

“Truly unique, incredibly thorough and comprehensive.”

— Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, US Army (ret.)

SPOTTING DANGER BEFORE IT SPOTS YOU

Build situational awareness
to stay safe

GARY QUESENBERRY

FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL

Foreword by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, US Army (ret.)

Make no mistake—in a world filled with crime and violence, you are your own last line of defense.

“The world we live in is full of victims and survivors. Gary teaches you how to be a survivor.” —Burk Stearns, MBA, BS Criminal Justice, California Court Recognized Gang Expert

“A must-read for anyone who doesn’t have the Secret Service doing their danger-spotting for them.”
—LCDR Jonathan Cleck, Navy Seal

“Practicing situational awareness is one of the most important things a person can do to keep themselves and others safe. This book is that important.”
—Alain Burrese, JD, author, personal safety instructor

“This book is mandatory reading for those of you who wish to make yourself and your loved ones a ‘hard target.’”
—Steven M. Kinsey, US Department of Homeland Security

“The book that needed to be written!” —Jamie Franks, US Navy chief petty officer, 22-year veteran

“A vigorous and memorable primer on heightening awareness to prevent or counter danger.”
—Kirkus Reviews

A mother dropping her teenager off at the mall, a young man leaving home for college, a family about to head out on their first trip overseas. What do all of these people have in common? They all have a vested interest in their personal security and the wellbeing of those they love.

Spotting danger before it happens is a skill that can be developed and may even save your life.

Author Gary Quesenberry breaks down the basic techniques necessary to help you develop good situational awareness and increase your level of personal safety. Gary calls upon his extensive background as a federal air marshal to explain these methods in simple terms that will greatly improve your understanding of how, when, and where violence occurs.

He will then take the next critical step—providing you with the tools you need to properly identify and evade danger before it ever has a chance to materialize.

- Recognize the common traits of predatory behavior
- Learn how to conduct a personal “safety check”
- Develop strong situational awareness skills
- Know what to do when you spot potential trouble

“Today more than ever, it is imperative that we pay close attention to our surroundings and learn how to interpret what’s happening around us. Tragic events can often be both predictable and preventable.”



Gary Quesenberry is a US Army veteran and a career Federal Air Marshal. He has devoted his life to studying violence and predatory behavior. Gary has been featured on the History Channel’s hit series *Top Shot, Season 3* and *Top Shot All-Stars*. He has an extensive background in domestic and foreign counter-terror training and has worked extensively educating others on the importance of situational awareness and personal safety. Gary resides in Galloway, New Jersey.

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Praise for Spotting Danger Before It Spots You . . .

“In my twenty years on the job, I have seen the tactics Gary teaches save lives. The world is full of victims and survivors, and he’ll show you how to be a survivor.”

—Burk Stearns, MBA, BS Criminal Justice,
Lieutenant, Field Watch Commander,
California Court Recognized Gang Expert

“In the modern world, danger abounds and none of us are immune to the threat of it, but what does it look like and how do we recognize and avoid it? Gary Quesenberry has *forgotten* more about how to spot danger than most us will ever know. Thankfully, he remembered the most important stuff and has put it in this book! *Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* is a must-read for anyone who doesn’t have the Secret Service doing their danger-spotting for them. Gary delivers no-nonsense advice on a serious and relevant topic with an engaging blend of humor, common sense, and the wisdom that comes from three decades of having lived in a world where spotting danger was a necessity.”

—LCDR Jonathan Cleck, Navy Seal,
Cohost of the *Kill Cliff* podcast

“Practicing situational awareness is one of the most important things a person can do to keep themselves and others safe. I think it is the most important thing I teach in my Safety, Self-Defense, and Survive a Shooting programs. And while many books mention awareness, Gary Quesenberry actually shows you in his book how to be more aware and what to be aware of. He provides key concepts, real-world examples, and practical exercises to help you develop the attitude and situational awareness necessary to avoid most violence, and he offers solid advice for those times you can’t. The three phases—Understanding the Threat,

Building Your Situational Awareness, and Developing Personal Defenses—are the keys to staying safe and not becoming a victim. Practicing situational awareness will not only allow you to see potential danger early enough to do something about it, it just may mean the difference between life and death. Yes, situational awareness is that important, and this book is that important. Read it, practice situational awareness when you are out and about, and enjoy life safely.”

—Alain Burrese, JD, author, fifth dan hapkido,
former army sniper

“Gary Quesenberry’s book is an all-encompassing guide and essential resource for understanding how to stay safe in today’s world. Gary shares proven personal safety tactics, techniques, and procedures that are taught at the highest levels of government, law enforcement, and the military.

His proactive approach to identifying potential trouble is spot on. But he doesn’t stop there. He touches upon simple and effective defense techniques specially created to be quick and effective. His real-life stories and examples of criminal activity give the lay person a road map for how to avoid being targeted in the first place.

This is mandatory reading for those of you who wish to make yourself and your loved ones a ‘hard target.’”

