



RealSafeAgent

# AGENTS

## A Comprehensive Agent Safety Analysis & Guide for Real Estate Associations, MLSs, and Brokerages



# aegis

**noun**

æ·gis | \ 'ē-jəs *also* 'ā- \

variants: *or less commonly* **egis**

Definition of ***aegis***

: the protection, backing, or support of a particular person or organization

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## OVERVIEW

The real estate industry has undergone dramatic changes in the past 50 years. It has seen radically new business models and practices come about every 15-20 years. Unfortunately, real estate agent safety has NOT changed.

The same policies and practices developed by people with no crime prevention experience 50 years ago have been repeatedly recycled without ever asking key questions:

1. What type of crime is crime against real estate agents?
2. Are the policies and practices that we have been using for all these years effective at preventing the crime?
3. Are we providing effective training?
4. Can we prevent crimes against agents?
5. How is behavior and culture influenced?

This document will answer these questions and more. We will start with an examination of how the industry has handled crime against agents and the impact of the mistakes it made, go in-depth into the nature of crime against agents, the offenders, safety products, what agents should be learning, behavioral and cultural change and a plethora of other topics.

There are those who will read this far in the document and read no further because they believe existing “industry standard practices” are enough. For the most part they are not. For example, “Let the office know where you’re going and what time you’ll be back”... does this keep the agent safe, or tell the office where to start looking for the missing agent? Keeping the office informed is a good practice but it DOES NOT keep the agent safe.

This document will propose a new approach, based in behavioral science and criminology, for preventing crime against agents and bringing about the long term behavioral and cultural change needed for a proactive community.

No products will be mentioned or endorsed in this document.

## THE INDUSTRY'S MISTAKES AND THE CONSEQUENCES

The real estate industry's attempts at improving safety have been largely ineffective over the years. The reason for the ineffectiveness is that the industry made 3 critical errors in dealing with crime against agents:

### Mistake 1 - An Inaccurate Assumption

The industry made an inaccurate assumption about the nature of crime against agents. It assumed that crimes against agents were similar to opportunistic street crimes. With rare exception, crime against agents is predatory crime and meets all the classic predatory behavior patterns. To reinforce this point, consider what someone must do to attack a real estate agent:

1. The predator must "shop" for a victim.
2. The predator must choose a victim.
3. The predator must research the victim.
4. The predator must pick a site.
5. The predator must come with a plan for how to get the victim to be alone with him at the site.
6. The predator must come up with a plan for how to get the victim isolated where he/she cannot be seen or heard while they are together at the site.
7. The predator must execute on all those plans.
8. The predator must make an attack.

Clearly, these are not opportunistic crimes committed by impulsive criminals. Additionally, for the overwhelming majority of predators, this is an obsessive-compulsive behavior pattern, quite literally an obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The effects of making an inaccurate assumption about the nature of crime against agents have been devastating, particularly in the area of safety training. With one notable exception, the safety training for the real estate industry is based in situational awareness training. Situational awareness focuses primarily on being aware of the impact of your environment or surroundings on your present situation. Situational awareness training was originally designed for combat operators and then adopted for police. It was later scaled down, simplified, and taught to the general public to help them avoid being victims of opportunistic street crime, where your environment and surroundings have the greatest impact and provide the means and opportunity for the crime. However, crime against agents is predatory crime and situational awareness does not address issues and topics pertinent to preventing predatory crime specific to the real estate industry.

Furthermore, as a result being taught that crime against agents was like opportunistic street crime, many agents assumed that the people committing those crimes were similar to the types of individuals we associate with street crime. However, those are not the people committing crime against real estate agents.

The overwhelming majority of attacks on agents are committed by white men between the ages of 30-55, who are middle to upper middle class, are typically employed as either white collar or professional trade and are typically in a long-term relationship. This profile further reinforces the nature of crime against agents considering that it's the typical profile for a predator. The net effect of the industry's error has made it easier for predators to attack agents, because the very nature of the predator's profile sets the agent at ease and makes it easier for the predator to make an attack.

Another byproduct of this mistake has been the teaching that if an agent meets the prospect at the office and gets a copy of the driver's license that this will keep the agent safe. Due to the obsessive-compulsive nature of predatory behavior patterns and high rate of unreported crimes against agents, this practice DOES NOT deter a predator or prevent a crime. Every year there are agents who have been attacked despite meeting the prospect at the office and obtaining a picture of the prospect's driver's license. To be clear, this is not a bad practice, however it SHOULD NEVER be used as a measure of safety with a prospect.

## Mistake 2 - A Limited Approach

The second major mistake the industry made was taking a limited approach. The industry saw every agent as a lone entity and operated under the paradigm that anything can happen to any agent on any day. This may be a true statement, however, if this is the approach that is taken, there is no way to prevent crime from occurring. It is only possible to report the crime after it has occurred or is so imminent that nothing can be done to prevent it. The ONLY way to prevent predatory crime is to adopt a paradigm of cooperation and collaboration.

This siloed approach has guided two very ineffective types of products into the hands of agents; personal safety apps and instant background check products. Neither of these solutions are effective at preventing the crime from occurring. Personal Safety Apps are by their very nature reactive and not proactive. Instant Background Checks are proactive. However, between errors, unreported crimes, and other issues, the overwhelming majority of results are unreliable. Additionally, considering that US courts have ruled that criminal background checks are inherently discriminatory, their use presents risks in the practice of real estate. The issues surrounding Personal Safety Apps and Criminal Background Checks will be discussed at length later in this document.

The other negative effect of taking this “siloes” approach is that industry actually made it substantially easier for predators to “hunt” in an area. Predators always meet with multiple agents prior to making an attack. By not adopting a safety paradigm of cooperation and collaboration the industry made it easier for predators to hunt.

### Mistake 3 - A Minimal Change Model

The third and final major mistake the industry made when trying to improve safety was using a minimal change model. The industry attempted to influence agent behavior and culture through public information campaigns. Public information campaigns inform, but they do not change behavior. Changing behavior requires positive reinforcement and making those changes permanent requires changing culture. The National Association of REALTORS® did a brilliant job using these principles to make RPAC one of the most (if not the most) prominent features in the industry culture.

The primary damaging effect as a result of the industry’s adoption of a minimal change model has been a reactive attitude toward safety. When there is a high-profile crime against an agent, the efforts to influence safety rise and some agents increase the frequency of safety efforts. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter habits return to the status quo until the next high-profile assault, rape, or murder.

We can use the same techniques used to influence behavior and culture as it related to political fundraising to bring about permanent, meaningful change as it relates to safety in the industry culture.

### What should the real estate industry be doing?

Considering the errors that the industry has traditionally made, it needs to embrace a few key changes in order to make the profession of real estate dramatically safer for agents:

1. It needs to adopt training and practices that are specifically designed to prevent predatory and pattern-based crime.
2. It needs to measure safety tools based on their efficacy in preventing the predatory and pattern-based crime.
3. It needs to adopt a safety paradigm that promotes cooperation and collaboration.
4. It needs to implement programs that reward agents for preventative safety actions and make safety a prestigious and laudable part of the industry culture.

## UNDERSTANDING CRIME AGAINST AGENTS

It's important for us to have an understanding of the primary types of criminals agents are likely to experience, as well as those criminal's pathologies and patterns. By taking the time to understand crime and criminals, people are better able to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies, tactics, products, polices, etc..... Previously, a lack of understanding of the crimes committed against agents and the people who commit those crimes, as well as a number of incorrect assumptions, has led to a slew of ineffective educations, policies, practices, and products.

	Predators	Thieves
<b>Motive</b>	Power, Control	Profit
<b>Crime</b>	Assault, Rape, Murder	Burglary, Robbery
<b>Emotional</b>	Yes	No
<b>Goal</b>	Isolate You	Be Isolated
<b>Decision Making</b>	Fill an emotional need	Potential Gain vs. Potential Risk

The chart above lists the primary characteristics of predators and thieves, the types of criminals an agent is most likely to encounter. Although this document will cover thieves, our main focus will be on predators and how they function.

### Predators vs. Thieves

A thief's primary motive is profit, and there is no emotional component to the crime. The obvious exception to this is kleptomania, however this document will not delve that deeply into the subject of thieves. As a result of the fact that thieves' motive is profit and there is no emotional component to their crime, they make their decisions the same way any business person decides. Thieves make their decisions based on potential gain vs. potential risk. The higher the perceived potential gain and/or lower the perceived potential risk, the more attractive the target

and situation is to the thief; conversely, the lower the perceived potential gain or the higher the perceived potential risk, the less attractive the target and situation is to the thief. By far the most common type of thief an agent is likely to run into is someone who is going to steal property from the showing or open house or use the showing or open house as a way to “case” the house as part of preparations for a burglary. One of the most important characteristics about thieves an agent needs to remember is the environment the thief needs in order to commit the crime; A thief needs to be isolated where he/she cannot be seen or heard in order to commit the crime. This is why thieves are more likely to be found at open houses.

Just as a thief needs to be isolated where he/she cannot be seen or heard, a predator needs to get the victim isolated where the victim cannot be seen or heard. This is why showings are much more dangerous than open houses, despite the common misperception that the opposite is true. A showing is much more conducive to a predator getting the victim isolated and open houses are much more conducive to a thief being isolated.

Predators are a very different animal than thieves. A predator’s motive is power and control and there is an emotional component to their crime and all the activities that lead up to their crime. For a predator, their crime and all the activities that lead up to their crime are part of an obsessive-compulsive cycle. They make their decisions to fill an emotional need, they actually get a “high” off each activity involved in their cycle. Their behavior is similar to that of a binge alcoholic, “getting the high” is what’s important and they will do anything that helps them achieve that high. Remember that a predator needs to get the victim isolated where he or she can’t be seen or heard in order to commit the crime. It’s much easier to do this if the agent is feeling comfortable and confident with the predator. This is why meeting at the office and getting a copy of a driver’s license does not deter a predator or prevent the crime. To the predator this is an opportunity to gain the trust and confidence of the victim. Furthermore, because 80% of crimes against agents go unreported and a typical repeat rapist will have on average 11 victims before he is arrested for any sexually based offense, the predator is not that worried about the potential victim knowing their identity. In many cases where the victim got the driver’s license of the predator, the predator provided his actual license.

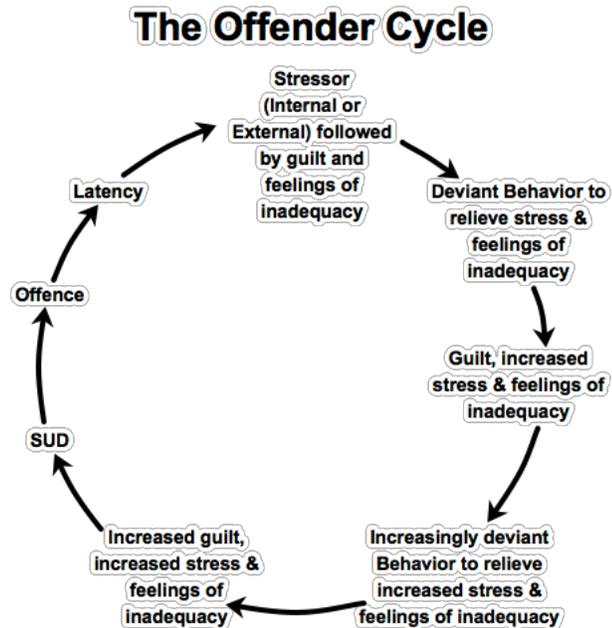
Since a predator’s motive is power and control, they are attracted to weakness, subservience, and vulnerability. Exercising power and control over another person is how the predator achieves the high, so it’s perfectly logical that weakness, subservience, and vulnerability would attract them. This is why being dominant can deter a predator and one type of smile versus another can make the agent less likely to be targeted by a predator.

