



# Rampart Group LLC

*Investigation & Security Services*

## **Our Latest Article: Situational Awareness – Trusting Your Instincts Lessons from an FBI Special Agent**



As a security professional and retired federal law enforcement officer with a total of 34 years in both fields combined, I have spent almost half my lifetime in public service and the private sector. Both fields have included serving and protecting; responding to incidents of crime against persons and property; conducting investigations; arresting and interrogating subjects and interviewing witnesses; collecting evidence and information that is key to sorting out facts from fiction.

Although the role of the law enforcement officer and the security professional have commonalities, they also remain somewhat different. Much of my work as a law enforcement officer was reactive and occurred after a crime had been committed. Kidnaping occurs – FBI responds. Fugitive flees the United States – FBI responds.

9/11 terrorist attack – FBI responds. I'm grateful for the time I spent as a as FBI Special Agent and for the experience and wisdom I have been able to bring to my private sector experiences. In my role as a private investigator, helping victims find justice in cases involving personal injury, wrongful death, wrongful termination, sexual harassment and discrimination, theft, and fraud, just to name a few, fuels my true passion.

In my other role as a security professional, the chosen focus of my work (and I truly believe my life's purpose) is proactive – it's predicting risks and developing plans to mitigate those risks before bad things happen. It's getting "out front" before danger strikes. I call it a "rampart", or a wall of protection, thus the name of my company, Rampart Group.

In my 23-year career as an FBI Special Agent, I had the honor and privilege of investigating some fascinating cases – many that regretfully included interviews of victims of heinous and violent crimes. What I found was that during interviews many victims will say, "I never saw it coming." Or, "I was totally taken by surprise." But then after a pause and further thought, many will say, "Something told me...." Or, "Now that I think of it, something just didn't seem right." As an example, we see this over and over again in active shooter situations where the previous behaviors of the active shooter are only realized after reviewing in hind-sight the threatening posts on social media, and the heinous act of killing and

maiming innocent victims results in horrific tragedies. We shake our heads and say, “I knew something wasn’t right.”

### **Victim v Survivor**

So, what is it that allows us to be so taken by surprise and become victims, but then later we realize the event was not really a surprise at all? Leading experts within the security profession and outside the profession all agree that there is an “internal voice”, a “gut feeling” that signals survival instincts when we are faced with danger. As Erich Maria ReMarque in All Quiet on the Western Front, very eloquently explained, “It is not conscious, it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible than consciousness. It’s a “second sight.” Gavin De Becker, well known security industry expert on violence, stalking and domestic abuse, and author of The Gift of Fear, calls it just that – the “gift of fear”. He describes how fear, or “situational awareness” in a good way, drives us to pay attention to our surroundings and react to ensure our safety and security. It’s paying attention to your surroundings, understanding how your surroundings affect you and using that information to take action.

Malcolm Gladwell in his widely acclaimed book, Blink, calls this inner voice the “adaptive unconscious” much like a giant computer that makes quick judgments with very little information. It sizes up the situation and initiates action. Laurence Gonzales, in his book Deep Survival, refers to this “gift” as an “internal voice” that clearly speaks during times of danger. To me personally, it’s that partner and most intimate friend who says, “I’ve got your back!”

### **Listening to Your Instincts and Situational Awareness**

So, you ask, “Kathy, how do you know when bad things are going to happen?” “Do you rub the crystal ball or.....what?” My answer is no. No crystal balls in my supply room. I believe each of us in fact do have a “gift” – the gift of an “internal guardian” that stands guard and warns us of danger and hazards, and once acknowledged, guides us through risky situations. This became very evident to me in my 5 years as a SWAT Commander for the FBI San Diego SWAT team. On so many occasions, I recall sending SWAT team members to affect very dangerous arrests where good instincts coupled with situational awareness was key to saving their lives, the lives of hostages and of the subject. (In the FBI we call bad guys the “Subject” as opposed to the perpetrator or suspect.) Trust me, I had a lot of conversations with my “internal guardian” who spoke clearly to me and NEVER let me down in these situations. As a result, I thank my internal guardian for bringing men and women home safely with no injuries or deaths. That “internal guardian” is inside you as well. It speaks with a very clear voice and coupled with your proficiency in listening and practicing situational awareness, it could save your life. Personally, every time I think of this great gift, I get chills. But chills in a good way that the internal guardian perks up and acknowledges my recognition and appreciation for its true existence.

