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The 3 steps to having self defense situational awareness

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The first thing you have to realise is that situational awareness is not some random thing. When someone tells you to “pay attention” they normally end up creating the impression that you must look around. Yes, but at what? The trees? The pretty sky? No, there are specific behaviours and signals that BG’s give off that you need to be watching for. So it’s less “What must I look around at?” and more “look around for.” People who say “Pay attention to your surroundings” are doing you a disservice when they stop at that point. Firstly, Bad Guys might use your surroundings to aid their crime, but your surroundings aren’t what’s going to hold a knife to your throat. It’s people that are going to mug you, not the sidewalk. So let’s start by saying you usually want to be paying attention to people, more than the environment. As you get better at this you’ll start adding environmental factors like spotting good ambush sites before you walk past them (and then giving them a wide berth or extra scrutiny)

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Step 1

So step 1 to having situational awareness is to be aware of the fact that there are specific, observable, known behaviours and conditions that are necessary for a crime to occur. If you see someone taking certain actions, it means that they are likely going to attack you.

The good news is there are lots of different things to choose from. The bad news is there are so many that I can't possibly go through all of them in one simple blog post. I would suggest starting with the following article to learn more about what actions a BG will take before an attack:

[The 5 stages of violent crime](#)

Step 2

So if step 1 is knowing what actions a BG takes before committing a crime (i.e. knowing what actions give away that it's a BG walking behind you), then step 2 is to choose just 1 or 2 at a time to practise. One of my big mistakes has been to learn as much as possible in the shortest time possible. So much, so quickly, that in fact I haven't had the time to internalise everything through practise yet. Call it information overload, or analysis paralysis, but I find that I have to break things up into manageable pieces and purposefully learn (i.e. practise) them piece at a time.

Step 3

So step 3 (now that we know some of the BG giveaways, and we've chosen 1 or 2 to focus on) is to go out and practise them. So obviously you want to go somewhere where there are absolutely no people whatsoever. Right? Riiiiiiight. Crimes need people, so if we want to get practise in spotting criminals, we need to be around criminals (I mean people) too. So go to the mall; go to a parking lot by a busy beach; go stand on the pavement on a busy (with pedestrians) street. Get a cup of coffee or something, and people watch. What you're doing is specifically looking for the behaviour you've chosen to work on today. Whether it's someone who isn't task focused (on their stupid phone) but is analysing the people around himself; or if it's looking for someone who gets closer to people than is comfortable for the area you're in; or if you're looking for 2 or more guys who are obviously together, but who stand somewhat spread out. You're "on the lookout" for some very specific behaviours. Much better than being told the generic "pay attention to your surroundings" isn't it? If you really want to know what it looks like to see people break out of their task fixation, go drive a (nice) car through a really poor neighbourhood. Then you'll get to see

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people size you up instead of looking at their phones.

You want to know the best thing about step 3? Most people in the world are actually good guys (believe it or not), so the bad news is that seeing this kind of behaviour is somewhat of a rarity. In fact, if you see these things all the time where you live, you really should move somewhere better. But despite not seeing too much of the stuff we're practising, the very fact that you are looking for specific, actionable behaviours (even if you don't see them) means that you will look alert and switched on. And this means a big drop in the chances of you being chosen for an attack. See, that's the beauty of situational awareness – once you know what to look for, and you actually look for it, most of what you're on the lookout for will leave you alone.