## The Offender Cycle

Earlier we mentioned that a predator's crime and all the activities that lead up to the crime are part of an obsessive-compulsive cycle. This cycle is known as the Offender Cycle. It's important to understand that most people have seen this cycle before in friends and family that are alcoholics. An alcoholic will stop drinking for a time before a trigger of some kind will occur – this event could be external such a bad day at work, a fight with a significant other, etc.... or could be purely internal. This trigger

will cause stress and start the obsessive-compulsive pattern. To relieve the stress and remove the obsessive thoughts they will start drinking. They may start with one drink a day for a week. They say “well, I can have one drink, that will be okay.” and they can control it to one drink a day, for a while. However, at some point one drink is not enough to keep the thoughts and feelings at bay. To further compound the issue, the addict starts feeling guilty about drinking again. Then it escalates to three drinks a day, then five drinks a day, and then he/she is passed out every night.

This is the same type of pattern that a predator goes through. They have something happen that triggers the beginning of their cycle-this trigger may be external or internal. The one thing we do know is that it's almost always associated with feelings of inadequacy or worthlessness. To get the bad thoughts and feelings out of their head they engage in an initial behavior; this is usually looking at pictures of agents on real estate portals or some other space on the web. These are stress relieving behaviors, not unlike that of “normal” people. It's important to note that we all have things we do when we are stressed-some read, some exercise, play with the dog, watch a movie, etc....The predator goes through the same thing, however, after they are done with the behavior and the “high” subsides they feel guilty over the behavior which makes the feelings of inadequacy more intense requiring them to engage in even more devious behavior to relieve the stress and gain temporary relief from the bad thoughts and feelings, as well as the obsession. Typically, the predator's offender cycle will move on to a research stage where, after choosing several potential targets, the predator will begin learning more about each potential target.



Next, the predator will enter their fantasy stage. During this stage the predator's research will take on a much more personal nature and will focus on social media and other more personal sources. The predator's fantasies are rarely if ever violent; they are usually quite loving and gentle. It's important to remember that at each stage in the cycle the feelings of inadequacy and obsession become more intense and therefore requires increasingly deviant behavior to relieve those feelings. The guilt becomes more intense because the predator knows that their behavior will eventually lead to the crime, but they don't want to commit the crime. However, the behavior that will lead to the crime is the only way to they get relief from the stress and pain of the feelings of inadequacy and obsession. After a while, the fantasies are no longer enough to satisfy and that is when the predator hits the SUD - the Seemingly Unimportant Decision. Until they reach the SUD, they can actually exit out of the cycle, although it will restart. Once the SUD occurs, the predator no longer has the ability to resist, and he will commit the crime. The "SUD" is typically "I'm not going to do anything, I just want to meet". The plans will be made, the sites selected, and the meetings arranged. The guilt over being unable to control their compulsions is what pushes them to the next level of behavior.

It's important to understand that the predator may not attack the first, second, or even 20<sup>th</sup> agent he meets with, but the attack will occur.

### The Timeline of a Crime

Most people think that when an agent gets attacked, the crime started when the predator met the agent. However, the reality is that the crime may have started months or even years before. The important thing to keep in mind is that in each step in the predator's progression there are opportunities to prevent the crime from occurring. Regardless of the specifics of a particular predator's offender cycle, the following is the common progression of the pre-cursor (or hunting) behaviors:

1. **Initial focus** - The crime begins when the predator first notices the agent(s). This typically occurs through photographs. Avoiding certain types of smiles can reduce the agent's risk of being targeted.
2. **Focusing behavior** – The predator is in the research stage, typically focusing on professional information. During this phase, the language and information an agent has on his or her website may encourage or discourage the predator staying focused on the agent.
3. **Fantasy** – The predator begins to fantasize about the agent. During this phase the predator is using personal information, typically collected from social media, to insert

elements of the agent's real life into the predator's fantasy life. During this stage, the agent has the opportunity to encourage or discourage the predator staying focused on the agent depending on how the agent structures and handles his/her social media. This stage may also involve physical stalking behaviors, but typically will not involve contact.

- It's important to note here that the predator is typically focused on several agents simultaneously during phases 1 – 3.
4. **Plan the meeting** - At some point the Fantasy and stalking no longer provide the "high", and the predator will plan a meeting-more than likely a showing. It is at this point that they will decide on a location.
  5. **Execute the plan** - The first step in executing the plan will be to arrange the meeting by calling and asking you to show him/her a home. This will likely be your first opportunity to assess the risk of the prospect.
  6. **Meeting** - The predator will meet you at the prescribed location, it is possible that he/she will "no show" depending upon their state of mind and/or comfort level with their urges.
    - It's important to note that the predator will repeat phases 4-6 on several agents. Predators always meet with multiple agents prior to making an attack. There are 2 primary reasons for this. The first is that the predator may be working up to an attack. Remember that the predator gets a "high" off all the activities leading up to an attack. Consequently, at any one particular meeting, "feeding" off the agent's discomfort and anxiety may provide enough of a "high". At some point that will not be enough, and the attack WILL occur on one of the agents that the predator is going to wind up meeting with. Once the predator has progressed to this point, he will still likely meet with several more agents. The second is that part of the "high" the predator seeks is that the situation needs to meet a plan or vision he has. Dominant agents, agents bringing accompaniments, agents not putting themselves in isolating situations, or other factors may interfere with the predator's plans and cause the predator to move on to the next target.
  7. **Stage setting** - During the showing the predator will seek to isolate the agent where he/she cannot be seen or heard by others. They may ask the agent to look at something in the closet or bathroom, show them the basement, the garage if the door is closed, or to close the blinds because they want to see how much light the fixture throws off, etc... By following the certain guidelines and strategies the agent can prevent an attack by not allowing him/herself to be isolated where he or she can't be seen or heard by others.

8. **Offend** - When the stage is set the way the predator wants it and you are isolated; the attack will come. During this stage the predator will begin to display outward signs of an increase of adrenaline. By understanding those signs, the agent can exit before the attack occurs as opposed to attempting to escape after it has occurred.

## AN EVALUATION OF PERSONAL SAFETY APPS AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

As we have previously discussed, an attack on an agent is not an impulsive act by an opportunistic criminal, it requires planning and patience. Crimes against agents are entirely different than random street crimes or home invasions, and the tools that can help in random street crimes or home invasions DO NOT work in the case of crimes against agents. To further complicate the issue, agents must sell. They often meet with people they do not know in empty residences and often feel uncomfortable. Unfortunately, their livelihood depends on staying with those individuals even when they feel uncomfortable.

Staying safe means preventing the crime in the first place, and once an agent is alone with a prospect the only way to prevent a crime without sacrificing a legitimate sale is to have another individual casually show up at the house within minutes of when the agent starts to feel uncomfortable. If the individual is dangerous and it takes someone 20 or 30 minutes to arrive, then it's too late. If the agent waits until they feel scared instead of just uncomfortable then an attack is imminent and it's too late. If the agent alerts police when he/she is just uncomfortable, and the prospect is not dangerous he/she has just lost a sale.

Many features of personal safety apps are mobile app-based versions of the same safety procedures the industry has employed for years; "tell people where you'll be and how long you'll be there", and "call/alert a friend, family member, or colleague if you're in trouble". Unfortunately, these policies only let people know that an agent has been attacked; neither one of these policies prevent an attack from occurring.

Let's for a moment take the typical scenario, that our agent has been contacted by someone who does not seem threatening over the phone and has met the individual alone at the property. At some point during the showing the agent becomes uncomfortable. Keep in mind that at this point our agent is uncomfortable but he/she does not know if the prospect is dangerous, socially awkward, or thinks himself a Don Juan.

Now that we have set our stage, let's look at the various types of personal safety apps and devices being marketed to real estate agents:

### Personal Safety Apps/Wearables/Features that Alert a Pre-Set List of Contacts

These types of features do not keep you safe because they do not prevent the crime from occurring in the first place. The key problem with these is that more than likely the five or so "pre-set" individuals may be 30 minutes away, or in a meeting, at a doctor's appointment,

etc....There are two scenarios where our agent might use this feature, issuing an alert when he/she first becomes uncomfortable and issuing the alert when he/she is scared.

Let's consider the scenario that our agent issues the alert when he/she first becomes uncomfortable:

1. If the prospect IS dangerous the contacts would need to be close enough to arrive within a few minutes, otherwise they will not be close enough to do anything that can prevent an attack. Also, if they arrive after an attack has started, they will likely be attacked as well if there are no features designed to keep the responder safe.
2. If the prospect IS NOT dangerous and panicked contacts show up at the house while the showing is still happening the agent risks losing a sale. After that happens once most agents will never use it again.

Now let's consider the scenario that our agent waits until he/she is scared before issuing the alert. In this case the attack is imminent, and no one can get there fast enough to prevent the attack.

### Personal Safety Apps or Wearables that Alert a Call Center or Police

These apps or devices allow you to alert police or a call center that then in return will either call the police for you or ask you if you need the police.

The vast majority of the time that an agent feels uncomfortable with a prospect, the prospect is not dangerous. The problem of course is that an agent doesn't know who is and is not dangerous until it's too late. If these systems are used when our agent is just uncomfortable, he/she will likely lose every sale where they feel uncomfortable and the prospect was not dangerous. Consequently, these systems are not practical as a means of prevention.

If our agent waits until he/she feels scared, then an attack is imminent and it's too late even if the police are called.

### Personal Safety Apps or Wearables that Work Off a Timer or Geo Fence

Some apps will notify a preset list of contacts if you have not turned a timer off before the timer expires and/or if you leave a pre-set geographic area. These are also completely ineffective at keeping the agent safe because they do nothing to prevent the attack from occurring. If our agent has not turned the timer off, then he/she has either forgot to turn it off or is incapable of turning it off.

In the case that nothing has happened, but the agent forgot to extend or cancel the timer....

1. If panicked contacts show up at the house while the showing is still happening the agent risks losing a sale. After that happens once most agents will never use it again.
2. If an agent continues to use the app and forgetting about the timer becomes a habit, then contacts will begin ignoring the alerts because they will become used to false alerts.
3. If contacts start calling this could cause a difficult conversation for the agent with the prospect thereby jeopardizing a sale. If the agent does not answer and either panicked contacts show up or call the police, this too puts a sale in jeopardy.

In the case that the agent has been attacked and is incapable of cancelling the timer or is taken outside the area against his/her will...Clearly in this case the agent has not stayed safe and the app is merely letting contacts know where to start searching.

Let us also consider one additional scenario; the prospect is dangerous and has, by coincidence, initiated an attack after the timer expired and sent an alert.

1. If contacts come to the house they have now been put in grave danger because they have no way of knowing that an attack has occurred, so by entering the house there is a high likelihood that the predator will attack them. Now we have 2 victims and one of the victims is a victim as a result of the safety app because the app did not provide the responder with any information that could be used to protect the responder.
2. If the contact calls the police, that's great, but the attack has already occurred.

