

The Business of Being Safe

By Meghan Gardner

Many of us have to go on business trips, frequently or occasionally. As we pack our bags for an early morning flight, our minds are filled with important details such as the itinerary, meetings, lunch with so-and-so, and all of the possible variables that might interfere with our carefully planned schedules.

But one variable we rarely consider is something bad happening to us. Even though we hear about such things on the news, it catches us by surprise when we put down our briefcase just long enough to dig out our boarding pass and then reach down to retrieve the briefcase and it's gone! One's stomach sinks and heart skips: *I've been robbed!* In a crowded airport, and no one saw a thing.

Our disbelief that it could happen to us gives way to anger and then panic: Everything—daily planner, cell phone, corporate documents, business cards with needed contacts, credit cards—was in that briefcase. Still stunned, we wander around looking for airport Security. Our minds flood: Call the office. Cancel credit cards. Inform police? Then we hear the boarding call for our flight.

Looking at it from the perpetrator's perspective, he or she spotted the perfect target: someone who was temporarily distracted and unmindful. So he or she moved in to strike. No sweat. Mission accomplished swiftly, and then disappeared without a trace.

How could this whole scenario have been prevented? Well, you might not be able to stop something like this from ever occurring, but you can cut down on the chances of it happening. The answer is simple: Don't be a desirable target.

These are some of the most common indicators of easy prey:

- being unaware of one's immediate environment and the people in it—such as reading a magazine at a bus stop,

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wearing headphones while jogging, or talking on the phone while driving

- submissive posture and body language—such as smiling when nervous, not making eye contact with an assertive stranger, or backing off in a confrontational situation

- circumstances that can put you at a disadvantage, such as an armful of packages, an injury or disability, or a broken-down car.

The good news is that there are several, relatively simple ways to counteract those indicators.

Be aware. Scan your environment, take notice of anything unusual, and don't assume any situation is completely safe. Act confident and assertive. If confronted by someone, don't be afraid to make direct eye contact, establish your personal boundaries, and stand firm. Minimize your disadvantages. If you

have a lot of packages, put them in a shopping cart. If you're hindered physically by an injury or a disability, ask for assistance from a trusted person. Become more aware and more assertive in questionable situations when they can't be avoided.

You can bet that predators are aware and certainly assertive. They scope and know their environments well. They're confident in their skills. And they always look for an advantage that can make someone an easy prey. The lesson for us is that it's much harder to take on

a victim who doesn't offer any advantage. Believe me, most predators would rather wait patiently for someone more vulnerable; there's less risk of being unsuccessful and being caught.

In fact, it doesn't take that much to discourage a predator. Mainly, it requires only that we think first. We routinely run through a list of things to accomplish for each day, but stop at thinking through a few safety precautions—whether for a business trip or just before we leave the house in the morning for the office.

We need to send a loud and clear message in our behavior, demeanor, body language, and actions: You'll find no easy prey here.

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