—Steven M. Kinsey, police firearms and tactics instructor,
US Department of Homeland Security

“There is an old saying in sports, ‘The best defense is a good offense.’ This is also supremely true when it comes to personal defense. So many peoples’ plans and preparations for personal defense begin and end with the concealed carry of a firearm, gun fighting tactics, or martial arts. This ideal is perpetuated by the booming ‘tactical industry’ with its peddling of ‘everyday-carry’ gadgets and social media videos romanticizing the CCW Instagram quick-draw.

“This is a book that had to be written. People need to understand that making it back home safe and sound shouldn’t rely on your fighting or shooting ability. The secret of self-defense is recognizing and avoiding dangerous situations altogether—which is what makes this book so brilliant.”

—Jamie Franks, US Navy chief petty officer
(twenty-two year veteran), competitive shooter on
The History Channel’s *Top Shot All-Stars*

“When I was sixteen, I was mugged in an isolated train station in Madrid, Spain. For years I felt ashamed that I didn’t fight hard enough to save my deceased grandfather’s gold necklace and cross from theft. Since then, my years of training and experience in special operations, counter-terrorism, and federal law enforcement taught me that the loss of the fight was not the true failure. It was the culmination of my mistakes which made me unaware of the imminent attack and made the two attackers view me as an easy target.

“My attire made me stand out like a foreigner, and I was sitting in an unpopulated and dark area of the station that offered few avenues of escape. I was not aware of my surroundings, and I didn’t give credence to my intuition. Every mistake leading to the mugging was my choice; I wasn’t a victim of a random attack. In reading Gary’s book, I am reminded of these errors, but I am also reminded of the strategies I could have used to avoid them.

“I can’t go back in time to that evening and apply all the principles I learned from years of law enforcement experience. But if I had read this book as a sixteen-year-old and applied its techniques, I am certain that those two muggers and I would never have had an exchange. They wouldn’t have seen me as an easy target, but even if they had, I would have been able to see the attack coming.

“This book is for everyone. The inexperienced will learn how to avoid being a target, spot an attack before it happens, and form a plan

of action in response, while those who are experienced in these matters will come to see areas in their lives where they have become too complacent about over the years.”

—Carlos Poysky, law enforcement physical techniques instructor,
Department of Homeland Security, former airborne ranger
(1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment 1995–1998),
former air marshal and air marshal instructor

“I have known Gary Quesenberry for over fifteen years. As an adjunct instructor who worked for me and as a credentialed federal air marshal, Gary was always a top-notch instructor and operator, a complete professional who stood out among his peers. Anything Gary puts his name on is first rate, and that includes this book, which he has written at a time when real-world situational awareness is a critical skill to have. Situational awareness is the critical skill for an undercover air marshal, and his background has no doubt vastly enhanced his ability to teach his readers about the subject. In our tactics instruction, we always preached that spotting a threat versus reacting to one was the key to winning a fight at thirty-five thousand feet in a tubular aircraft with no backup, cover, or place to hide. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to learn the skills involved in observing their environment and using what they observe to make them safer. Written in a no-fluff style, it is broken down into learnable chunks (phases) that will make every single person who opens the cover better prepared.”

—Michael R. Seeklander, owner of The American Warrior Society and Shooting-Performance Training Systems, author of *Your Competition Handgun Training Program*, *Your Defensive Handgun Training Program*, *Your Defensive Rifle Training Program*, and *The Art of Instruction*

“*Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* is a book everyone who leaves the safety of their home on a daily basis should read. His book made

me realize how the way I had been going about my everyday activities was making me a potential target. I learned a lot about how to harden my defenses with the exercises Gary provides.”

—Gabby Franco, competitive shooter, author of
Trouble Shooting: Mastering Your Pistol Marksmanship

“*Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* is filled with crucial information that should be passed down to those you love. Regardless of how much our world changes, humankind continues to victimize itself. This information should be incorporated into your lifestyle in order to protect yourself and others from harm. The author does a superb job of drawing principles and techniques from his life experience and communicating them to the reader in a no-nonsense writing style.”

—Rod Smith, law enforcement officer,
owner of SpecGear—Tactical Concealed Carry

“Over my twenty-five-plus years in law enforcement, no subject has been more important than situational awareness. For those who serve inside the walls of America’s toughest prisons, the ability to stay in tune with their surroundings is all important. This book identified traits associated with situational awareness that have become second nature for me, but I had to learn those traits on my own in the course of my career, and I wish I had had a book like this to make learning those essential skills easier. Gary’s book provides an essential foundation for situational awareness, and I plan on making it required reading for officers and staff.”

—Darrin McWhorter, captain in the Federal Bureau of
Prisons, Special Operations Response Team Commander,
and National Tactical Trainer

“Crime can happen to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. *Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* contains solid advice that’s been, literally, proven the world over.

Gary shares his wealth of knowledge and provides real-world case studies involving personal safety and security that are applicable to the seasoned professional as well as to the average citizen. He covers the concepts involved in being aware of your surroundings and stopping a problem before it starts. Full of practical and easy-to-follow recommendations that will help keep you safe, this material Gary presents in this book will bridge any gaps in your personal planning, awareness, and understanding as either a safety professional or ordinary citizen.”

