



"AWARENESS IS THE CURRENCY THAT BUYS YOU TIME AND OPPORTUNITY. STAY INFORMED. SEEK OUT CURRENT AND RELEVANT INFORMATION WITH REGARD TO RIOTS, PROTESTS, CRIME RATES AND OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN."

At the end of delivering a 40-hour train-the-trainer program in Quantico, Virginia, I asked the newly trained federal instructors if there were any questions. One student asked a question about self-defense against a physical attack: "What is the one technique guaranteed to work every single time?" I replied with the answer nobody wants to hear: "There is no such technique." If there was one, then we'd all know what it was after watching the online video.

Although there is no such thing as a "secret ninja move" to guarantee your physical safety, there does exist a non-physical self-defense technique — what I refer to as a "soft skill" — that can help guarantee your safety in any violent physical attack: avoidance. Avoidance is the No. 1 soft skill response to any physical attack.

If you fail to avoid a potentially high-threat environment, you may unwittingly find yourself in a less-than-optimal scenario. Your next best defense is to use the most important soft skill in your tool

kit — situational awareness — to both observe and assess your immediate environment for potential or developing threats. Awareness is the currency that buys you time and opportunity. Stay informed. Seek out current and relevant information with regard to riots, protests, crime rates and other areas of concern in your immediate area and areas you intend to visit.

Environmentally speaking, situational awareness is knowing what goes on around you. Whether you're at home, in your car or on foot, applying good situational awareness eliminates such potential threats as being surprised or otherwise placing yourself behind the action-reaction power curve. Failure to avoid or detect a potential or developing threat can place you squarely behind that curve, so control your environment — lest your environment control you. As far as situational awareness in the context of monitoring and controlling your environment, there are seven signs you can look for that may indicate you are about to be attacked.

BODY POSTURE

How people carry themselves is usually a straightforward indicator of their intentions. To a trained observer, how and where a person positions his or her body may indicate a potential threat. Also observe and assess a person's posture. In typical non-threatening situations, most people carry themselves calmly and without tension. Individuals standing squarely in front of you — with both feet even with their shoulders — are in what is commonly referred to as a "neutral" position.

A person poised for a physical attack will typically stand to one side of your center rather than squarely in front of you. He or she may have his or her feet set in an aggressive or bladed stance, with one foot back and the other forward, much like a boxer or a wrestler. This bladed position affords the attacker a tactical advantage in preparation for a physical strike or other rapid, aggressive movement. The bladed stance is also conducive to the use of non-ballistic (meaning edged or impact) weapons.

EYE CONTACT

This is one of the earliest detectable indicators of a potential threat. Normal people make normal eye contact, which can be described as looking you in the eye (but not too intently). Someone who intends you harm may look at you one of three ways: through you, past you or intently at you. Any of these will feel different than normal eye contact.

In looking through you, the individual might appear to be staring at an object you're standing in front of instead of looking at you. What this usually indicates is that his or her attention is fixed on something else, such as what he or she is planning to do. In addition to looking through you, note any delay or extended lag time in response to any question you may ask, as he or she may be thinking about his or her next move instead of focusing on the conversation.

The second eye contact red flag is breaking visual contact, or occasionally glancing past, near or around you. Such rapid eye movement causes a pause in conversation and should raise concern, as this typically indicates that there may be more going on than what's directly in front of you. Predators typically travel in packs, and rapid eye contact with other pack members may be a dead giveaway that you are being set up. Quick darting glances usually signify that a person is visually confirming an accomplice's position, verifying an escape route or targeting some part of your body to strike.

A third red flag may be if the person is looking at you too intently. Granted, some people lacking malicious intentions may be wired a little too tight and look at you for longer than others will. However, someone staring at you so intently that it makes you feel uncomfortable may indicate a challenge or a preparation for physical confrontation. In some street cultures, such an intense stare could ignite a street fight that ends in severe bodily injury or death.

HANDS

The first thing any cadet learns in any respectable police academy is that "the hands kill." Any competent

law enforcement officer will focus on a suspect's hands, as it is the hands that can wield ballistic or non-ballistic weapons — both of which become far more dangerous at personal distance.

In any normal conversation, you are within arm's reach of the person with whom you are conversing, which means that you are in immediate contact range of a knife, impact weapon or concealed firearm. If you can't see a person's hands or what is in his or her hands, that should raise valid concern — especially if combined with either of the first two signs. Something in the hands, especially hidden from view, is a non-verbal sign that may indicate assaultive intent.

