

Situational Awareness



Robin Davis, NRP

ALL ABOUT MINDSET

I read an article recently, in which the author said “Situational awareness (SA) is a lot like the weather: People talk about it a lot, but many people don’t prepare for it properly. We forget or forego things like sunscreen, umbrellas, hats or gloves because we’re in a hurry or because we’re not really convinced that we’ll need them.” - Steve Shupert

I believe situational awareness often finds itself tossed into the category of things that are only important when we need them. Quite often, the discussion of situational awareness centers around some violent event that happened “somewhere else.” But, when our tones drop, we get rushed and seem to forget anything beyond that familiar mantra of “SCENE SAFE. BSI.”

Situational awareness isn’t difficult to define. It’s simply being aware of your surroundings and identifying potential threats or dangers. The challenge is understanding that it is a mindset, not a physical skill. Most of the training in public safety focuses on improving skill retention and very little on mental preparation.

So, how do we develop a situational awareness mindset? Is it something we only need when we’re on the job? Fortunately, because it is a mindset, it can be practiced by anyone with desire and discipline.

KNOW YOUR ENVIRONMENT

It’s very important to understand what’s normal and know when things change around you. The faster you recognize change, the greater your chance of identifying threats or danger. This includes listening to what’s happening around you. So often, we try to tune out the world, but the world is giving you subtle clues about what’s happening. Some things are threatening and others are purely entertaining. Don’t miss the show.

ACCEPTANCE NOT DENIAL

We don’t like things that are out of the ordinary. We don’t want to believe bad things can happen near us or worse, to us. Many times, we’ll know that something is wrong but we won’t accept it, so we somehow justify it as a normal occurrence. This allows us to “feel” safe. We call this, denial. Stop living in denial. Accept bad things happen everywhere to anyone. You may feel a little paranoid at first, but as you learn to identify and distinguish real threats from paranoia, you’ll discover paranoia will disappear and confidence will take its place.

ENOUGH WITH THE SMARTPHONE

Ok, maybe that’s an over simplification but honestly, avoid the tunnel vision and the distractions. Get your head up and looking around. Tunnel vision used to refer to staring at the road immediately in front of you; or focusing only on the bloodiest of injuries. Today, the social media and the instant updates are out of control. It’s ok to text from your desk but not while you’re out on the street or running a call.

Developing situational awareness is a skill that takes constant practice. It will feel awkward at first, but in time, it will become seamless. One last tip - try this on your way home. We all know the way around our town, but do you know what street you just passed? Try checking out the names of the streets you cross on your next trip out. I’ll bet you’ll see things you’ve never really seen before.

Remember, a safe provider is ever vigilant.

Robin Davis is a retired police lieutenant and EMS Battalion Chief. With nearly 30 years of experience, Robin is internationally recognized in the EMS community for his exceptional situational awareness and safety instruction