—Jennifer N. Mitchell, US Department of Homeland Security,
former police officer, Lansing, Michigan

“*Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* is a must-read. Gary has written *the* manual for the average citizen on situational awareness. The skills he teaches in this book are the same skills I have used in the US Air Force, the Secret Service, and Federal Air Marshal Service. You can practice defensive measures, fighting skills, concealed carry, and verbal judo, but without knowing how to evaluate your everyday life, you are leaving a gaping hole in your defense plan.”

—Gary J. Byrne, federal air marshal (Ret.), former
Air Force security policeman, secret service
(police officer), uniform division officer

“A federal air marshal offers a guide to observing and evaluating your surroundings.

Quesenberry’s nonfiction debut draws on his nineteen years of experience as an air marshal, a job that gives him “a first-class ticket into the world of covert surveillance, surveillance detection, and self-defense.” In hundreds of settings, he has been the person paid and expected to know what’s going on and to anticipate and counter any potential dangers. By contrast, as he quite rightly points out, most people relax themselves into a false sense of security by thinking “nothing will ever happen here” or “that would never happen to me.”

But even the author's cursory listing of some of the twenty-first century's worst outbreaks of terrorist violence all over the world should make it clear to readers that they can no longer afford such attitudes—they must take a large part of their safety into their own hands. Quesenberry's aim in his book is not only to change those attitudes, but also to arm readers with the basic perception shifts that will help them guard their own well-being. The foremost of these is "situational awareness," which the author describes as "the ability to identify and process environmental cues to accurately predict the actions of others." The adverb is crucial: readers are gently admonished to discard their reflexive prejudices and assumptions and "identify and process" what they're actually seeing in any environment (as the author points out, preset perceptions can sometimes blind a person to reality). In quick, sharply paced chapters full of well-chosen anecdotes and bulleted points, Quesenberry instructs readers on how to expand their awareness of the people and things in their immediate area, how to assume an aggressive mindset in order to anticipate how actual predators think, and even the basics of one-on-one self-defense. Much of what the author relates is elementary in nature—travel advisories all over the world urge some variation of situational awareness—but the clarity of this manual makes it stand out.

A vigorous and memorable primer on heightening awareness to prevent or counter danger."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS

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Foreword

YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS AN AMAZING BOOK, unlike any other on the subject.

Many good books have been written about the critically important topic of detecting danger and protecting yourself and your loved ones from violence, books like Patrick Van Horne and Jason Riley's *Left of Bang* and Gavin de Becker's *The Gift of Fear*. Gary Quesenberry has integrated the best of such leading works with his own world-class expertise to create a uniquely useful resource. A work that is greater than the sum of its parts, and unlike anything else available on this critical topic.

This book also stands out because of Gary's incredibly thorough and comprehensive presentation of the main subject of this book: the art of *situational awareness*, a life-saving ability to spot danger in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones. The many case studies, drills, and exercises provided in this book will help to ensure mastery of this vital survival skill. I have read many books on the subject, and I can honestly say that no one has even come close to matching *Spotting Danger Before It Spots You* when it comes to teaching situational awareness.

This fundamental skill is key to surviving and overcoming the array of threats that confront the average citizen in the world today.

Finally, Gary Quesenberry is uniquely qualified to write this book. As a US federal air marshal, Gary lived and breathed situational awareness as an essential part of his daily life for decades. He has been there and done that. Gary's knowledge has been, as he puts it, "forged in the fires of real-world experiences." And he now passes that knowledge on to you in a powerful, masterful, and entertaining way, as all great teachers do. With all my heart I encourage you to study and apply the knowledge and techniques in this book to your own life.

As we love our families, as we love our nation, as we love our way of life, we must all rise to the challenges of the age. Armed with the skills taught in this book, you will not need to live in fear; you will live instead in a state of awareness and readiness. You will truly be "spotting danger before it spots you."

Dave Grossman

Lt. Colonel, US Army (ret.)

Author of *On Killing*, *On Combat*, and *Assassination Generation*

Director, Killology Research Group, www.killology.com

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman is a former West Point psychology professor, professor of military science, and an Army Ranger Lt. Col. Grossman's work has been translated into many languages, and his books are required or recommended reading in colleges, military academies, and police academies around the world, including the US Marine Corps Commandant's reading list and the FBI Academy reading list. His research was cited by the president of the United States in a national address after the Littleton, Colorado, school massacre, and he has testified before the US senate, the US congress, and numerous state legislatures. He has served as an expert witness and consultant in state and Federal courts, including *United States v. Timothy McVeigh*.

He helped train mental health professionals after the Jonesboro school massacre, and he was also involved in counseling or court cases in the aftermath of the Paducah, Springfield, and Littleton school shootings. He has been called upon to write the entry “Aggression and Violence” in the *Oxford Companion to American Military History*, three entries in the *Academic Press Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, and has presented papers before the national conventions of the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. In addition, he has written extensively on the current threat situation, with articles published in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* and many leading law enforcement journals.