### Lethal and Non-Lethal Weapons

Police are trained to use the 30ft rule, if the attacker is within 30 feet then don't use your weapon because there is not enough time to use the weapon. Attacks on agents do not occur from across the room. An attacker will attempt to isolate a victim where he/she cannot be seen or heard and then attack from arm's length away. Consequently, unless an agent is willing to carry the weapon, safety off, in his/her hand the agent will not have the time to take the weapon out, aim, and fire.

## Background Checks

### DOJ Study

Every 2 years the DOJ releases a study on the nation's criminal history databases. The most current study was released in 2018 and provides insights into why commercial background checks are ineffective. The report found that a remarkably low percentage of arrests and convictions are making it into the nation's most complete criminal history database. The following are some highlights of the report:

- Of the 10.7 million arrests in 2016, only 3.6 million were reported to NCIC.
- Of the 3.6 million reported, only 1.4 million had a final disposition. (Final dispositions are necessary for a record to show up in a commercially available criminal background check)
- 2016 was the most complete year in the NCIC's history.

What these numbers show is that even if a commercial instant background check system is using the most complete criminal history database in the country, it will still only have information on 13 percent of the crimes. Additionally, we also need to take into account the estimated 30 percent error rate of instant background checks due to variances in the spelling of names, errors in dates of birth, and mistakes that occur in the data entry process.

If a prospect rapes, assaults, or kills a real estate agent, is convicted, goes to jail, gets out, and calls an agent to show him a house and the agent runs an instant background check, the agent has approximately an 8 percent chance of finding out about the crime.

### Predatory Behavior and Criminal Background Checks

In addition to the incompleteness of criminal history databases, the very nature of crime against real estate agents makes reliance on criminal background checks problematic. Crime against agents is predatory crime, committed by true predators, and meets all the classic predatory behavior patterns. These are not random opportunistic crimes committed by impulsive careless people with extensive felonious criminal "rap sheets." Additionally, predatory behavior, including the crime, is a progressive, obsessive-compulsive behavior pattern similar to that of a binge alcoholic. A predator's motive is power and control; they get an "emotional high" off their

crime and all the events that led up to the crime. When visiting with an agent, they intentionally exert "dominance." This dominance is what causes agents to have uncomfortable feelings.

Studies into various types of predators have shed light into their behavior patterns and lack of any criminal history while committing multiple crimes.

On average, a non-preferential rapist will have 10 victims in his adult life before being arrested for any felony let alone rape. Source: Repeat Rape & Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists . One individual raped 26 agents in 13 years before he finally got caught on the 27th.

Other studies such as Weinrott & Saylor's Self-Report of Crimes Committed by Sex Offenders, published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*—have found that, on average, a rapist will have 11 victims prior to being arrested the first time and they estimate that unreported rapes range between 68 percent to 92 percent.

Only 37 percent of people charged with rape had a previous felony conviction at the time they were arrested for rape the first time, according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

### **Legal Implications of Background Checks**

A discussion of instant criminal background checks would not be complete without considering the legal issues involved. Aside from the obvious legal implications of inaccurate reporting, according to the Supreme Court, the use of background checks may be a violation of the Fair Housing Act. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled on *Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs v. Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.* The opinion, written by Justice Kennedy, said that a party may prove violations of the Fair Housing Act by either showing intentional discrimination or that a certain practice has an adverse or "disparate impact" on protected classes.

In a 2016 article entitled "What the Latest Fair Housing Guidance on Criminal Background Checks Means for Real Estate" about new HUD rulings, the National Association of Realtors said, "While persons with criminal records are not a protected class under the Fair Housing Act, HUD's recent guidance maintains that criminal history-based barriers to housing have a statistically disproportionate impact on minority groups. Because minorities are a protected class under the Fair Housing Act, HUD's guidance says that creating arbitrary or blanket criminal-based policies and restrictions could potentially violate the Fair Housing Act."

When one considers the completeness of criminal history databases, the error rate due to data variances, and the predatory nature of crime against agents, the effectiveness of background check systems in providing agents with "red flags" disappoints. Furthermore, instant criminal background checks pose a potential Fair Housing Act violation. Considering the lack of efficacy

and potential Fair Housing issues, if an agent chooses to use instant background checks, he or she needs to do so with an understanding of the issues and risks involved.

## CHANGING AGENT BEHAVIOR AND COMMUNITY CULTURE

“Just always take someone with you”

### **Why it fails**

Traditionally agents have been told “Just always take someone with you” and while that would certainly be ideal, almost no agent complies with that. Why? Very often people in the industry, including leadership, will say that agents are being foolish, or greedy, etc.... This response is not only wrong but damaging. There are 4 psychological processes that work against agents when dealing with issue of taking someone with them on appointments:

*ALWAYS=NEVER*-The brain requires differentiation, consequently ALWAYS = NEVER. For example, when someone tells an agent “it’s important for your safety that you always take someone with you”, and the agent goes on an appointment without taking anyone with them, then “it’s ALWAYS important” just became “it’s NEVER important”. By failing to help the agent differentiate low risk from high risk, the person training the agent has unintentionally set him or her up to be an easy target.

*POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT OF A NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR* – Unfortunately, the nature of the industry provides positive reinforcement of a negative behavior. The negative behavior is going into a house alone with a stranger, this behavior is positively reinforced by not being attacked. It is then further cemented because of variable rewards. What’s the variable reward? Sometimes the agent gets paid for this behavior.

*PROSPECT THEORY*- Prospect Theory is a Nobel prize winning behavioral economics theory developed by Daniel Kahneman. Simply put the theory states that we make decisions heuristically, that is to say that we take one small fact and build an entire set of facts based on that one thing. For instance, the prospect is a middle-aged white male with a good job (the small fact). So, I’m sure he’s good guy with a nice family and I have no reason to fear him (the agent’s brain filling in the gaps, in this case incorrectly). The second critical thing Prospect Theory teaches us is that we increase the likelihood of a reward and decrease the likelihood of a negative consequence. What does this mean for the real estate agent and his/her safety? His/her natural tendencies as a human trick him/her into making a decision about a prospect based on insufficient information, and then he/she unrealistically maximizes the potential for and the size of a commission while minimizing the possibility of an attack.

*EMOTIVE HOMOGENIZATION* - Our intellectual memory can differentiate, which is to say that our brains assign specific memories to specific events. This is why most agents can remember some aspect of just about every showing they have ever been on. However, unless there was an emotional event that caused one showing to stand out more than others (for instance the agent

was particularly fearful during that showing), the brain “assigns” a general emotional state to all similar experiences. The net effect of this is “well I always feel \_\_\_\_ and nothing has ever happened”, the agent fails to distinguish WHAT specific appointments he or she became uncomfortable at and WHAT specific actions or circumstances brought about that uncomfortableness. So why is this bad? In and of itself, this is a minor issue. However, humans are motivated by emotion, not intellect and most agents have NO emotional memory of being attacked at a showing or similar event. However, most agents DO have a powerful emotional memory of not knowing where rent or food money for next month is coming from. Consequently, when they cannot differentiate WHAT made them uncomfortable, AND the fear of financial instability is stronger and more tangible than the fear of being attacked, THEN they make bad decisions.

### **Overcoming the “cocktail” and getting agents to take accompaniments more often.**

These four psychological processes mix to form a very deadly “brain cocktail” for most agents. The key to overcoming these is to re-orient agents to the concept of High Risk vs. Low Risk and provide them with tools and training that helps them see “red flags” so they can differentiate and discern high risk from low risk. The end result will be agents making better decisions about their own safety, because if they see the next appointment as somehow different than the last 100 appointments, then he or she will behave differently.

This document is filled with tactics and strategies that will bring about this change.

## **Scare Tactics**

### **Why scare tactics don't work**

Another common tactic used to try and influence the behavior of agents is to use scare tactics. These attempts to cause fear among agents that if they don't do something then they will be assaulted, raped, or murdered is ineffective because the threat is intangible to them. Additionally, the natural tendency of people is to NOT believe that anything will happen to them. This can be traced back to prospect theory and the minimization of the risk possibility. This tendency is illustrated when you ask a room full of agents to raise their hand if they think they could be attacked by a prospect while showing a home in the next week. After that ask them to raise their hand if they think someone in the room could be attacked by a prospect while showing a home. The natural human tendency is to believe with certainty that a negative event will not happen to them, while at the same time acknowledging that the same negative event could occur to someone in the group to which they are a part.

### **Overcoming the Reasons Scare Tactics Don't Work**

In order to overcome the “it won’t happen to me” effect, the benefits of selling safely must be made more tangible to the average agent by staying away from “doomsday” scenarios and instead focusing on common experiences. All agents can relate to feeling uncomfortable while showing a home alone to a prospect they have never met before. Additionally, they can all relate to having to deal with the fear of not knowing how to interpret a prospect’s action... “is he dangerous? Socially awkward? Trying to be a Don Juan? Creeping on me? etc....”. These feelings are further intensified and complicated by the “don’t be offensive” social conditioning that almost all people have grown up with, and the financial motivation which is driven by the emotional memory of the fear and stress that goes with financial insecurity.

In order for “fear” based messaging to influence agent behavior, that “fear” based message must have a relatively high degree of “relatability”. By focusing on the “uncomfortable uncertainty” experience, safety messages will have a higher impact because almost all agents have experienced that at frequencies that range from “sometimes” to “always” for female agents and “rarely” to “often” for male agents.

Community support messaging will be discussed later in this section.

### Changing Agent Behavior

As was previously mentioned, one of the failures of the industry was attempting to use public information campaigns to change agent behavior as it relates to safety. However, agents’ lack of safety practices was not because they didn’t know about the dangers. Consequently, spending time and money informing them of something they already knew about by using fear-based messages that they couldn’t relate to was not going to be successful. A combination of relevant messaging and rewards would be substantially more effective in changing agent behavior.

It’s worth noting at this point some of the principles of behavior modification that have proven time and again to be effective regardless of age, education level, or environment. The primary key to changing an individual’s behavior is rewarding them for engaging in the desired behavior. This reward does not have to be tangible, it can be something as simple as praise. Additionally, there is no need to reward every time the desired behavior occurs, in fact intermittent reinforcement is more effective than consistent reinforcement. To further enhance the effectiveness of a behavior modification program there should be a variable reward as well as an intermittent reward. For instance, someone randomly being rewarded with movie tickets in addition to praise. Ideally, a behavior modification program would be multi-layered. For example:

**Layer 1** – A constant, compounding reward system where people are rewarded for behavior on a consistent basis and those rewards individually have no value. However, collectively they build to something valuable. (i.e. trading in coupons, points, etc....for something of tangible value)

**Layer 2** – At often but irregular intervals people are rewarded in a low tangible value or intangible way, for example praise or recognition for individual actions.

**Layer 3** – At infrequent and irregular intervals people are rewarded with something of high tangible value in relation to the other rewards.

### Changing Culture

At this point it's worth looking at the history of RPAC. RPAC was founded by NAR in 1969 and for the first 20 years of its existence the organization had a minimal footprint. Today RPAC is by far the prominent internal feature of the real estate industry. How did it rise to such heights? The answer is simple...REALTORS® were rewarded for their participation, and participation in RPAC was made to be prestigious-the industry publicly praised people for participation and the more money and effort given, the more praise and higher the elevation. The industry created awards around RPAC, participation in RPAC became required for eligibility to other awards and positions, etc...Initially this required effort and resources, but with commitment and consistency RPAC as a status symbol took root. Once the roots grew, the prestige of RPAC participation became self-sustaining.