### **Improving Situational Awareness**

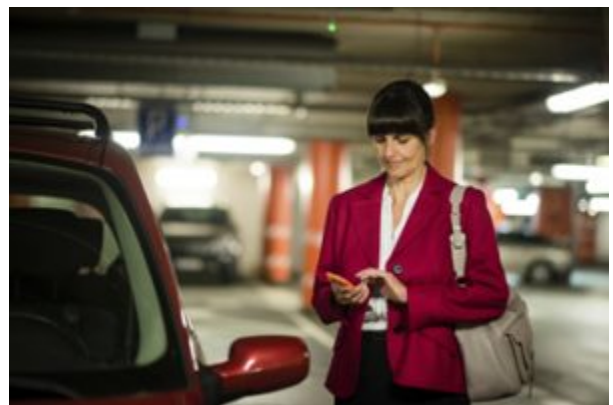
I want to share with you some tips to improve situational awareness, but with that you should also understand the most common enemy that reduces situational awareness is distraction. Most commonly, talking or texting on your smartphone, walking around with earbuds in our ears listening to music and daydreaming. I too am guilty of daydreaming, especially when I’m driving on a warm and relaxing summer day. My best example of this is crossing the Tacoma Narrows bridge south of Seattle. It’s a 2800 ft suspension bridge that crosses the Puget Sound and connects Tacoma, WA with the Kitsap Peninsula where I live. The times I have crossed that bridge on a beautiful Pacific Northwest summer day and found myself surprised that I had passed it are way too many to count. I was daydreaming and not paying attention. But then again, if it’s a winter day and the wind and rain are howling, you bet I’m paying

attention to the crossing! Instinctively the change in the environment speaks to me that danger could be ahead if I don't pay attention, slow down and focus on the road.

**Here are a few tips to help you improve your situational awareness that could save your life:**

- 1. Practice...Practice....Practice....** Do some simple drills to train your mind to become more situationally aware. These could include: identifying all exits when you enter a public building, looking at people around you and trying to figure out their stories – their career, mood, what are they focused on, what are they preparing to do that day. Exercise and test your peripheral vision by identifying things that are not directly in your line of sight. You'll be surprised how aware you become of your surroundings.
- 2. Become familiar with your environment and look for present dangers** – compare normal sights, sounds and behaviors with what isn't normal. For example, the person who walks into the gym in the dead of summer with temperatures reaching 100 degrees wearing a heavy long black coat and walking with what appears to be a limp should definitely get your attention. It's not normal. Think of other abnormal scenarios and compare them to the normal. This is a great practice that will increase your situational awareness. Focus on your surroundings – be aware of who is near you. Most threats come from people, so look around you and see who is nearby. Avoid people that appear threatening.
- 3. Exercise Control** – Don't assume normal behavior doesn't pose a threat. The shooter at the Yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida, posed as a yoga student appearing normal before he began firing his weapon killing 2 innocent women and injuring more. He also exhibited behaviors that weren't normal and was described as "creepy", "out of place" and gawking at women. Look directly at a threat – If you feel threatened by someone, often looking directly at the individual communicates that you will not be an easy victim. Remember, criminals want easy victims.

- 4. Don't become distracted** – If you focus so hard on one thing you get "Focus Lock". This alone can reduce instead of improving your situational awareness. An example would include texting and driving. It's hard to focus on dangers ahead if you are looking down at your smartphone. Pay attention – walk with your head up and avoid reading texts or listening to music while you walk. Giving the appearance of being distracted makes you a logical target for criminals. Avoid routine. Change your route and schedule from time to time. Routine behavior not only makes you predictable and thus an easy target for criminals, but it also invites complacency and diminished situational awareness.



- 5. Fight against complacency** – When you get too comfortable you don't see threats around you. Perhaps you take the same path from work to your car 5 blocks away where you always park in the same location and spot. You've never had anything happen to you during that 5 block walk so it's OK to text and talk on the phone along the way. Upon entering a building, identify potential

locations where you can take cover if you are unable to evacuate during an attack. Select secure parking – choose parking locations near your destination and avoid dark or isolated areas.

- 6. Commit to Action** – Once you perceive a threat, you are generally afforded three courses of action: You can flee or evacuate, you can seek cover, or you can fight as a last resort. Only you can decide the most appropriate course of action for your situation. Once you decide on a course of action, commit to it as if your life depends on it – because it just might. Timing is critical. Take immediate action if you are threatened. Do not become frozen by fear. A moment’s hesitation can be the difference between becoming a victim or successfully averting an attack and becoming a survivor.

Enhanced situational awareness is portable and improves your security everywhere you go. Heightening your awareness may be the simplest and easiest thing you can do to dramatically improve your personal security.



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Call 1-800 421-0614 or visit us at [www.rampartgroup.com](http://www.rampartgroup.com) for further ideas on protection and security.

Thanks for reading!

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