Introduction

“If, then, I were asked for the most important advice I could give, that which I consider to be the most useful to the men of our century, I would simply say: in the name of God, stop a moment, cease your work, look around you.”

—LEO TOLSTOY

I AM A FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL. That’s the career path I chose, and for the past nineteen years, I’ve had a first-class ticket into the world of covert surveillance, surveillance detection, and self-defense. If I had to assess all the training I’ve received throughout my career and pick one essential skill I could pass along to everyone I care about, it would be situational awareness. Why awareness? Shouldn’t it be something along the lines of precision marksmanship skills, or some high-speed, quick-finish self-defense technique? No. The bottom line is you can never fight what you can’t see coming. For that reason, being mindful of your surroundings and capable of using what you see to accurately predict the actions of others are crucial skills when it comes to guaranteeing your personal safety.

When people think of situational awareness, they usually relate it to some spy movie they've seen. I always think back to a scene from *The Bourne Identity*. If you've seen the movie, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about, but if you haven't, here's a quick summary. The captain of a fishing boat finds Jason Bourne floating in the ocean. He has a bullet hole in his back, a mysterious bank account number embedded in his leg, and no recollection of who he is or how he got there. Although he has completely lost his memory and identity, he still possesses some pretty extraordinary abilities, two of which are some ninja-level self-defense skills and an almost superhuman capacity for situational awareness. In the scene I'm referring to, Bourne (who doesn't know that's his name yet) is sitting in a diner waiting for a female friend. When she comes in and sits down, they strike up a conversation about the best way for him to regain his memory. The woman tries to explain away Bourne's exceptional abilities, but he becomes frustrated and says, "I come in here and the first thing I'm doing is I'm catching the sidelines and looking for an exit . . . I can tell you the license plate numbers of all six cars outside. I can tell you that our waitress is left-handed and the guy sitting up at the counter weighs two hundred and fifteen pounds and knows how to handle himself. I know the best place to find a gun is in the gray truck outside . . . now, why would I know that?" I love that scene, but I think a lot of people have the misconception that that's how situational awareness actually works. Realistically it would be next to impossible to take all of that information in so quickly, but the good news is that these things aren't superpowers; they're basic skills we all possess, and once learned, they'll help you think more clearly and critically about your surroundings and how you interact with them.

My goal here is to take what's relevant in the world of situational awareness and personal safety and boil that information down to its simplest terms, which can then be easily implemented in your daily life. The techniques and exercises I'll have you practice work for everyone—parents, small children walking to school, teenagers going off to

college, and whole families headed out on summer vacation. It works universally. When properly applied, this system of situational awareness will help improve your general understanding of how, when, and where violence occurs. It will also increase your chances of successfully detecting and avoiding danger no matter where in the world you may find yourself.

As a federal air marshal, my primary area of operation was Europe. At the time, there was a general feeling of unrest in that area that often turned violent. Knowing this, situational awareness played a central role in how I performed my job on the ground. Not every incident can be immediately identified and controlled, so it was essential to have specific skill sets that allowed me to spot potentially life-threatening situations before they occurred.

- March 2012: A gunman claiming links to al-Qaeda killed three Jewish schoolchildren, a rabbi, and three paratroopers in Toulouse, southern France.
- January 7, 2015: Two brothers stormed the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* (a satirical newspaper) killing eleven people at the start of three days of terror. Another radicalized Muslim later shot and killed a policewoman before shooting more people at the Hyper Cacher market in Paris. The attackers were later killed in stand-offs with police.
- November 13, 2015: One hundred and thirty people are killed and hundreds wounded in a series of attacks by gunmen and suicide bombers at cafes, a rock concert, and a stadium in Paris. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.
- March 22, 2016: At least thirty-one people are killed and one hundred and fifty injured in three explosions at the Brussels airport and at a downtown metro stop.¹

1. Belgium's federal prosecutor confirms that the incidents were suicide attacks.

- March 22, 2017: A man drove an SUV into a crowd on the sidewalk along the Westminster Bridge in London, killing at least four. After ramming the car into a barrier outside the House of Parliament, the driver exited the vehicle and stabbed a police officer to death before responding officers shot and killed him.
- June 3, 2017: Eight people were killed in two terror attacks in central London before police shot three suspects dead. The violence began when a van swerved into a large group of pedestrians on London Bridge. The suspects then jumped out of the van and proceeded on foot to nearby Borough Market, where witnesses say they produced knives and slashed indiscriminately at people in restaurants and bars. At least forty-eight people were injured and taken to hospitals, according to the London Ambulance Service.

These are just a handful of the attacks that happened during my time covering Europe, but they didn't "just happen." The attackers carefully surveyed and selected their targets. They made plans and conducted rehearsals. Unfortunately, some people have the mindset that "nothing will ever happen here" or "that would never happen to me." Air marshals don't have that luxury. We have to assume that every day could be the day and every place could be the place for the next attack. It's crucial you adopt that same attitude if you want to improve your situational awareness.