With a well-planned, consistent, and committed strategy we can elevate safety to the same plane as political action. By elevating safety to a prestigious and admirable endeavor, taking responsibility for one's own safety and for the safety of colleagues will become self-perpetuating community habits.

The keys to a successful cultural modification program are the 3c's: **Commitment, Consistency, and Congruency**. Changing culture is like piloting an ocean liner, nothing happens quickly or easily, but with the commitment of a small number of people, whose actions are congruent with each other's, eventually their consistent effort will turn the great ship. Once the ship starts to turn it's practically impossible to stop.

Just as modifying the behavior of one individual requires more than the passing of information, so does influencing the culture of the community. The first key in achieving cultural change requires that there is congruency in messaging and efforts in the leadership at each of the various organizational layers of the community. This congruency creates interlocking reinforcement mechanisms, such that actions and messaging at each layer of the community winds up supporting and reinforcing the layers above and below it without any extra effort or actions.

The second key to bringing about cultural change is commitment. At the onset of any initiative there is a swell of enthusiasm and participation followed by a dramatic drop in that participation and enthusiasm. Many programs fail at this point because leadership senses the drop and fails to

keep up with the messaging and efforts. However, the drop is natural and if leadership stays committed to implementing the cultural change program, the enthusiasm and participation will return. Eventually the “change” will become the norm, and as new members of the community are brought in, the norm will organically become an expectation of the community.

The third key to a successful cultural change program is consistency. At each layer within the community, the efforts and messaging of the leadership of the that layer must occur on a consistent schedule. By keeping to a specific schedule leadership will ensure that the interlocking reinforcement mentioned earlier is happening, that commitment at all layers is trackable, and that the messaging and efforts of all layers of the community become conspicuous features of community life.

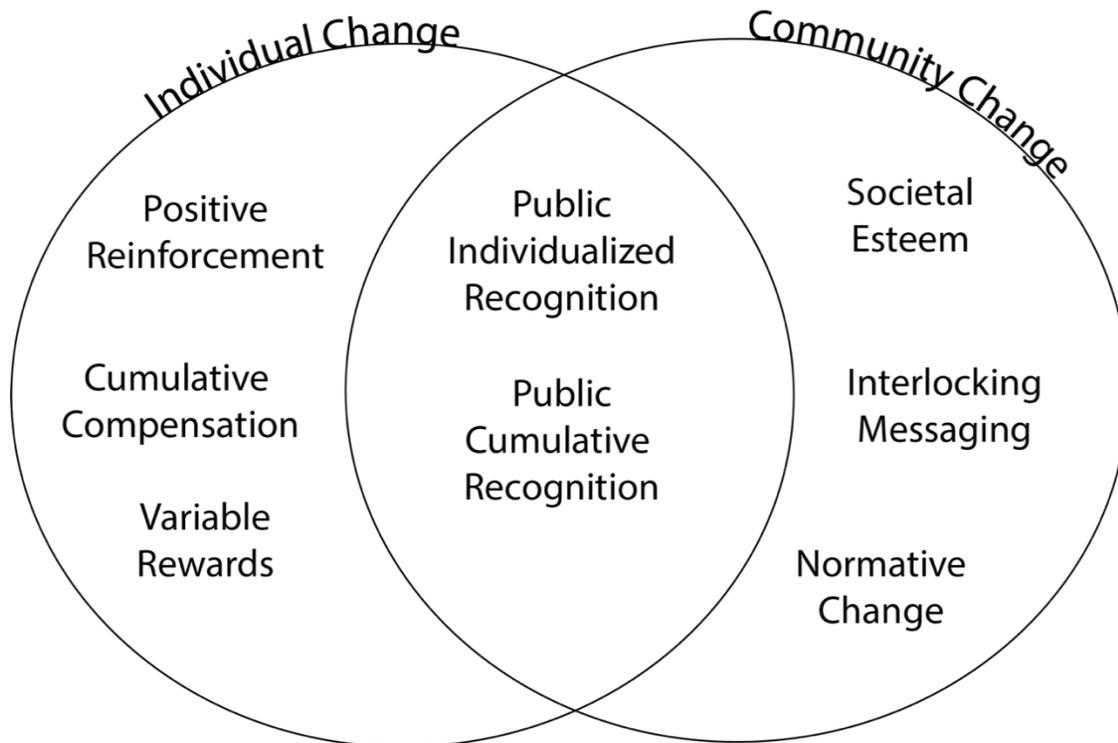
### The Cooperative Change Model

The Cooperative Change Model is an extremely effective model for designing programs that influence both the individual’s behavior and the culture of the community. Its effectiveness lies in two key structures:

1. The primary change agent, Positive Reinforcement in the case of Individual Change and Societal Esteem in the case of Community Change, are each reinforced and amplified by two additional structures.
2. Its use of bridges that allow efforts towards effecting changes in individual behavior to reinforce and amplify effects towards effecting changes to the culture of the community and vice versa.

The figure below is a Venn diagram that maps out the Cooperative Change Model. In the diagram the primary change agent for each type of change is at the top of each circle with its two reinforcers below. The intersection of Individual Change and Community Change contain the bridges that allow the Individual Change elements and Community Change elements to reinforce and amplify each other.

## Cooperative Change Model



### Individual Change Elements

The following principles are specific to changing agent behavior at the individual level:

- **Positive Reinforcement (Primary)** – A reward that an individual receives for engaging in a specified behavior.
- **Cumulative Compensation (Reinforcer)** – Tangible awards made available through the collection of rewards derived from positive reinforcement that enhance the effectiveness of Positive Reinforcement.
- **Variable Rewards (Reinforcer)** – Intermittent and variable value rewards that enhance the effectiveness of Positive Reinforcement.

### **Community Change Principles**

The following principles are specific to changing the community's culture as a whole:

- **Societal Esteem (Primary)** – Establishing that the desired behavioral or attitude change is prestigious within the community.
- **Interlocking Messaging (Reinforcer)** – A communications methodology where each organizational layer of a community is supporting and reinforcing the messaging and efforts of another layer or layers.
- **Normative Change (Reinforcer)** – Implying, creating, or prescribing a behavioral norm, standard, or expectation.

### **Bridging Elements**

The following principles bridge the gap between behavioral modification and cultural change. These principles reinforce the behavioral modification and cultural change principles, as well as allowing those principles to reinforce each other:

- **Public Individualized Recognition** – Publicly recognizing an individual for a specific action.
- **Public Cumulative Recognition** – Publicly recognizing an individual or small group of individuals for the cumulative effect of several actions.

## WHAT SHOULD EACH LEVEL OF THE INDUSTRY BE DOING?

Either the MLS or the Association should provide a safety product; specifics on choosing a product are addressed in another section of this document. However, the product should be at no additional out of pocket cost to the member and stress safety as part of a community. The structure, the finances, and relationship between the MLS and the Association will determine which entity provides a safety system.

### The MLS

The MLS is in a unique position to influence behavior and culture because of the frequency with which it has contact with agents. Additionally, the very nature and purpose of the MLS, Cooperation and Compensation, aligns well with the Cooperation and Collaboration paradigm needed to prevent crimes against agents.

### Safety Fields

The following are a list of safety fields that should be included in the MLS. These fields should NEVER be visible to the general public. Each field has a specific purpose and is designed to allow the listing agent and buyer's agent to communicate and collaborate for safety. Additionally, adding these fields will serve as an additional reinforcement mechanism for behavioral and cultural change.

Field Label	Field Definition	Simple Data Type	Lgth	Group	Explanation
Cell Signal Strength	Tells the buyer's agent the quality of the cell signal at the property (Good, Fair, Poor, None).	String List, Single	10	/Listing	A property with poor or no cell signal represents a higher risk because of the inability of the agent to call for help or an accompaniment.
Cell Phone Company	The cell carrier of listing agent or individual reporting the quality of the cell signal	String	50	/Listing	

Other Homes visible from interior	Tells agents how visible people in the house would be from other houses (Good, Fair, Poor, None)	String List, Single	10	/Listing	Homes with poor visibility are higher risk because a predator's goal is to isolate the victim where cannot be seen or heard by others
Exterior Light	Tells agents how well lit the exterior of the home is. (Good, Fair, Poor, None)	String List, Single	10	/Listing	Homes with poor exterior lighting are a higher risk because it decreases visibility
Interior Light	Tells agents how well lit the interior of the home is. (Good, Fair, Poor, None)	String List, Single	10	/Listing	Homes with poor interior lighting are a higher risk because it decreases visibility
Met Neighbors	This field communicates if the listing agent has met the neighbors (yes, no)	Boolean	10	/Listing	This field, the following 3 fields, and the visibility field are important because in an initial conversation an agent can use property and neighborhood information to make a meeting less attractive to a predator while making it more attractive to a legitimate buyer. For example, "I really like this home it has plenty of windows with great visibility and natural light, the listing agent said that she's met the neighbors and they said it's an active tight knit little community, in fact

					there's even a sheriff that lives there." These are all attractive criteria to a legitimate prospect, but very unattractive attributes to a predator.
Neighbors said tight knit neighborhood		Boolean	10	/Listing	
Neighbors said active neighborhood		Boolean	10	/Listing	
Neighbors said law enforcement lives in neighborhood		Boolean	10	/Listing	

**Message of the day**

The MLS’s message of the day feature can be used to provide positive reinforcement to specific individuals for specific actions, to reinforce that safety is a prestigious and praise worthy activity, and to reinforce the messaging and efforts of the Association. Messages should be posted at least once per week. The following are examples:

- “Thanks and Kudos to Joe R for completing the safety fields for his new listing at 123 main street, anywhere.”
- Post a safety video in the MoD.
- Post a safety slogan from the Association.
- Post a “Thanks and Kudos” message about safety actions other than in the safety fields.

## The Association

As the central point for the real estate community, the Association can have the biggest impact on culture. The Association should have an ongoing behavioral and culturally based safety program designed to create a self-perpetuating proactive safety culture.

### **Messaging**

There are two central themes that should be employed in this initiative:

1. “Going Home Safe is a Member Benefit” has a primary purpose of establishing safety as a central purpose of the association. Variations and sub headings of this theme will also serve to put forth the message that the value of the association is the community it provides.
2. “Stand by Me” has the primary purpose of establishing that each agent’s safety is dependent on every other agent. By focusing on the cooperation and collaboration needed to keep the entire community safe, the natural tendency of a person to believe “that it will never happen to me” is avoided. Consequently, the messaging intentionally targets the 80% of members that rarely participate while still appealing to the 20% that regularly participate.

Additional messaging that follows the “Stand by Me” theme:

- “At (name of the association) you are our value”
- “What’s saving a life worth?”
- “Our value is you”

### **Pieces of the puzzle**

#### *Safety Awards*

The Association will need to establish 2 safety awards, one for an individual and one for a brokerage. The purpose of the safety awards is to firmly establish that the Association feels that taking responsibility for your own safety as well as the safety of your colleagues is a prestigious endeavor worthy of recognition.

#### *Virtual Rewards*

The Association should create a method for providing agents with virtual rewards for each safety action in which the agents engage.

### *Safety Coins*

The Association should have safety coins made that can be handed out as a reward. These coins serve an additional purpose if the association operates a store.

