

White paper: Safety for Real Estate professionals: Applying a self awareness strategy.

Introduction

Real estate professionals repeatedly find themselves in vulnerable and potentially dangerous situations during any given work day. As a progressively dynamic market, the growing trend in home buyer expectations is to demand more comprehensive information in less time. This rapid pace is compromising the one element that should be every agent's main priority: personal safety. Today, industry expertise and well-refined business procedures alone are not enough. Personal safety skills and defense tools must be incorporated into every agent's business strategy and training process.

The Threat

Year after year, the statistics speak for themselves, citing safety breaches that range from distressful encounters to atrocious crimes.

The 2015 Member Safety Report by the National Association of REALTORS® found by the following insights:

- Real estate agents meet almost **50% of their prospective clients with having little or no previous contact.**
- An astounding **40% of Realtors have found themselves in situations where they feared for their safety**, or the safety of their personal information.
- The most common circumstances that resulted in **fearful situations are open houses, showing vacant and model homes, working with properties that were unlocked or unsecured, and showing homes in remote areas.**
- **The most rapidly increasing** real estate market areas are **suburban and rural zones.**
- **The highest population** of real estate professionals is comprised of **women who work alone.**

Agent risk and vulnerability are at their highest during the first contact with new prospective buyers. According to statistics, **half of all first encounters occur directly on the property, instead of in a real estate office or a neutral location.**

Frighteningly, this practice is growing due to the nature of today's homebuyers. As more information becomes easily available to consumers, homebuyers are now better informed about the listings they want to see, and more familiar with real estate procedures, making them eager to skip the introductions and get right to the showings.

This "show me now" attitude has created a trend in the real estate community called "Pop-tart agents" The expression refers to situations in which an agent receives a call from a prospective client, and promptly "pops out" of the office to show them the property (Ramus 2015). This situation puts the agent alone in an empty home, with an unknown person about whom they have very little information.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, the risks associated with real estate professionals' daily activities are undeniable and must not be ignored.

Unfortunately, when standing in the face of danger, many individuals are not adequately prepared to protect themselves. It is easy to believe that such things could never happen to you or someone close to you (Siciliano R. 2003). This way of thinking is naive and dangerous, and leads us to ask:

"Are we as concerned about agent safety as we should be?"

"Do agents know how to protect themselves and are they armed with the tools to do so?"

"How can we make better decisions concerning agent safety?"

The Void

When questioned about their knowledge of safety precautions in the workplace, only 46% of the surveyed agents reported that their brokerages have standard safety procedures in place. According to the current Safety Report from NAR® The majority, 54%, either do not have standard safety procedures in the office, or the agents are unaware of them if they do exist.

Some concerned agents are taking matters into their own hands:

- Nearly 40% of real estate professionals have participated in self-defense classes
- More than one-third of agents carry a self-defense weapon on their person
- Female Realtors® are more likely to carry pepper spray
- Male Realtors® more commonly carry a firearm.

However, only about 10% of agents use technology, such as smartphone safety apps, to send emergency notifications and track their locations. These tools are particularly preferred by female agents.

The Plan for Improvement

The most important assets to any brokerage are its agents. Creating a safe facility, adequately equipped with video cameras and panic buttons, is a step in the right direction. However, the real need lies where the most imminent threat is: **in the field.**

So how do we establish a connection between a safe office and a safe field environment?

Industry-Wide Call to Action:

In the wake of the kidnapping and tragic murder of Arkansas real estate agent Beverly Carter, many agents have called for Multiple Listing Services and real estate associations to establish “rules of engagement” for dealing with prospective clients. In the NAR “Window to the Law” video for implementing office Safety Measures, the NAR associate counsel Jessica Edgerton suggests to standardize protocol and bring consumers to the understanding and acceptance that real estate professionals will not show homes without first following set safety procedures.

Suggestions for industry-wide safety procedures:

- Every first encounter between an agent and client must be held in an office or public location; not in the home to be viewed.
- Each individual over the age of 18 who wishes to enter a home with a real estate agent must first provide valid state or government issued photo identification.
- The agent has the right, and is encouraged, to copy or photograph every client’s photo identification, and keep it on file in the office.
- The client must notify the agent at least 1 hour prior to the showing if any additional parties wish to attend. A copy of each additional party’s photo identification must be transmitted to the agent, and verified on site before entering the home.