Before we begin, I think it's important to understand what you're up against when it comes to the frequency of violent encounters. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program describes violent crimes as those offenses that involve force or the threat of force such as murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. In 2017, there were an estimated 1.25 million violent crimes committed in the United States. That breaks down to an estimated 383 violent crimes per one hundred thousand inhabitants, or a little over two violent crimes committed per minute. Aggravated assault accounted for

65 percent of those crimes. Robbery took up 26 percent, rape 8 percent, and murder accounted for 1 percent. The report also shows that firearms were used in 73 percent of the nation's murders, 41 percent of robberies, and 26 percent of aggravated assaults.² According to data collected by the National Crime Survey and the Bureau of statistics, 73 percent of women and 89 percent of men will have been victimized by a violent crime in their lifetime.³

Given these statistics, I think it's safe to say that bad things happen and, unfortunately, bad things can happen to good people. We usually don't like to think about that fact because it makes us uncomfortable. Comfort is important to us, and we equate comfort with safety, but that way of thinking carries with it a fatal flaw. Turning a blind eye to the physical threats of the world so you can feel more secure is dangerous; it changes the way you act and carry yourself. It causes people to slip into patterns of behavior that are easily identifiable by criminals and, in their eyes, make you look like an easy target. It softens defenses, diminishes levels of awareness, and in the worst case, leaves you completely unprepared should you find yourself in a bad situation. Trust me, I'm speaking from personal experience.

Spotting Danger Before It Spots You—Build situational awareness to stay safe is broken down into three easy-to-follow phases:

1. Understand the threat.
2. Build your situational awareness.
3. Develop personal defenses.

Each phase will walk you through the various steps of developing awareness. At the end of each chapter you will find a refresher of the

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, *Crime in the United States*, 2018 report, Fall 2019, 1–2.

3. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization, 2018*, by Rachel E. Morgan and Barbara A. Oudekerk, September 2019, 13.

key points as well as a practical exercise to help you put what you've learned into practice. I've also provided a self-assessment guide in the appendix to help you gain a clearer perspective on your current level of awareness and where you need to make improvements.

The methods I outline in this book were forged in the fires of real-world operations, and the lessons they carry were hard-won. The skills you take away from here can save your life if you are willing to put them into practice. There are no prerequisites; your past experiences may be very different than mine, but that doesn't mean you're any less capable of understanding your surroundings. You can be more alert, focused, and better prepared today than you were yesterday, so let's get started!



PHASE ONE—Understand the Threat

“I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.”

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

1

The Basics of Predatory Behavior

THE FEDERAL AIR MARSHAL SERVICE started out small back in 1961 with only a handful of agents. Back in those days, hijackings were fairly common. Between 1968 and 1972, there were 130 hijackings on American air carriers alone. The hijackers were typically driven by personal gain or just looking for safe passage to places they weren't supposed to go. They would demand that a flight take them to a place like Cuba and then ask for hundreds of thousands of dollars in ransom money before they would release the passengers. For years, airlines mostly gave in to these demands because they felt customers would find enhanced security at the airport more of an inconvenience than the possibility of a hijacking. Things changed significantly after four commercial aircraft were taken over by al-Qaeda terrorists and used as steerable weapons of mass destruction on September 11th, 2001. Now air marshals number in the thousands and serve on both domestic and international flights to detect, deter, and defeat acts of terrorism within the aviation domain.

As an agency, we thought we had a pretty good grasp of what the threat was, but in fact, we had become complacent. As we sat back waiting for the next cookie-cutter, standard-issue hijacking, the enemy

was moving right under our noses, surveying targets and conducting dry runs for an attack we had never imagined. The signs were all there, but we missed them because we failed to give up on our old points of view.

Real situational awareness requires a shift in perspective. It's not enough to just walk around in a state of hypervigilance, thinking that nothing within your line of sight will go unnoticed. You have to be able to see yourself and others from the perspective of a predator. This isn't easy for a lot of people. For the most part, we all want to see the best in others, and the fact that someone else could possibly view us as a target of opportunity is hard to imagine. The unfortunate truth is that there are predators among us, and unless we can change the way we think, we may look like easy prey without even knowing it.

To better understand predatory behaviors, let's start by breaking down and categorizing the different types of predators and their basic motivations. In his book, *Facing Violence: Preparing for the Unexpected*, Sgt. Rory Miller breaks down predators into two groups: resource predators and process predators. A resource predator is looking for tangible items, be it cash, jewelry, or even your shoes. They've decided they need something and they're going to take it from you. Predators in this category include your basic mugger, pickpocket, or burglar. In some cases, if a resource predator confronts you and you just give them the thing they want, they go away.

Process predators, on the other hand, are much different. Process predators aren't interested in your watch or wallet; they get off on the act of violence itself. This category of predator includes the likes of rapists and murderers.

Motivations of the two categories of predators can vary, but violent behavior is primarily driven by one of four things: money, ego, territory, and emotion. Let's take a closer look at each.