### *Safe Association Partners*

In addition to providing positive reinforcement through “Thanks and Kudos” messages, periodically agents should receive something tangible as a reward. This is called variable rewards and dramatically increases the effectiveness of behavioral and cultural change programs. The association should get no less than 5 local business to participate in a Safe Association Partner program. There is NO cost to the partner to participate. The association should make nothing from this program, the purpose of the Partner Program is to provide positive and variable reinforcement to agents for engaging in behaviors that help keep the themselves and every other agent safe.

Reach out to a few local businesses such as restaurants, entertainment, printers, sign companies, etc.... Advise them to structure their offer to drive new business not to cannibalize existing business. The following are some ideas for coupons:

- Free Appetizer with the purchase of two entrees
- Free Popcorn with the purchase of two movie tickets
- 10% off your first order (ideal for printers, sign makers, etc.)

It's also a good idea to have the association participate in the partner program. The following are some ideas about possible ways to participate:

- Members can use safety coins to get discounts at the association store.
- Members can purchase safety coins to give to other members (brokers can purchase to give to agents)
- Members can use safety coins to receive discounts on CE credits from the association.

### *Safety Gifts*

The association should have tangible awards of measurable value such as movie tickets, \$10 gift cards, etc... that should be awarded weekly to an agent for helping another agent.

### *Public Thanks and Kudos*

“Thanks and Kudos” are messages that give credit to specific individuals for specific actions. Messages should appear regularly in newsletters, weekly updates, social media, billboards, etc....These serve 3 functions:

1. They provide positive reinforcement to specific individuals.
2. They reinforce that an agent can gain status by engaging in safe practices.
3. They act as a general reinforcer of safety messaging.

### *Top 5 lists*

“Top 5s” are messages that give credit to up to 5 individuals or brokerages for cumulative actions. Messages should appear regularly in newsletters, weekly updates, social media, billboards, etc....

These serve 3 functions:

1. They provide positive reinforcement to specific individuals.
2. They reinforce that an agent can gain status by engaging in safe practices.
3. They act as a general reinforcer of safety messaging.

### *Safety Content*

The Association should have sufficient safety content to be able to have a different safety video every week without needing to repeat videos during the year, so there should be at least 52 videos in total available. This safety content should follow the safety education curriculum laid out in this document. These videos should also mirror the content of safety classes so that the weekly safety video serves as an educational reinforcer as well as a regular safety messaging.

A link to a full video library that your association and brokers may use at no cost is included in [Appendix A: Safety Resources](#) of this document.

### *Safety Classes*

The Association should offer safety classes every month. These classes should meet the safety curriculum laid out earlier in this document. Information on obtaining curriculum for a 1, 2, and 3-hour version of Safe Selling class, train-the-trainer classes, and assistance in obtaining CE certification for these classes in your state can be found in Appendix A of this document. These services are provided at no cost.

*Program Coordination and Implementation*

The most effective programs are ones where each layer of the industry stack supports and reinforces the efforts and messaging of the layers above and below it.

Such that:

Layer	Supports and reinforces the efforts of:
MLS	Association
Association	MLS and Brokerage
Brokerage	Association and Agents

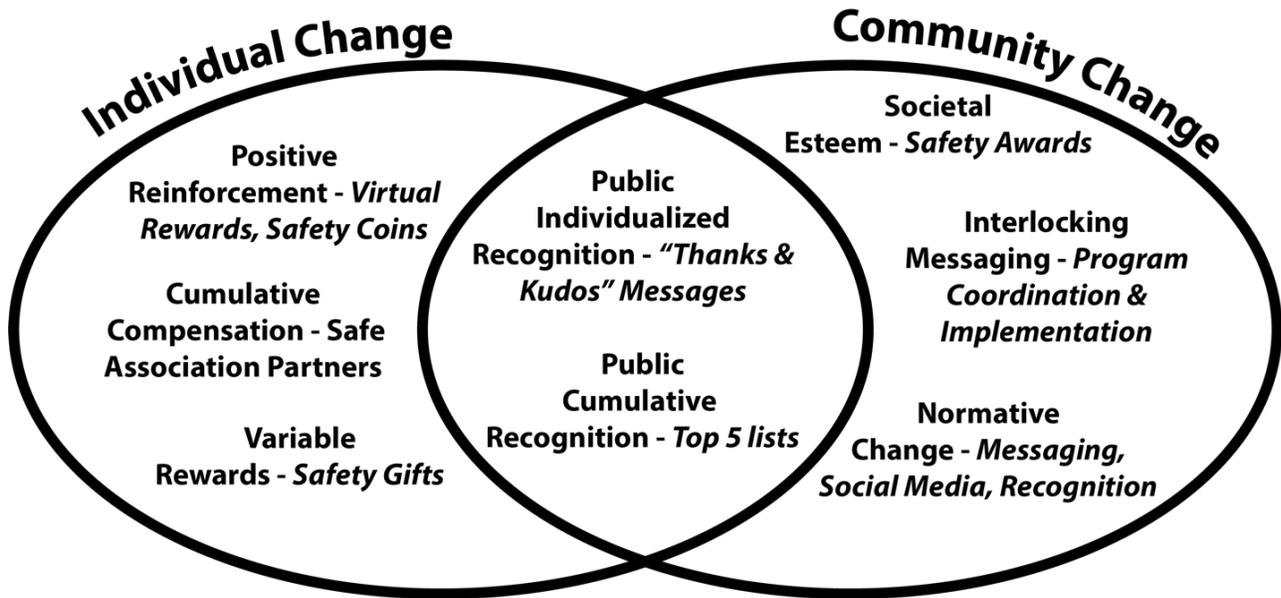
**Fitting the Pieces Together**

Utilizing the Cooperative Change Model as a template, the association should create its “Going Home Safe is a Member Benefit” program that includes regular “Thanks and Kudos”, variable reinforcement, education, educational reinforcement, safety awards, and partners. The program should require no more than 1 hour per week of staff time to implement.

When the program is designed accompanying guides should also be created for brokerages and the MLS, so that efforts and messaging between all three layers are supporting and reinforcing the other layers, creating the congruency mentioned earlier.

At the top of the following page is a sample diagram of how the “pieces” mentioned previously fit into the Cooperative Change Model:

## Cooperative Change Model



### The Brokerage

The brokerage has the biggest impact on agent’s behaviors, habits, and attitudes; it’s commitment to safety is invaluable...and success could mean the difference between one of your agents going home safe or not going home at all one day. The brokerages’ efforts and messaging should reinforce the efforts and messaging of the Association, that reinforcement will also work the other way. The following are efforts that can be done at the brokerage level to bring about behavioral and cultural change:

#### 5 Minutes at every Sales Meeting

Commit to spending 5 minutes out of every sales meeting on safety. By showing one safety video and giving one person in the room public kudos for something safety related, these efforts and similar efforts at the association will amplify each other.

#### Make Safety a regular part of daily interactions

It’s fairly common for agents to ask the broker and/or the more seasoned agents in your office for advice of all types. If the broker and the more seasoned agents at the brokerage add safety-

oriented questions and comments to their regular daily interactions, the safety efforts of the brokerage and the Association are greatly enhanced. The following are some examples of how safety can be added to regular interactions:

- When an agent asks a question regarding a new prospect, in addition to asking if they have gotten the prospect qualified also ask if they did an EAR checklist (See page 50) on the appointment.
- If an agent tells a broker about an upcoming showing with a new prospect in a rural area the broker should ask them if they have checked the safety fields and/or contacted the listing agent to find out how the cell signal is at the house.

### The Association Safety Committee

Many associations around the country have implemented safety committees. Unfortunately, more often than not, those safety committees fade after a meeting or two because they don't know what they should be doing. This document has laid out safety best practices, and how to best influence behavior and culture as it relates to safety. This section will talk about how to implement a safety committee and what that committee should be doing on a regular basis.

Once the committee has formed in a manner consistent with the association bylaws, the following tasks should be executed:

1. The Committee should develop a comprehensive program for implementing behavioral and cultural change as it relates to safety. This plan should follow the guidelines for behavioral and cultural change laid out in this document.
2. The Committee should examine and choose safety curriculum for the association and oversee CE accreditation for that curriculum. This curriculum should focus on crime prevention and should have accompanying educational reinforcement materials such as videos.
3. The committee should obtain board approval for the plan if needed.
4. The Committee should organize a meeting with the MLS, brokers, and key influencers to go over the plan, obtain their input and buy in.
5. The committee should evaluate and make recommendations for safety products in accordance with the guidelines laid out in the section of this document entitled "How to Evaluate Safety Products".

6. The Committee should execute and, where needed, oversee putting the resources in place to execute the plan (i.e. obtaining safety partners).
7. Once the plan has been started the committee should oversee its implementation.
8. Individuals should be chosen to track social media, broker engagement, and agent engagement.
9. Reports should be made at each monthly committee meeting.
10. The Committee should make adjustments as needed.

## HOW TO EVALUATE SAFETY PRODUCTS

There are countless “safety” products on the market and without an understanding of crime against agents and how it works poor decisions and recommendations can easily be made. Staying safe as a real estate agent means preventing the crime from occurring. The following are criteria that should be used in choosing a safety product:

1. The product should support behavioral and cultural change.
2. The product should be designed to prevent crime against agents.
3. Because predators follow behavior patterns, the product should be rooted in behavioral science.
4. If the product is designed to “alert others”, who it alerts should be based on the proximity of the people being alerted to the agent issuing the alert. This criterion is important because their proximity determines how quickly they can get to the agent.
5. The product should include two different alert types, one alert for when the agent is just “uncomfortable” and does not want to be alone with the prospect any longer, and an emergency alert. This is important because predators always meet with multiple agents prior to making an attack and those agents always report feeling uncomfortable. However, because agents also feel uncomfortable periodically with legitimate prospects, they must have a way to get a third person there quickly without having to wait to find out if the prospect is dangerous.
6. The product must be clandestine so that the agent can use it without concern about making a legitimate prospect uncomfortable.
7. Considering the ineffectiveness of background checks and social media checks the product must allow the agent to see behavior-based “red flags” based on the prospect’s behavior and the reaction of others to that behavior.
8. The product should be integrated with 9-1-1 and should provide the 9-1-1 operator the ability to determine the agent’s location.

## WHAT SHOULD AGENTS BE TAUGHT TO KEEP THEMSELVES SAFE?

### How to Reduce the Risk of Being Targeted

The first step in preventing being a victim of a crime is eliminating as many “attractors” as possible. That being said, a big part of marketing yourself as a real estate agent is making yourself and your picture as prominent as possible. This section is about how to still market yourself but make minor changes that remove as many “attractors” as possible.

#### Images

Images are an important part of marketing yourself and your listings. However, they are also often the item that starts the targeting process.

A predator’s motive is power and control and will therefore be attracted to characteristics such as weakness, subservience, and vulnerability. Your professional photos can act as an attractor to the predator by conveying vulnerability. Typically, agent’s headshots fall into one of two types...a personal smile (right) and a professional smile (left). A personal or intimate smile is the smile one would expect to see when someone they love says I love you. It’s typified by a slight tilt of the head, eyes that appear more oval than round, and a flatter smile where the ends of the mouth are pointing towards the lower connection of the ear. In pictures as in real life intimacy is vulnerability, and an intimate smile is more likely to attract the attention of a predator.

