Asking you to move closer
- Excessive sharing of personal information
- Suggestive or “double meaning” language
- Complimenting you on your looks or an article of clothing in an unprofessional manner
- Escalating verbal communication from seemingly professional, to familiar, to intimate

Escalation Behaviors

A predator who is preparing or grooming you for an attack will exhibit a pattern of behaviors that indicate an attempt to escalate the meeting from a professional encounter to an

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unprofessional encounter, as if they are “testing the waters” to see how open you will be to an advance AND you will likely notice isolating behaviors such as constantly looking out of windows. You should be particularly wary of this combination.

It is worth noting that everyone exhibits the behaviors previously mentioned in this section at one time or another and each behavior in and of itself does not indicate that an individual is a threat. However, it is the combination of behaviors without a seemingly apparent reason for the changes which should act as a red flag.

Safety at Open Houses

The Truth about Open Houses

Traditionally the real estate industry has focused on open houses when it comes to the subject of safety. The reality is that open houses have a very low incidence of violent crime as compared to showings, but a very high incidence of theft as compared to showings. This fact is well illustrated just by reviewing news articles about violent crimes against agents and taking note of whether the crime occurred at a showing or an open house.

The reason that open houses are less dangerous than showings is because of the different environments needed for the two different types of crimes. It's important to remember that for any crime to occur the criminal must have motive, means, and opportunity.

Thieves require an environment where it's easy for them to be isolated where no one can see or hear them. This is the condition that must exist for them to have the opportunity to commit the crime. This is easy to accomplish in an open house but very difficult to accomplish during a showing. The difference in these two environments is the reason why open houses have a much higher incidence of theft and a lower incidence of violent crime.

Conversely, predators need to get their victim isolated where he or she can't be seen or heard by others. This is the

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condition that predators must have in order to have opportunity to commit their crime. This environment is very difficult to achieve at an open house where people are likely to walk into the house at any time; this is why open houses have a very low incidence of violent crime compared to showings.

There is one additional scenario worth mentioning. Although rare, it is possible that a thief will enter the open house with the intent of robbing you as opposed to burglarizing the house. If this is the case the thief will follow the same patterns as a predator and the attempt will occur at either the beginning or the end of the open house when you are most likely to be alone. If you are confronted by a robber, DO NOT argue or fight, give them what he/she is wanting while telling him/her that you had forgotten something and your son and his friends are bringing it buy so he/she should go quickly so there's no trouble.

Further explain that if he/she leaves then he/she will have made some good money today and go on without any issues OR if he/she chooses to stay then when your son and his friends arrive then one of them will surely call the police and that you don't want to see that for anyone, you just want to do your open house without any further trouble. The overwhelming majority of the time a thief DOES NOT want a physical confrontation, they want to get valuables and leave as quickly as possible.

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Open Houses have Dangerous Times

Although open houses have a low incidence of violent crime as opposed to showings, violent crime does occur at open houses. Typically, violent crime at an open house will occur when there is the greatest opportunity for the predator to catch the agent alone... at the very beginning or at the very end of the open house.

The end of the open house is substantially more dangerous than the beginning and most violent crimes at open houses occur at the end of the open house. Human predators are no different than animal predators, they study their prey. Consequently, a predator who will attack an open house will typically spend time at open houses observing common agent behaviors and determine the attack strategy with the highest likelihood of success. A common attack strategy is that a predator will often show up towards the end of the open house when it's busy and easy for you to lose track of him. The predator will typically hide and wait for the end of the open house when he knows no one will be in the house and you have locked the doors to prevent anyone from entering while you clean up after the open house.

Safety Procedures for Open Houses

It goes without saying that having at least one other person at the open house the entire time would be ideal; however, often this is not practical.

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Finding another individual who can spare the 3 – 5 hours to accompany you from the opening preparation to the end of the clean-up is highly unlikely and not required to prevent the overwhelming majority of crimes at open houses. However, finding someone who can spare 30-60 minutes at the beginning of the open house and the same or a different person to do 30-60 minutes at the end of the open house is much easier.

You should have an individual accompany you at the beginning and the end of the open house. An additional strategy, and one taught by Dave Legaz to his agents, is to limit access to two prospective buyers (or buyer groups – i.e. a couple).

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APPENDIX A – Free Resources

APPENDIX A – Free Resources

Safety Video Library

A full year's worth of safety videos can be found at the link below.

<https://www.realsafeagent.com/resources>

Additional Reading

1. Clarke, Ronald R. Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies.
2. “A Descriptive Model of The Hunting Process of Serial Sex Offenders: A Rational Choice Perspective”, Journal of Family Violence D. Kim Rossmo
3. Cohen, Lawrence E. and Marcus Felson. 1979, “Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach”, American Sociological Review, Volume Number: 44-04.
4. Ronald V. Clarke and Marcus Felson M., 1993, « Introduction: Criminology, Routine Activity, and Rational Choice », Advances in Criminological Theory: Routine Activity and Rational Choice
5. Center for sex offender management, understanding sex offenders an introductory Curriculum
6. Dynamic Factors of Sexual Aggression: The Role of Affect and Impulsiveness, Criminal Justice and Behavior April 2013
7. Psychopathic Personality: Bridging the Gap Between Scientific Evidence and Public Policy, Psychological Science in the Public Interest December 2011
8. Sexual Murderers with Adult or Child Victims: Are They Different? Sex Abuse September 1, 2010
9. Psychopathy/Antisocial Personality Disorder Conundrum, Aust N Z J Psychiatry June 1, 2006
10. Psychopathy and Sexual Deviance in Treated Rapists: Association With Sexual and Nonsexual Recidivism, Sex Abuse January 1, 2004



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