1. **Money:** Like it or not, money is a consideration in almost every aspect of our lives. If you want a roof over your head, food in your stomach, and clothes on your back, you're going to need money,

2

Conducting a Self-Assessment

NOW I'M GOING TO ASK YOU TO DO SOMETHING that may make you uncomfortable. I need you to take a long, honest look at yourself and evaluate what you see based upon what you've learned regarding the predatorial mindset. This exercise is known as a self-assessment and I've included a structured worksheet in the appendix to help you out with the process. Be honest about your current level of awareness and then use the PROD method to weigh out how others may perceive you, what risk you pose to potential criminals, your current level of observable value, and your personal defenses. Once that's established, we're going to break this whole process down and identify the four Ws, or the who, what, when, and where of a potential attack scenario. By uncovering your vulnerabilities, you'll have a pretty good idea of where your weak spots are and what steps you can take to minimize them. It's imperative that you conduct this evaluation, find those weaknesses, and make the appropriate corrections, but read through the whole book first. That way you have all the information you need before beginning the self-assessment. Trust me, you never want to put yourself in a position where you're being completely reactionary and making corrections only after the fact. Early in my career as a federal air marshal,

I was forced into a position where I had to completely reevaluate my own personal defenses. Unfortunately, this reevaluation was in reaction to what was regarded as the attempted abduction of my children.

It happened in 2003. I was assigned to the Las Vegas Field Office and primarily covered domestic flights along the Eastern Seaboard. My wife was a stay-at-home mom, and two of our three children were enrolled in the local elementary school. I was on an overnight trip to Baltimore when I got a call from my wife asking, "Did you try to take the kids out of school today? What the hell is going on?" I had no clue what she was talking about, but it was obvious she was distraught. After a few minutes of trying to calm her down, she explained what had happened. She and my youngest daughter (who was not of school age yet) had been out running errands. Instead of going home afterward, she decided to head to the school early and volunteer her time in the office, making copies for the teachers, something she did often. The staff at the school knew my wife well but didn't really know who I was or even what I looked like. When my wife showed up in the office, one of the secretaries made the comment that she was sorry to hear that we were removing our children from the school. Their belongings had been collected, and they were waiting in the counselor's office for their dad. My wife was obviously confused by this information, so the secretary went on to elaborate. A man identifying himself as Gary Quesenberry had called that morning and told the attendance officer he would be coming by the school and picking the kids up early. He said that because he worked for the government, he was being reassigned to a new office and the children would not be returning. The caller knew my name, the names of my children, and that I worked for the government. This information instantly sent my wife into a state of anger and confusion. It took several minutes to convince her that I was really in Baltimore and that I had not contacted the school. To me, this was a clear attempt by someone to get at my children. But who? What could I possibly have done to cause this? More importantly, how did I allow this to happen



PHASE TWO—Build Your Situational Awareness

“You can observe a lot just by watching.”

—YOGI BERRA

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The Basics of Awareness

MY PERSONAL DEFINITION OF SITUATIONAL AWARENESS is this: the ability to identify and process environmental cues to accurately predict the actions of others. When most people think of situational awareness, they probably think of someone sitting with their back to the wall in a restaurant or constantly looking over their shoulder, but real situational awareness goes quite a bit deeper than that. It involves equal measures of comprehension, planning, and intuition. In some cases, when people set out on the path to become more of a hard target, they get their priorities backward. They'll get a concealed carry permit or pay lots of money for firearms training and self-defense classes, all of which are great, but those things apply to the reactionary aspects of personal safety. Real security starts in your own mind. The ability to logically process what's going on around you and spot danger before it has a chance to materialize should be your first priority. It allows you time to plan and act well before anyone else even knows what's going on.

Much like chess, there's nothing physical about developing your situational awareness; it's a completely mental game and requires focus as well as critical thinking. Lots of people imagine their lives like a

chessboard. They have everything they need set up in a nice orderly fashion, and the threat only exists on the other side of the playing field, but after the first move, things become considerably more complicated. After both players make a move, there are roughly four hundred possible interchanges. After the second pair of turns, there are two hundred thousand possible move combinations, and after three moves, there are over one hundred and twenty million. Each turn requires you to dive deeper into the intentions of the other player, and each game evolves into one that has probably never been played before, each with a completely different outcome. Much like the beginnings of a violent encounter, it can be overwhelming. Now imagine being able to look at the board before all of that chaos and map out a solution that would always improve your chances to win. That is situational awareness: the ability to fully comprehend a situation before the first moves are made and plan your solutions well in advance.

Now that you have a pretty good handle on the concepts involved in the predatory mindset, which we covered in chapter one, it's time to move into the good stuff. But like any good training program, we're going to start with the basics. We're going to cover the various levels of awareness and how to remain observant without burning yourself out through hypervigilance. After that, we'll dive into the facts surrounding reaction times and how all of this factors into your personal safety; but first, I want you to have a firm understanding of how your perception of events can sometimes blind you to reality. One of the most important steps you can take toward hardening your personal defenses is putting aside what you think you know about the people who commit violence and focus on the things that define the reality of a situation.