Conversely, a professional smile will make an agent less attractive to a predator because it projects power, confidence, and authority. A professional smile is typified by the head being straight, the eyes wide open but not strained, and a big smile where the ends of the mouth are pointing towards the upper connection of the ears.



It should be noted that buyers are more attracted to photos with professional smiles and less attracted to photos with personal smiles. Basically, personal smiles increase the likelihood that an agent will be targeted by a predator and less likely that a buyer or seller will contact the agent. At the same time, a professional smile makes it less likely that a predator will target him/her and increases the likelihood that a legitimate buyer or seller will contact the agent.

To reduce the risk of being targeted by those with a power motive:

- Avoid full body pictures.
- Wherever possible use photos that are above or right at the shoulders.
- When using pictures that include the upper body:
  - Be professional.
  - Wear a shirt that goes no lower than the top of the breast bone.
  - Don't wear anything form fitting.
  - Wear professional colors.
  - Wear a jacket where possible.
  - Be aware of facial expressions.
- Professional, authoritative smile and expression – We smile differently towards a client than we do towards a loved one. A professional smile is a facial expression that establishes a “boundary”, whereas a personal smile is a facial expression that is softer, warmer, and conveys vulnerability.
- Look straight into the camera.
- Keep your head vertical, no tilt to one side or another.
- Professional Eyes (relaxed and fully open, but not “strained open” as if you are surprised).
- For women, your make-up should be natural and understated.

To reduce the risk of being targeted by those with a profit motive:

- Avoid pictures that depict you with an expensive vehicle.
- Avoid jewelry if possible.
- Jewelry should be minimal and understated.
- Wedding rings visible in photos should be a simple wedding band.

A predator's initial focus will almost always be from an image, however, once the initial targeting has occurred the predator will go through a progression of behaviors that will typically start at professional research based in the target's website and other “professional” information and eventually progress to researching personal details of the target primarily through social media. These behaviors are part of the predators “offender cycle” and provide the predator with

the emotional high they seek. The increasing depth of their research and eventual fanaticizing is a reflection of more shallow activities no longer being satisfying in the same way that the alcoholic or drug addict builds a tolerance.

If targeting occurs, an agent can increase the likelihood that the predator will cease to focus on him/her based on factors such as the language and information used in marketing and how social media is used.

### **Marketing Language Matters**

The words used in your marketing messages have connotations, which is to say that they have emotional value over and above the literal meaning. Those who commit crimes with a power motive are attracted to subservience and weakness because the “power high” is what they seek. Those who commit crimes with a profit motive are also attracted to subservience and weakness because it represents lower risk.

Agents should be aware that the language they choose in their marketing materials and website set the tone. Choosing words and messages that convey power, control, knowledge, authority, etc....will reduce the attractiveness for a predator.

For example:

“Here to serve all your real estate needs”

vs.

“Experience to handle the entire real estate process”

Notice that the first statement implies servitude, whereas the second statement implies confidence, authority, and power. It’s important to point out that authoritative language attracts more legitimate prospects and detracts predators.

### **Information to Avoid in Marketing**

Earlier we mentioned that stalking behaviors give a predator a “high”; in addition to potentially planning an attack. Consequently, an agent wants to ensure that information included in marketing does not “feed the stalking high” or help a predator plan an attack in the event that someone does fixate on and target him/her. By limiting the “high” a predator can achieve through online stalking, the agent will increase the likelihood that he or she will lose interest.

For several years agents have been told to include personal information in their marketing efforts. This is the wrong approach; a prospect does not care about the agent’s family, where they live, or what schools their children attend. What they do care about is that the agent is competent and is an expert in the area where the prospect wishes to live.

An effective way of achieving this “expert” status without revealing personal information is to provide lifestyle information about specific areas. For example:

- “If you are looking at homes in these areas there are 3 supermarkets nearby, this supermarket is typically less expensive, this other supermarket has a great organic section, this other supermarket has great meats.”
- “If you are looking to live in this subdivision and you have kids there are 2 parks; this park is great for little kids, but this other park has a tendency to be popular with teenagers.”

Avoid including the following information:

- Whether or not you have children.
- The neighborhood you live in - For Example: Avoid “I’m the expert in the Hills Subdivision, I’ve lived here for years”; Instead use “I’m the expert in the Hills Subdivision, I’ve lived in the area for years”.
- Pictures of your family.
- Your favorite places-restaurant, club, exercise, store, etc...
- Specific PUBLIC networking groups to which you belong.
- Specific neighborhood or school groups to which you belong.

### **Social Media**

In today’s day and age social media is an important marketing tool for the real estate agent. Unfortunately, it is also an important tool for predators and those who stalk. Remember, if an agent catches the attention of a predatory or obsessive individual, their best chance of having them lose their interest is to give the predator little or no material of interest on which to fantasize or “feed the high”. The more personal information a predator can get on a target, the more he will fantasize about the target and the higher the likelihood that he will continue to progress through his offender cycle and eventually commit the crime.

#### *Social Media Do’s:*

- Have separate personal and professional pages and make sure that no personal information appears on your professional page and vice versa. Use different emails to create the pages. There should be NO shared information or images between the two.

- Abbreviate your last name or use a nickname on your personal pages, use your full name on your professional pages.
- Use different images on your personal and professional pages.
- Periodically, use Google© to search for yourself to see how difficult it is to find your personal pages.
- Use the social media site's security to help ensure your personal site information is hidden to all who are not your direct friend or contact.

#### *Social Media Don'ts:*

- Don't use location tracking.
- Don't post your habits (i.e. "I love this coffee shop, I come here every day")
- Don't post information that could be used to identify your children's school, spouse's workplace, etc.....

Additionally, agents should be encouraged to periodically search for themselves on the internet to test how difficult it is finding personal information. They should also be encouraged to use Google Images® to search the internet for any place where images they use in their professional profiles are appearing.

#### *Pre-Showing*

If a predator has targeted an agent and the predator does not lose interest, then the predator will eventually execute his plan to get the agent to be alone with him at the property. This will involve a phone call, and it is in this call that the agent has the opportunity to reveal "red flags" and raise deterrents to the predator. Additionally, after the initial call and before the meeting, there are specific techniques that can be taught to agents that will improve the rate at which they take people with them on appointments.

#### **The Initial Call**

##### *Using Active Listening to uncover "red flags"*

Active listening is not only one of the most effective sales tools an agent can have in his/her toolbox because it quickly and effectively allows the agent to establish trust and to uncover a

buyer's wants and needs. Active Listening is also a valuable safety tool and can be used to uncover "red flags" that indicate that a prospect may have an ulterior motive.

Let's take a look at an excerpt from an initial phone conversation:

**Prospect:** I saw this house online and I'd like to see it.

**Agent:** OK, what about the house appealed to you?

**Prospect:** I just liked it.

The prospect's answer should serve as a red flag. If someone liked a house enough to take the time to see it, there should be at least one specific thing that was attractive to him/her.

**Agent:** OK, I'd like to make sure I can answer any questions you may have during the showing. Is there anything about the house or neighborhood that's important for you to know?

**Prospect:** Not really.

Once again, the prospect's inability to specifically answer reasonable questions should act as a red flag.

**Agent:** That's easy then, I know you found the house online. How did you locate me?

**Prospect:** Online, the same site as the house.

**Agent:** Great, it's nice to know that I'm getting some attention, sometimes it's difficult to evaluate what sites are getting my name out there. What site did you find me on?

**Prospect:** BigDataRealEstate.com.

In this part of the conversation there are no red flags until the agent compares it with information only he/she would know; for instance, whether or not he/she pays BigDataRealEstate.com to promote him/her alongside properties in that zip code. If they don't, then that's an obvious red flag.

**Agent:** I understand that BigDataRealEstate.com also recommends mortgage providers, have you already been pre-qualified?

**Prospect:** Yes

**Agent:** Great, who have you been working with? (You may even tell them it's because as a matter of policy you need to have the pre-approval paperwork)

**Prospect:** I can't remember.

Obviously, not being able to remember the name of the company or individual that pre-qualified him/her would be a red flag.

Notice that each question built on some aspect of the prospect's answer to the previous question, sending the clear signal that you are listening to what the prospect has been saying, which is the first step in building trust. Teaching agents to be fluid in these conversations, not mechanical is important; thereby not giving the conversation the feel of an interrogation. The primary reason for this is that the vast majority of prospects are legitimate, and you don't want to scare those off. This fluidity can be seen in the following:

**Prospect:** I found this house online and I'd like to see it.

**Agent:** OK, what about the house appealed to you?

**Prospect:** I've seen other houses in the neighborhood and wasn't thrilled, but I liked the looks of this house.

**Agent:** Sounds like you've been putting some time into this. Have you seen those houses with other agents?

As you can see, the agent adjusted her line of questioning based on the prospect's response and followed up with a question that was relevant but would still obtain important information for a legitimate sale as well as possibly uncovering red flags.

The above conversation was kept short for time consideration. However, in a real situation, if the prospect was a threat, he would often be more talkative and inquisitive, because he would be trying to increase the agent's comfort level and obtain information he could use, thereby making the agent an easier target.

### **Using Property and Neighborhood information to deter a predator**

Information about the property and neighborhood can be used to uncover red flags and deter a predator. For example:

**Agent (spoken to prospect on the phone):** I really like that property. The house has a great feel to it, lots of windows, great visibility. I've also met some of the neighbors and it seems like a close knit, pretty safe neighborhood.

It should go without mentioning that agents should never lie to a prospect. So, we urge listing agents to meet the neighbor's when they get the listing, not only is it a good sales practice, but it allows the agent to learn valuable information that can be used both as a sales tool and as a deterrent and "red flag" investigative tool.

Referring back to the above example of the agent's statement to the prospect--the information the agent relayed would likely make the property more attractive and one might expect to hear a positive response such as the prospect's tone of voice going up. However, if the prospect was a threat, the agent has essentially told them that it will be harder to get them isolated where he or she cannot be seen or heard because of the windows and visibility of the home and that there is a decent chance that someone will be "dropping in" because of the tight knit nature of the neighborhood. If, in listening to the response of the prospect, one detects a drop in the tone of voice or some other change that would indicate a drop in enthusiasm, that could be a red flag that would indicate the agent should bring an accompaniment.

Additionally, listing agents should be encouraged to include this type of safety information in the broker only remarks so that buyer's agents can see that information. Cooperation and collaboration are the only way to prevent predatory crime.

### *The Training Play*

During the initial call or follow-up, the agent will find the "Training Play" a useful tool in assessing the prospect. The Training Play is simple: during the call the agent mentions that the office has asked him/her to help train a new agent and he will be joining them on the appointment. The prospect's reaction to that news may provide the agent with valuable information. The agent may even describe the new agent "You'll really like Eric. He's a great guy, he used to be a pro football player and he's always telling stories". If the agent chooses not to bring someone with him/her on the appointment, he/she can simply mention that the other agent had something come up or he's on his way.

### *Establishing Control and Avoiding "Victim Stance"*

Remember that criminals with a power motive will be more attracted to a victim that is subservient, therefore an agent establishing control of the conversation and the situation can act as deterrent to a predator. This can be easily done with a few simple techniques. For example, when the prospect suggests a meeting time (say 6pm) the agent should not automatically accept it, instead he/she should say he/she needs to make it 6:30. Don't ask if 6:30 is OK, tell them that's when you can meet. The agent is establishing power and control, thereby making herself/himself less attractive to the predator without sacrificing attractiveness to a legitimate buyer.

