

Situational Awareness

One of the most critical aspects of personal safety and security is situational awareness. An individual who is keenly in tune with their surroundings, and what is potentially emerging, is often able to act before anything bad occurs. The OODA Loop is a theoretical concept developed by retired Air Force Colonel John Boyd. The acronym stands for: Observe – Orient – Decide – Act. It has proven itself worthy in many military and corporate situations.

Another concept involves color codes to indicate the states of awareness. The late Jeff Cooper, a retired Marine, developed a system of different possible levels of awareness based on color. It is divided into five possible categories: white, yellow, orange, red, and black. Level white is where no one should ever be. If you are at level white, you are not aware at all of what is going on around you. Code Level Yellow is where we should be most of the time. In Level Yellow, we are aware of our surroundings. We are prepared but relaxed. In Level Orange, we have determined that there is a possible threat and are prepared to act. In Level Red, we are involved in an emergency, and our focus is on dealing with that emergency. Besides the event we are engaged in, a secondary danger is that our intense focus on this event may cause us to overlook other potential threats, such as friends of an attacker. In Color Code Black, we panic, freeze, and shut down. This is the worst possible state.

While it is helpful to have familiarity with these color codes and corresponding awareness levels, along with an understanding of the OODA Loop, I prefer to follow the

teachings of Yousef Badou, a Marine veteran who founded Emergence®. Mr. Badou is, in my opinion, a leading guru of situational awareness and safety.

The gist of his situational awareness training program boils down to staying Left of Bang. The “bang” being when the you know what hits the fan. You want to know how to realize something is about to happen before it happens, and avoid it. So, just a bit of what he teaches:

Do You Analyze Behavior?

When someone is making you nervous or feel uneasy for no apparent or direct reason, please don’t dismiss it. You have to make sure you’re viewing these behaviors in the proper context. First, establish baselines for expected behavior in the current context, and then examine their behavior through that lens.

If a violent attack or active shooting is about to occur, there are usually many warning signs in the immediate moments before it happens. But you can’t just look at one indicator or a single behavior to prevent workplace violence, active shootings, or crimes of opportunity.

How To Spot A Threat To Your Safety Before Violent Behavior Occurs?

One approach, the Threat Risk Assessment (TRA), is a systematic but straightforward way of looking at what you know about an individual’s behavior and their potential to harm.

- **Capability:** The person has the means, motive, and opportunity to commit violence.
- **Intent:** The person has expressed or exhibited violent intentions.
- **Behavior:** The person has engaged in violent or threatening behavior in the past.

This approach is not always 100% accurate, but it can be a valuable tool for assessing and managing risk if you already know or have some familiarity with the people.

How Behavior Analysis Can Help Spot Problem Behaviors?

Behavior analysis in a crowd or an event full of people you don't know may seem impossible. One helpful tool is establishing a baseline for normal behavior, which allows for quick classification and grouping of individuals into categories based on their behavior within the group and social environment. If you notice something out of the ordinary, you will be prepared to handle any violent situation.

What Are Some Different Categories Of Behavior?

For example, before you walk into a mall, you can use the behavior categories above to think about the baseline. Should most people at the mall typically exhibit submissive or neutral body language and behavior in the majority of situations? Usually, yes.

If someone is dominating everyone around them or one person in particular, they might be an obvious threat. But what about threats that aren't so obvious? What else can we look for?

- Dominant or Neutral/Submissive.**
- Interested or Uninterested.**
- Comfortable or Uncomfortable.**

Should most people at a mall be interested or uninterested in what they are doing? Usually, interested. Should most people at a mall be comfortable or uncomfortable? Usually, comfortable.

Now, suppose you see someone who appears completely uninterested in those around them and looks uncomfortable or distressed. In that case, you know you can focus your observations on them, as opposed to continuing to scan everyone there following the “rules” of the baseline you established.

Conclusion

Each of these behavior analysis methods has its strengths and weaknesses, but when used together, they can provide a more comprehensive view of an individual's risk for violence.

The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from violence is to be aware of the risks and know how to identify potentially dangerous behavior. If you see something that doesn't seem right, report it immediately.

Stay aware. Stay safe. Stay tuned to <https://www.protectionmattersinstitute.com/>

Regards,

John