3.1 Defining the Threat—Perception vs. Reality

It has often been argued that the world around us is subjective, that each individual's own perception dictates his or her reality. That would mean

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The Next Level of Awareness—Comprehend, Identify, and Anticipate

AT THIS POINT, you have a decent understanding of the predatory mindset and how to use that knowledge to strengthen your own defenses. You also have an idea of how your preconceived notions about violent encounters can affect your level of awareness and diminish your likelihood of spotting the real threat when it shows up. Building on these fundamentals, it's now time to concentrate on the more focused aspects of awareness like comprehension, identification, and anticipation. These three elements will form the core of your awareness training and provide you with tools to accurately analyze your surroundings.

Since situational awareness is a mental exercise, I think it's only appropriate that, as with physical activity, we first warm up. A great way to do this is with what's known as a KIM's game, or Keep-in-Memory game. KIM's games are commonly used in military and law enforcement sniper training to increase observational skills. Candidates

are given a number of random objects to memorize in a short period of time and then asked later in the day about what they saw. As the training progresses, the number of objects increases as does the amount of time between observation and questioning. This helps to build the candidate's level of awareness, attention to detail, and memory. Below, you'll find a picture of various items. I want you to study the image for thirty seconds. Memorize as much of what you see as possible, take in as much detail as you can, then without thinking about it, continue reading up to section 4.2. No cheating, and you only have thirty seconds. I'll ask questions about what you saw later.

KIM's Game



4.1 Comprehend the Situation: the Initial Scan

Whether we admit it or not, we are creatures of habit; we tend to live our lives within a specific set of patterns. We have a morning routine as we get ready for work, on the way to work we follow preexisting traffic patterns, and at work we know and understand the various moods and customs of our coworkers and how we should best interact

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What Comes Next

NOW THAT YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE BASICS OF AWARENESS, you can see that when it comes to the threat of a violent attack, being proactive is a much better option than being reactive. Knowing what to look for and how to interpret what you see gives you more time to develop a plan of action should the need arise. There are four basic options when it comes to self-preservation: avoidance, escape, de-escalation, and confrontation. Don't let the simplicity of these options fool you; people who are placed under enormous amounts of stress tend to overcomplicate things and in doing so can severely hinder their own chances of surviving an attack. When you're faced with a violent encounter, you have to approach the situation like you're solving any other problem.

- Identify the problem
- Determine your goals
- Assess the alternatives
- Choose a solution

This isn't always easy when you're not used to the devastation being caught off-guard can have on your decision-making process. That's why

it's so important to use the what-if games to preplan your reaction to events before they happen. It keeps your solutions from getting overly complicated. Remember that when faced with a set of decisions, the best solution is usually the simplest one.

5.1 Establishing a Basis for Action

In their fantastic book *Left of Bang*, authors Patrick Van Horn and Jason A. Riley point out that people generally act within four specific groups of behaviors. They're dominant or submissive, comfortable or uncomfortable. Think about it this way. You take your significant other to the same restaurant every Tuesday night for dinner. When you walk in, you know the staff, you have a particular booth you like to sit in, and you know where the bathrooms are. To other patrons in the restaurant, you probably seem comfortable. Another customer walks in who's visibly upset and yelling. He's flailing his arms about and demanding to speak to a manager. This person's actions would fall under the category of dominant. In the corner, a waitress is chastising a busboy for not properly clearing the table. The busboy is obviously embarrassed and could probably be seen as submissive or uncomfortable. These are very basic behavioral categories, but they paint an accurate picture of how a person is feeling in a particular situation. When you walk into an environment and conduct your initial scan, you expect to see people acting in accordance with the norms. Aggressive is the norm for a mosh pit, but if someone were acting aggressively during a church service, you'd have reason to believe something was seriously wrong. It's when someone acts outside of those situational and behavioral standards that we need to start paying closer attention. To form a basis for action, you need to understand that just one unusual behavior isn't enough. That's why the Federal Air Marshal Service trains its agents to follow the Rule of Three we considered earlier: if you see three specific behaviors that fall outside of the behavioral norms, then you may want to start developing a plan.

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Reinforcing Your Defenses

WE'VE DISCUSSED THE DIFFERENCES between hard targets and soft targets. I'm sure by now you understand the importance of being aware and well prepared, but during your self-assessment, you may have spotted a few weak spots. Now we're going to cover ways to correct those weaknesses and reinforce your defenses. Regardless of how impenetrable you think your defenses are or how well thought out your plans for early detection and avoidance may be, there is always the possibility that something could slip through and catch you unaware. For this reason, it's crucial that you improve your mindset, learn to minimize distractions, control fear, and build confidence through practice and understanding. All of these things will help you to harden your defenses and round out your skill sets in the area of attack survival. They'll also change the way you carry yourself and how others view you, which will of course make you less appealing to potential criminals and help ensure your general safety.