BEWARE THE 'KNOCKOUT GAME'

Given today's civil unrest, you may be targeted for a one-off violent physical attack, sometimes referred to online by the umbrella term the "Knockout Game." This is one of many types of physical assaults in which one or more assailants attempt to knock out an unsuspecting victim. The rules of the "game" are as simple as they are brutal: A group, usually young men or even boys as young as 12, selects a lead attacker and then seeks out a victim. Unlike typical gang violence or other street crime, the goal is neither revenge nor robbery.

The victim can be chosen at random or may be perceived to be a social enemy of some kind. (Picture various assaults on a person for nothing more than the color of the hat he or she is wearing.) The attacker sneaks up on or charges at the victim and begins punching. If the victim goes down, the group usually scatters. If not, others join in, punching and kicking until the victim is unconscious or at least incapacitated. Such an assault is dependent on the element of surprise and is done for reasons ranging from entertainment to political intimidation, so being aware that such a "game" exists and maintaining proper situational awareness to identify pre-attack signs will give you a heads-up to avoid and even deter such a threat.

COURSE INTERCEPTION

Normal people walk about with self-termination and purpose. They generally

tend to their own business and are focused on their own movements, be it to and from their vehicles or whatever tasks or errands are at hand. Should a person's attention shift to you and your movements, such as what you're doing or where you're going, it could very well be a pre-attack indicator that you should not ignore.

In practical application, if you are walking in one direction — let's say southbound on a sidewalk — and you notice someone behind you also traveling in the same direction, that doesn't necessarily indicate a potential threat. However, should you abruptly change directions and the individual follows in your footsteps, or if you accelerate your pace and he or she matches or exceeds your pace, that's a red flag that may very well indicate an interception of your course that will initiate an attack.

VERBAL ENGAGEMENT

In today's antagonistic environment, there are those who would try to incite an incident just to record and post it on social media. A spontaneous conversation is certainly nothing to be alarmed about, but escalating that verbal engagement to the level of harassment is usually an indicator that an individual may be probing, pushing your buttons and trying to escalate a verbal assault into a physical one. Again, keep in mind that there may be more than one attacker involved. Don't get caught up in the heat of the exchange; keep your awareness trained on your immediate environment for other actors. Most predators are risk-averse to a one-on-one fight.

PERCEPTION

We as humans are gifted with not only our organic physical senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste but also an innate sense of perception. Some call it a hunch, a sixth sense or a gut instinct, but it can be best described as when you have a feeling that something isn't quite right. It happens to be the most fine-tuned of the early warning, potential-threat-identification tools we possess. And it should never be ignored.

In his best-selling book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*,

Malcolm Gladwell presents a concept he calls "thin-slicing." He states that "there can be as much value in the blink of an eye as in months of rational analysis."¹ Gladwell encourages his readers to not suppress their first thoughts in favor of getting more information to make a decision. Some people are more intuitive, which doesn't necessarily go hand in hand with intelligence or access to more information. Finding a blip anywhere on your radar screen, regardless of how it got there, is all the alert you need to know that something is probably up.

HIGH-PROFILE VICTIM OF THE 'KNOCKOUT GAME'

■ On Oct. 1, 2020, while taking a stroll in downtown Manhattan around 7:30 a.m., a man in an "I Love NY" hoodie passed a 67-year-old man — but not before striking him in the face. The victim turned out to be Rick Moranis, the actor best known for his roles as Louis Tully in *Ghostbusters* and Wayne Szalinski in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. Moranis just happened to be the unlucky victim of the "Knockout Game." Fortunately, police were able to obtain video footage capturing the attack, which allowed them to arrest the assailant. Luckily, besides suffering pain in his head, hip and back, Moranis escaped the assault without any serious injuries. This random act of violence demonstrates that everyone, regardless of who they are, needs to diligently practice situational awareness.

— Frank Jastrzemski, Associate Editor

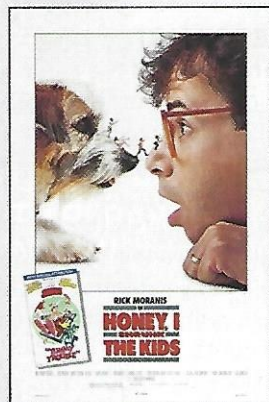


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STAY ALERT

Protection experts always have and always will employ a high level of situational awareness as a deterrent to violence.

These seven signs — combined with your conscious attention to your surroundings — can help keep you informed of what your environment is telling you — and keep you a step ahead of events

that may be emerging around you. Utilizing proper situational awareness skills to identify one or more pre-attack indicators affords you time and opportunity to readily address a tactical problem, control the action-reaction power curve and secure minimal probability of personal injury.

ENDNOTES

(1) Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), 17.



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