Technology Call to Action:

Enhanced communication and connection will not only help agents sell more homes; they are the key elements to creating a safer work environment. Realy is a software company that develops solutions for real estate professionals, and we believe that collaboration and awareness on an industry-wide level are vital to achieving safety in the real estate community.

We aim to play a vital role in this collaborative process through Realy Safe, a new mobile application that integrates a one-touch safety alert system into your mobile phone. “Safe” and “Help” notifications are delivered instantly to Emergency Contacts, giving agents security at work, and providing loved ones with peace of mind. With Realy Safe, no agent is alone in the field.

Agency/Brokerage Call to Action:

Safety awareness begins in the office. Every agency and brokerage should take action to protect and educate their agents.

1. Develop/update a safety program and policies for your brokerage.

NAR associate counsel Jessica Edgerton suggests that brokerages integrate safety policies and programs into their training procedures to help increase agent security when they are out of the office, meeting with new and prospective clients.

When developing safety training or education programs, be sure to take the following points into consideration:

- **Select a safety app for the company.** Request that each agent download the app to their phones, and designate at least one co worker or supervisor as an Emergency Contact to receive safe and help alerts.
- Ensure that any programs offered will fully **accommodate individuals with disabilities or special needs.**
- **Training programs should be offered to everyone, regardless of gender.** Men and women are equally vulnerable in the field.
- Prior to hiring an external safety expert, make sure that **the expert is properly qualified and insured.**
- **Work with your local council** on how to best maintain and integrate your safety policies

2. Know the state law.

As many agents are beginning to arm themselves with self-defense weapons, every employee and member of management should become familiar with all applicable weapons-related laws and regulations (Edgerton 2014). Agencies may not require that employees or agents carry weapons. When referring to weapons as firearms, regulations are specific to each state’s individual laws.

- Laws regulating firearms licensing, transport and concealed carry vary widely depending the state you are in

- Every state now permits concealed carry, meaning that with the proper licenses, individuals can carry concealed firearms in public
- Interstate travel with a weapon also carries restrictions and regulations

Aside from firearms, other hand-held weapons commonly used for self-defense may also be regulated at the state or local level. For example, be aware that certain states have laws pertaining to the use of maces, pepper sprays, and other non firearm weapons.

Agent Call to Action:

As we've already seen, the most common circumstances that resulted in **fearful situations are open houses, showing vacant and model homes, working with properties that were unlocked or unsecured, and showing homes in remote areas.**

How can agents protect themselves during showings and open houses?

1. **Find a safety app** that is easy to access and use. Spend some time getting to know and testing your safety app with your Emergency Contacts before you go out in the field.
2. **Avoid meeting new clients in a remote areas alone.** Conduct first meetings in the office, or if you must meet in the field, take a co worker, friend or family member with you.
3. **Drive separately.** Do not get in a car with someone you don't know, or if you must, make sure that you are the driver.
4. **Keep visitor in sight.** Let the buyer take the lead when exploring a home. Always follow behind, and leave all access points open for an easy exit.
5. **Trust your instincts.** If you feel uncomfortable, excuse visitors, and let them know that you are expecting a colleague to arrive (indicating that you are not alone).
6. **Don't linger.** If you feel uncomfortable when the visit finishes, let your emergency contacts know, and do not remain on the property alone. Move to a safe place, such as a public area or your office.

For a complete list of safety procedures to follow before, during and after a showing, [download this printable PDF](#) and post it in offices and break rooms for employees to review.

Further steps

While many real estate organizations have established rules regarding conduct that pertain to brokers and agents, there are no such guidelines for members of the public. Real estate rules of engagement need to be standardized and implemented into the industry, leaving no excuse for lapses in security procedures. Agencies, brokerages and agents must educate

themselves, and arm themselves with tools and strategies such as safety apps. The results will be fewer crimes toward agents, less fear and vulnerability, and more peace of mind in a safer environment. The threat is real. The past is proof. We have the ability to protect our agents; now is the time to take action.

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