6.1 Improving Mindset

Now that we've covered the concepts of predatory behavior and situational awareness, it's important to acknowledge that not every situation is avoidable. At some point in your life, you may find yourself confronted by something or someone you did not see coming. When this happens, you'll need to have a good understanding of what role your mindset plays in the outcome of those situations.

Every violent encounter consists of two separate battles: the one we fight in our minds before the confrontation, and the actual physical conflict. The doubt and insecurity that sometimes accompany confrontation can create a losing mindset and cause you to give up long before things turn physical. People often give up or lose their focus because they let those negative feelings creep in and take over. It's important to understand that people sometimes find themselves in horrible situations with little or no warning. If that happens you have to push negativity aside and focus on the best way to approach the problem. At this stage, it's more often than not the person's mindset that saves their life.

Take, for instance, Lt. Brian Murphy of the Oak Creek Wisconsin Police Department. Lt. Murphy was the supervisor on duty one Sunday morning in 2012 when he received the report of an active shooter in a nearby Sikh temple. Murphy quickly realized that he was closest to the scene, and within minutes he found himself face to face with the deranged shooter. Both Murphy and the gunman opened fire. Murphy's first shot missed, and he immediately began taking rounds. One round pierced Murphy's face; it struck his jawbone, went down his throat, ripped through his vocal cords and esophagus, and eventually bounced off his spine. He then took cover behind a car but said he realized immediately "it was a tactical mistake" because he lost sight of the shooter. The shooter then approached Murphy from behind and began to unload. One round struck Murphy's thumb, completely destroying it and knocking his gun from his hand. "About halfway through I'm thinking, 'When are you going to be done shooting me?'" Murphy

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Putting It All Together

EARLIER, I MENTIONED that after the incident involving my children, I came to the realization that changes needed to be made. Based on my training, I felt I had a pretty good idea of how personal security worked, but I had failed to put all the pieces together. When I took a step back and reevaluated the situation, the root of the problem was staring me right in the face. I had become complacent, and because of that, I had ignored my defenses and left my family vulnerable to attack. That was a hard pill to swallow then, and it's hard to write about even today. I had become what I later referred to as a nine-to-fiver. When I strapped my gun on in the morning and left for the airport, I was 100 percent focused and ready to perform my job. But, at the end of the mission, when I returned home, I developed a habit of dropping my guard and falling into the trap of believing nothing would ever happen to me outside of work. Thirty thousand feet in the air . . . that's where the real bad guys were, right? That was my fatal mistake, and when a real threat presented itself, it came from a direction I had never anticipated. After that day, I began making serious changes, but those changes were incremental; some were made on the spot, but others

took time to implement. I still stop once in a while and reevaluate myself from a predator's perspective. I frequently find areas where complacency may have crept in and improvements need to be made. I use the flaws I find to readjust my defenses and strengthen the most vulnerable areas. It's a never-ending process, but if you use the techniques I've outlined in this book, you'll find that improving your situational awareness and hardening your defensive position in life is easier than you think.

We've covered a lot of ground in the last six chapters, and I feel entirely confident that the information I've passed along has opened your eyes to some aspect of situational awareness that, up to this point, you didn't know you were missing. Now you have a pretty good understanding of what factors drive violence and how predators think and act. Given this information, you're now able to look more critically at your own defenses and, through the self-assessment, identify the areas where corrections need to be made. The knowledge of how things work within your environment allows you to accurately establish baselines of behavior and quickly identify events that fall outside the norm. Once something suspicious has been spotted, you can now accurately anticipate the actions of those around you, plan for multiple outcomes, and act decisively when the time comes. That's a pretty impressive set of skills, but when you look at it as a whole, it may seem a little overwhelming. The good news is that all of this information is scalable. You can make a few minor adjustments to your current state of awareness, which will almost instantly increase your level of security, or you can make more significant modifications to your lifestyle, which take more time to master. The choice is up to you. The big question is how do you go about putting what you've learned into practice? Let's review the basics.

1. Heads up! Simply looking around instantly raises your level of awareness and makes you look less appealing to predators.
2. Watch people's hands. If watching people makes you feel a little bit creepy, just make a habit of looking at their hands. The hands are what can hurt you so keep an eye on them.

About the Author

GARY QUESENBERRY was born in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. His love of the outdoors and patriotic spirit led him to enlist in the United States Army where he served as an artilleryman during Operation Desert Storm. Gary later became a career federal air marshal and trainer where he has devoted his life to studying violence and predatory behavior. Now Gary serves as the CEO of Q-Series LLC and has devel-



Photo by Mary Mcilvaine

oped numerous basic- and advanced-level training courses focused on mental toughness, marksmanship, and defensive tactics. As a competitive pistol shooter, Gary has been featured on the History Channel's hit television series *Top Shot, Season 3* and *Top Shot All-Stars*. He has an extensive background in domestic and foreign counterterror training and has worked in both the private and corporate sectors to help educate others on the importance of situational awareness and personal safety "through his "Heads Up" training program."