### *Set the Expectations Up Front*

One of the greatest challenges for agents, especially new agents, is setting boundaries without making a legitimate prospect uncomfortable. Basically, agents don't need to be told don't go into the basement, they know to not go into the basement. The reason agents go into the

basement is that they are afraid of jeopardizing a sale because they don't want to make the prospect uncomfortable and/or offend them. What agents need to be taught is how to not go into the basement without alienating a legitimate prospect.

The key to not alienating a legitimate prospect is setting expectations up front. For example: "The house has a finished basement, and during the showing you are more than welcome to explore it. I'll be right at the top of the stairs to answer any questions you may have". By using an authoritative but friendly tone the agent will not offend a legitimate prospect and will not set him/herself up for an uncomfortable situation where they are telling a prospect as they are walking towards the basement that he/she won't be going into the basement. Additionally, setting expectations upfront establishes power and control and makes the agent less attractive to a predator.

### *Avoiding Victim Stance*

An important part of establishing control is not displaying "Victim Stance" or expressing that the reason for a particular situation or rule is because of something that happened to the agent that is beyond his/her control. For Example, the agent shouldn't say "I can meet at 6:30 because my car is at the shop and I have to pick it up". The agent should instead say, "I can meet you at 6:30". The agent shouldn't say, "I won't go into the basement because I've had a bad experience". The agent should instead say, "I'll wait up here, take all the time you wish".

The agent can make him/herself an unattractive target to someone seeking to do him/her harm, without making the legitimate buyer uncomfortable.

### *Assessing Overall Risk*

Traditionally agents have always been told "just always take someone with you", and yet almost no one ever does. There are several reasons for this which are discussed at length elsewhere in this document. Even so, agents should be encouraged and taught to assess the overall risk. By teaching agents to assess overall risk and to take someone with them when the relative risk appears elevated, without instructing them to focus on any one particular criteria, agents will take people with them more often. The key to this strategy is providing a comprehensive approach to risk. Agents should be instructed to assess the risk of the prospect, the property, and the situation.

The following are important factors in determining the risk level of the property:

**Vacancy** – Is the property vacant? A vacant property will increase risk because of the risk of squatters.

**Cell Signal** – Do you have a strong cell signal? If the signal is weak or non-existent  
ALWAYS BRING SOMEONE WITH YOU ON AN APPOINTMENT!

**Exterior Lighting** – Is the exterior of the house well lit?

**Interior Lighting** – Is the interior of the house well lit?

**Windows** – Are there plenty of windows? Do they provide an unobstructed view from the outside of the house to the inside and vice versa? Ideally, you'll want to make sure that you and the prospect are always in view of the outside.

**Stories** – How many stories does the house have? A one-story house is the safest because they generally have the best escape paths.

**Garage** – Does the house have a garage? Is it attached? Can you open the door easily? The existence of a garage can increase risk if it's attached and the garage door is closed.

**Basement** – Does the house have a basement? Basements are a huge risk, and if a predator has targeted you, there is a good chance that a basement will be a factor in choosing the house in which to commit the crime.

**Escape Paths** – Do you have at least 2 escape paths from any point in the house? Multiple escape paths reduce the risk because a predator can't block your escape path if it's needed.

**Exterior Doors** – Does the entrance have a storm door in addition to main door? How many exterior doors? Storm doors can slow down an escape if needed, the more exterior doors the house has means more escape paths.

**Yard** – Does the yard obstruct the view into the house from any houses around the property? Does it provide an escape route to another house or the street?

**Fence** – Is the front and/or back yard fenced? Does it obstruct views? Is it locked?

No class or guide can anticipate every layout of every house, so be sure to you use common sense and think critically. The more visible you are the safer you are, and the more escape paths the safer.

### *EAR Worksheet*

The following tool, the EAR worksheet, can be used to assess the overall relative risk of an appointment.

The process is simple. The worksheet contains a list of criteria that corresponds to the evaluation the agent has already done. Each of the criteria has a corresponding negative or positive value, depending on whether it increases the risk or decreases the risk. Simply add the numbers together to arrive at an overall risk assessment. The lower the score, the higher the risk.... simple.

Associations, Brokers, and Agents can add, remove, or change the values to criteria as they see fit.

The following two pages contain a sample EAR Worksheet:

**E**valuate the prospect, property, and circumstances

**A**ssess the overall risk

**R**eact appropriately

## EAR Worksheet

**Prospect**

The prospect is a stranger	-1
They found me on the Internet	-1
Cash buyer	-2
Looking for a Foreclosure	-1
From out of town	-1
Referral from a previous client	+1
Close friend or relative of the person that referred you	+2
You confirmed prospect with the referrer	+3
Prospect can't articulate what they are looking for in a home	-2
Prospect can only meet at a specific time that is after dark	-2
Prospect say they are an investor looking for empty homes	-1
Prospect says you can't call them back	-3
Prospect stumbles over lifestyle questions	-2
Prospect is specific about what they are looking for in a home	+1
Prospect is flexible with meeting time/date	+1
Prospect is open to seeing other homes	+1
Prospect freely gives phone number	+1
Prospect says they will be bringing kids	+1

**Property**

The property is off the beaten path	-2
There is no or poor cell phone reception	-10
The property is poorly lit	-1
The property has a basement	-1
The property only has one exterior door	-1
The property is in a typical suburban neighborhood	+1
Good cell phone reception	+1
The property is well lit	+1
There are multiple exit doors	+1
One story home	+1
Limited windows and poor visibility	-2
Abundant windows and good visibility	+1

**Circumstances**

You have an uncomfortable feeling	-10
You need to close a deal	-10
Abandoned property	-10
Total EAR Score	

The overall risk score is not an absolute number, it is a relative number designed only to give agents an easy way to determine the risk of an appointment. Furthermore, there are only a few “absolutes” when it comes to when an agent should bring someone with him/her on an appointment.

Agents should **ALWAYS** bring someone with them on an appointment if:

- There is poor cell service at the property.
- The property is vacant.
- The agent has not closed a deal in a while.
- The agent has an uncomfortable feeling prior to the appointment.

## Showing Safely

### Meeting the prospect at the House

#### *Arrive Early*

Agents should be instructed to arrive early enough to the appointment so they can prepare the home and be ready before the prospect arrives. Expect the prospect to be running early.

#### *If the Agent Can't Arrive Early*

If the agent can't arrive early, they should call the prospect to attempt to postpone the appointment long enough to allow them to arrive early. However, if that's not possible the agent can easily prepare the home by setting the expectations in a quick phone call notifying the prospect that he/she is running late... "I'm running a few minutes late. Per the seller's instructions, once I get there I'm going to need to spend a few minutes inside the home checking on certain things prior to letting you inside".

#### *Parking*

The truth is that where the agent parks is not relevant. The only time the position of a car is important is if the agent is being chased, and if the agent is being chased then he/she will not have the time to get their keys, unlock the door, open the door, get in, close the door, and lock the door before the person chasing him/her is on top of him/her. Agents should be instructed to not worry about getting to the car if he/she is being chased, rather, they should be instructed to run down the street screaming "rape". A predator needs to get him or her isolated where they can't be seen or heard in order to commit the crime, and by running down the street screaming, the agent is denying the predator the opportunity to commit the crime.

#### *Preparing the Home*

Preparing the home has two purposes, to maximize visibility and to prepare escape paths should they become needed. The reason for maximizing visibility is to make it more difficult for a predator to get the agent isolated where he/she can't be seen or heard, thereby removing the opportunity to make an attack without making a legitimate prospect uncomfortable. Assuming the agent has arrived early he/she will need to prepare the home for safe showing. The following are things the agent should be instructed to do:

- **Lights** – Be sure to turn on all lights; not only is it a good presentation habit, but it also makes the inside of the home more visible from the outside which makes you safer.
- **Drapes** – Be sure all drapes and blinds are open and there is maximum visibility into the inside of the home.

- **Exterior Doors** – Make sure all exterior doors are unlocked. There is a substantially higher likelihood of the agent being in danger from the person he/she is showing the house to versus a random person walking into the house.
- **Interior Doors** – Make sure all interior doors are open.
- **Garages** – Open the garage door if possible, if not possible, avoid entering the garage with the prospect. Garages can be particularly dangerous because of the availability of things that can be used as weapon. Remind the agents that in these situations the predator always has the upper hand because he/she knows what he/she is planning, the agent doesn't.
- **Obstructions** – Be sure to clear any possible obstructions from potential escape paths.
- **Dangerous Objects** – The agent should be sure to put away any items that could be used as a weapon. (Easily accessible vases, trophies, bats, knives, pans, etc....)
- **Cameras** – Video cameras, whether fake or real, are great deterrents. Instruct agents to make sure they are very visible, perhaps even place them next to focal points in a room and mention them during the conversation.

There is a school of thought that tells agents to lock the exterior doors during a showing to prevent an intruder from entering the home. Whereas this may be a good practice with an established client, it elevates the risk with a new prospect. Someone who comes up on a home during a showing and enters through an unlocked door is committing a crime of opportunity; crimes of opportunity are usually profit crimes (theft), committed by criminals who are typically inexperienced and therefore easily startled and scared off. They are not looking for a confrontation, they are looking for a quick, easy score. The greater risk to your safety is the new prospect in the home with you.

## Meeting the Prospect

### *Greeting the Prospect*

As mentioned in a previous section, agents should be taught to always greet the prospect outside. However, in that section we were talking about greeting the prospect in the event that the agent was arriving after the client. This section is focusing on the scenario that the agent arrived early, prepared the home, and is waiting for the client outside.

Keep in mind that the greeting sets the tone, and an authoritative tone makes the agent less attractive to a predator. Instruct the agent that, if at all possible, “take the high ground”. Position him/herself where he/she is above the prospect, so that the agent is in a dominant position relative to the prospect during the initial greeting. A front step is a great place for the agent to position him/herself. Additionally, instruct the agent to not come off that high ground to greet, let the prospect come to him/her.

### *Outbuildings*

In a previous section we mentioned setting expectations up front. If there are outbuildings, be sure the agent unlocks them prior to the tour, lets the prospect know before the showing that they won't be going in the outbuildings, and instruct them to NOT ENTER outbuildings with a prospect.

### *In the Home*

While inside the home, there are some guidelines the agent should follow to help keep him/herself safe. It is important to remember that the ultimate goal is to make the situation unattractive to a predator while not making a legitimate prospect feel uncomfortable.

Every home is different, so the agent may have to adjust some of the following practices to meet the layout of the home and his/her particular sales style.

When at all possible the agent should be sure to position him/herself in such a way that he/she is clearly visible from the outside of the house (effectively removing the opportunity). If a prospect is looking to assault the agent, he will not want to do it where it can be witnessed.

When moving from one area of the home to another, let the prospect explore before you enter the area with them. "The next area is the kitchen, go in get an initial feel of it and tell me what you think". This is known as a "no influence sales strategy". This strategy is respectful and well received by legitimate prospects while still allowing the agent to keep him/herself out of a potentially dangerous position.

Agents should not enter bedrooms with the prospect, if at all possible. Standing at the edge of the door in the hallway is respectful and attentive while still allowing the agent to keep him/herself out of a potentially dangerous position.

Master Suites – Agents should be sure to familiarize him/herself with the master bathroom because this is an ideal place for a prospect to isolate him/her. The predator may ask a question as a strategy for getting you into the bathroom with them. **THE AGENT SHOULD NOT ENTER A MASTER BATHROOM WITH A NEW PROSPECT.** If the agent must enter the bedroom to answer the question, the agent should stand outside of the doorway to the master bath. Furthermore, he/she should stand perpendicular to the doorway, this makes him/her a smaller target and allows for a faster escape if necessary.

### *General Body Position*

- Agents should always try to stay at least 2-3 arm lengths (approximately 5-7 feet) from a prospect; it shows respect for body space to a legitimate prospect and makes it more difficult for prospect who is a threat to assault him/her.
- Wherever possible the agent should make sure he/she is visible from the outside of the home.
- Agents should always position him/herself so that the prospect is never between the agent and the escape path.

### *Stairs in the Home*

Many agents have been told to allow the prospect to go all the way up or down the stairs before proceeding. **THIS IS WRONG, DO NOT ADVISE THE AGENT TO DO THIS.** The proper way to approach stairs on the home is as follows:

- Agents should always allow the prospect to go up or down the stairs first and maintain at least a four-stair difference between the two of you. However, the agent **SHOULD NOT** allow the prospect to go all the way up or down the stairs before the agent begins going up or down. The reason for this is because the agent never wants to allow the prospect to be out of his/her sight, especially when dealing with stairs because landings often provide a predator with an opportunity to hide and then ambush the agent when the agent reaches the landing.
- Agents should always allow the prospect to move away from the top or bottom of the stairs (depending on the direction you are going) before completing the ascent or descent.
- Agents should remember that stairs are an ideal place for an attack; they are usually hidden from view and it's easy to knock someone off their feet.
- If there is a handrail, the agent should use it. If a prospect suddenly turns on him/her, the agent will have an anchor point to use the prospect's own momentum against him/her.

## Reading the Prospect

Some of the most useful tools agents have to keep themselves safe are their ability to read the prospect; body language, para-verbal communication, and verbal communication. When reading the following, it is important to keep a few things in mind:

- If a prospect is meeting the agent for the purpose of harming him/her, they will likely look for a place to isolate the agent so he/she is not visible from the outside of the home. If the agent is following the guidelines, it will be difficult for the predator to do so and therefore, he will become frustrated. Signs of frustration are detectable if the agent is observant.
- When someone is preparing for an attack, their adrenal glands will increase the amount of adrenaline in their body. This is also known as the fight/flight reaction. This increase in adrenaline produces observable signs; Pupils will dilate, hands may shake, volume will increase, cadence will become faster.

There is no hard and fast way to determine who is and is not a threat, nor is there a single telltale sign that someone has violent intentions towards the agent. However, the following are some potential red flags:

### *Body Language*

Body language encompasses their body position relative to the agent, facial expressions, eye movements, hand position, etc. Here are some physical signs that something has changed in the emotional and physical state of the prospect:

- A prospect continually looking out the window
- Invasion of body space, particularly uninvited touching (even if seemingly accidental)
- Lack of eye contact
- What appears to be intentional positioning between you and the door
- Hands in the pockets (especially if they are large pockets on a coat)
- Wearing cool weather clothing in warm weather
- Look for changes, particularly:
  - Dilated pupils
  - They are no longer paying attention to what you are saying or the house in general
  - Changes in breathing
  - Changes in facial expression
  - Visible veins in the forehead or neck

- Wiping hands on pants or shirt, or rubbing hands
- Fidgeting or repetitive body movements such as scratching, tapping, etc.

### *Para-Verbal Communication*

Para-Verbal communication is all the parts of speech that are not the words themselves, such as tone, cadence (speed), and volume. Changes in Para-Verbal communication can be signals that something has changed in the emotional and physical state of the prospect. For example:

- Changes in volume when there is no change in the noise level or distance - This will be a subtle change but noticeable and accompanied by other observable changes as well. Frustration is typically associated with elevated volume.
- Changes in cadence (the speed at which someone speaks). Frustration is typically associated with increased speed.
- Changes in tone – Frustration is typically associated with a sharper tone, clearer diction, and an emphasis on the first syllable of a word.

### *Verbal Communication*

Verbal communication that could indicate red flags include:

- Showing more interest in you than in the house.
- Issuing orders (“Come here” vs. “Please come here and look at this”)
- Asking you to move closer.
- Excessive sharing of personal information.
- Suggestive or “double meaning” language.
- Complimenting you on your looks or an article of clothing in an unprofessional manner.
- Escalating verbal communication from seemingly professional, to familiar, to intimate.

### *Escalation Behaviors*

A predator who is preparing or grooming for an attack will exhibit a pattern of behaviors that indicate an attempt to escalate the meeting from a professional encounter to an unprofessional encounter, as if they are “testing the waters” to see how open the agent will be to an advance AND the agent will likely notice isolating behaviors such as constantly looking out of windows. Agents should be particularly wary of this combination.

It is worth noting that everyone exhibits the behaviors previously mentioned in this section at one time or another and each behavior in and of itself does not indicate that an individual is a threat. However, it is the combination of behaviors without a seemingly apparent reason for the changes which should act as a red flag.

## APPENDIX A – Free Resources

### Safety Video Library

A full year's worth of safety videos can be found at the link below. These videos may be freely used by MLS, Associations, and Brokerages in newsletters, Message of the Day postings, meetings, email signatures, training classes, etc.

<https://www.realsafeagent.com/resources>

### Student & Instructor Class Guides

Instructor and student guides for safety classes that meet the recommendations made in the “What Should Agents be Taught To Keep Themselves Safe” section of this document can be found at the link below. MLS, Associations, and Brokerages may freely use and distribute these guides to their members. Real Safe Agent periodically runs Train-the-Trainer classes to teach how to teach these classes.

<https://www.realsafeagent.com/resources>

### Obtaining CE Credit Information

For assistance in obtaining CE certification in your state please contact Real Safe Agent at [info@realsafeagent.com](mailto:info@realsafeagent.com). Just as with the classroom materials and train-the-trainer classes this assistance is provided at no cost.

<https://www.realsafeagent.com/resources>

## APPENDIX B

### Safety Surveys

#### Survey 1 – Safety Habits and Criminal Incidents

1. On average how often do you meet with a new prospect?
  - a. Less than once per Month
  - b. One to three times per month
  - c. Four to six times per month
  - d. More than six times per month
  
2. On average how many open houses do you host per month?
  - a. Less than once per Month
  - b. One to three per month
  - c. Four to six per month
  - d. More than six per month
  
3. How often are you alone when showing a home to a new prospect(s)?
  - a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Always
  
4. How often do you currently ask someone to accompany you when showing a property to a prospect you have never met?
  - a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Always

If answer to Question 4 is either a,b,c, or d

5. When you don't have someone accompany you, why?
  - a. It's difficult to coordinate schedules with the people I know
  - b. I don't want bother anyone else
  - c. I feel awkward asking for help
  - d. I'm sure I can handle any situation that could arise

6. When showing a home to a prospect you have never met before how often do you feel uncomfortable or wished there was someone else with you?
  - a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Always
  
7. Have you stayed in situations where you felt uncomfortable or unsafe because you didn't want to risk losing the potential for a sale?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
8. If you knew that a prospect had previously met with another agent and that agent felt uncomfortable being alone that person would you choose to bring someone with you on the showing?
  - a. Definitely
  - b. Possibly
  - c. No
  
9. What statement would you most strongly agree with:
  - a. I can just tell if a prospect is dangerous.
  - b. I run a criminal background check on every prospect.
  - c. If the prospect gives me a copy of their driver's license I know he's safe.
  - d. I don't think there is any way to predict if someone might be dangerous.
  
10. Have ever been a victim of a crime while you were engaged in your duties as a real estate agent?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

If Yes then....

11. Did you report the crime?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
12. Gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
13. Age
  - a. 21 – 30
  - b. 31- 40
  - c. 41 – 50
  - d. 51 – 60
  - e. Over 60

14. Years Experience as a Real Estate Agent
- a. Less than 1 year
  - b. 1 – 3 years
  - c. 4 – 10 years
  - d. 11 – 15 years
  - e. More than 15 years

**Survey 2 – Safety Education**

1. Have you taken an agent safety class?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

If yes...

2. When did you take this class?
  - e. Within the past 6 months
  - f. 6 – 12 months ago
  - g. 1 – 3 years ago
  - h. 3 or more years ago

3. What type of class was it?
  - a. Based on Self Defense
  - b. Based on Situational Awareness
  - c. Based on Criminology

If Q3 answer is a.

4. Which Statement most closely matches your opinion of the class you took?
  - a. “It was fun, but I doubt I’d remember any of it in an emergency”
  - b. “If you’re in shape and you practice then maybe the techniques taught will help but that’s not me”
  - c. “I’m confident I can recall the techniques in an emergency and that I can defeat my attacker”

If Q3 answer is b.

5. Which Statement most closely matches your opinion of the class you took?
  - a. “For the most part it wasn’t relevant to my job”
  - b. “I thought the information was basic and fairly useless”
  - c. “I didn’t learn anything new”
  - d. “I thought the information I learned will keep me safe”

If Q3 answer is c.

6. Which Statement most closely matches your opinion of the class you took?
  - a. “For the most part it wasn’t relevant to my job”
  - b. “I thought the information was basic and fairly useless”
  - c. “I didn’t learn anything new”
  - d. “I thought the information I learned will keep me safe”

7. Safety is a regular part of my brokerage’s sales meetings.
  - a. Yes
  - b. no

8. What statement most closely matches your opinion about how safety is dealt with by your association?
  - a. "I feel like my local association and my national association take safety seriously"
  - b. "I feel like my local association takes safety seriously, but my national association gives it lip service and that's it"
  - c. "I feel like my local association gives safety gives lip service, but my national association takes safety seriously"
  - d. "I feel like both my local association and my national association gives safety lip service"
  
9. What statement most closely matches your opinion about how safety is dealt with by your broker?
  - a. "I feel like my broker takes safety seriously"
  - b. "I feel like my broker gives safety lip service"
  - c. "I feel like my broker doesn't pay any attention to safety"
  
10. All things being equal (i.e. splits, technology, etc..), if you were going to change brokerages would one brokerage being very active and involved in agent safety verses another brokerage influence your decision?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe

## Additional Reading

Clarke, Ronald R. Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies.

“A Descriptive Model of The Hunting Process of Serial Sex Offenders: A Rational Choice Perspective”. Journal of Family Violence D. Kim Rossmo

Cohen, Lawrence E. and Marcus Felson. 1979. “Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach.” American Sociological Review, Volume Number: 44-04.

Ronald V. Clarke and Marcus Felson M., 1993, « Introduction : Criminology, Routine Activity, and Rational Choice », Advances in Criminological Theory: Routine Activity and Rational Choice

Center for sex offender management, understanding sex offenders an introductory Curriculum

Dynamic Factors of Sexual Aggression: The Role of Affect and Impulsiveness, Criminal Justice and Behavior April 2013

Psychopathic Personality: Bridging the Gap Between Scientific Evidence and Public Policy, Psychological Science in the Public Interest December 2011

Sexual Murderers With Adult or Child Victims: Are They Different?, Sex Abuse September 1, 2010

Psychopathy/Antisocial Personality Disorder Conundrum, Aust N Z J Psychiatry June 1, 2006

Psychopathy and Sexual Deviance in Treated Rapists: Association With Sexual and Nonsexual Recidivism, Sex Abuse January 1, 2004