



**Personal
Safety
Systems**

Situational Awareness

PSS TG-002-19

**IF YOUR EYES HURT
AFTER YOU DRINK COFFEE,**



**YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE
SPOON OUT OF THE CUP.**

*How do you know
if you're paying
attention to the
right things?*

This booklet is part of an educational series prepared by Personal Safety Systems.
For information regarding the complete series, please contact us at
www.psscanada.com

HOW TO DEVELOP SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Many of the resources on situational awareness say it can be cultivated by generally keeping tabs on your surroundings — “checking your six” and “keeping your back to the wall.”

This definition isn't wrong. That's exactly what situational awareness is: knowing what's going on by scanning your environment. This explanation is, however, a bit lacking. What exactly are you looking for? How do you know if you're paying attention to the right things? Are there behaviours or warning signs of an imminent threat that you should know about?

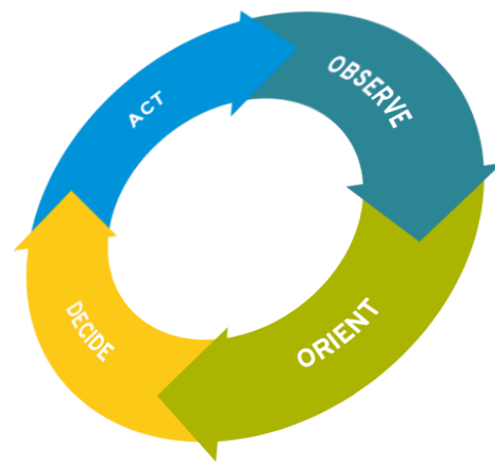
OBSERVE + ORIENT = SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

An effective tool to help you understand situational awareness is framing it within the OODA Loop.

The OODA Loop is a learning system and decision-making process that was first laid out by U.S. Air Force fighter pilot and military strategist John Boyd.

The four steps of the OODA Loop are:

- **Observe**
- **Orient**
- **Decide**
- **Act**



In a head-to-head competition, like air-to-air combat, a violent confrontation in a parking lot, or even political contests, the person who can cycle through the OODA Loop the fastest wins.

Obviously, the Observe step in the loop is what most people associate situational awareness with, but it's the second step in the OODA Loop – Orient — that answers what developing situational awareness actually involves. Orientation tells us what we should look for when we're observing, and then puts those observations into context so we know what to do with the information.

SO OBSERVE + ORIENT = SITUATIONAL AWARENESS.

But how can we become better observers so that we can improve our situational awareness? And how should we orient ourselves so that we observe the right things and understand the context for what we're seeing?

OBSERVE: STAY IN CONDITION YELLOW

In his book, Principles of Personal Defense, Ex-USMC Lt. Colonel Jeff Cooper laid out a colour code system to help individuals gauge their mindset for combat scenarios. Each colour represented a person's potential state of awareness and focus:

WHITE	Unprepared and unready to take action. If you are attacked in White you will probably die unless your adversary is totally inept.
YELLOW	Prepared, alert and relaxed. Good situational awareness.
ORANGE	Specific alert to probably danger. Ready to take action.
RED	Action Mode. Totally committed to the emergency at hand.
BLACK	System overload. Breakdown of physical & mental Performance.

WHITE

You are relaxed, unaware of your surroundings, and not prepared to react to anything. Heart rate is between 60 and 80 beats per minute (BPM).

YELLOW

You are in a relaxed state of alert and have a general awareness of what is going on around you. You do not perceive any threats, but you are looking for and are aware of possible threats. This state can be maintained for a long period of time. Heart rate is between 60 and 80 BPM.

ORANGE

You are at a heightened state of alert and are getting ready to deal with a threat. Your mind is preparing for the reaction to the threat. This state cannot be maintained for a long period of time, and your body will want to revert to a state of yellow when the threat is gone. Heart rate is between 60/80 and 115 BPM.

RED

You are reacting to the threat and are in a fighting state of mind. You are executing the plan you developed while in a state of orange. You may experience focus lock, tunnel vision, and other adrenaline effects (shaking, sudden bursts of energy). Heart rate is between 115/145 and 175 BPM.

BLACK

You are in a state of catastrophic breakdown of mental and physical performance. This usually occurs when you are forced to react to a threat that you have not been able to prepare for, like when you go from white or yellow straight to black. Heart rate will be greater than 175 BPM.

For optimal situational awareness, Cooper recommended that we always stay in Condition Yellow.

Condition Yellow is best described as “relaxed alert.” There’s no specific threat situation, but you have your head up and you’re taking in your surroundings with all your senses. Most people associate situational awareness with just visual stimulation, but you can also learn a lot about a particular scenario from the sounds (or lack thereof) and even smells in the environment.

Even though your senses are slightly heightened in Condition Yellow, it’s also important to stay relaxed. By adopting a calm demeanor, you won’t bring any unnecessary attention to yourself. If you look antsy and your head is swiveling frantically while you scan your surroundings, people are going to notice you. Additionally, staying relaxed ensures that you maintain an open focus, which allows you to take in more information about what’s going on around you. Research shows that when we get nervous or stressed, the epinephrine response causes our attention to narrow, causing us to concentrate on just a few things at a time. A narrow focus can therefore cause us to miss important details in our environment.

Situational awareness isn’t just for times when your enemy is of the human variety...Look up from your Smartphone, don’t zone out, open your eyes, ears, and nose, and calmly scan your environment to take in what’s going on.

Besides staying in Condition Yellow, here are a couple of tips to improve your observational abilities:

PUT YOURSELF IN A POSITION FOR OPTIMAL OBSERVATION.

To achieve effective situational awareness, you need to be able to observe as much of your surroundings as possible. Positioning yourself in obstructed spots will inhibit the flow of information coming in. For example, something might be in your way that prevents you from seeing a bad guy enter a theater or restaurant. You also don’t have eyeballs in the back of your head, so you can’t see what’s going on behind you.

Therefore whenever you enter an environment put yourself in a position that will allow you to see as much as you can. Find a place where you can view all or most of the exits and which allows you to put your back to the wall. This position readies you to make a quick getaway, and eliminates the possibility of failing to see a threat materialize behind you.

Granted, this isn’t possible in all situations. You don’t have much control as to which table a restaurant hostess seats you at on a busy night, and you’d likely get a lot of strange looks if you stood with your back in a corner while you’re waiting in line at 7-11. So do your best within the given circumstances. In that busy restaurant, you might not have control of your table location, but you can choose which seat you take. Pick the chair that gives you the best view from your table. When you’re standing in line at a convenience store, nonchalantly look around and take in the scene.

HONE YOUR OBSERVATION SKILLS BY PLAYING THE A-GAME.

Combat sections play a game called the “A-Game,” or Awareness Game, to help them strengthen their observational skills. To play, when you go into a business, make note of a few things about your environment: the number of workers behind the counter, the clothing and gender of the person next to you, how many entry/exits there are, etc. When you leave and get into the car to head home, ask yourself or your teammate questions like “How many workers were behind the counter?” “Was the person sitting next to us a man or a woman?” “What colour was his/her shirt?” “How many exits were there?”

OBSERVATION

Observation begins with the gathering and processing of information obtained through the senses. The five sensory systems are sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste that allow information to be collected from the environment. Perception is the process that the mind uses to organize the sensory information into an understandable interpretation of the environment.

Central to all these skills is a critically-thinking Protection Officer (PO) whose decisions can be affected by numerous factors, both external and internal. The PO refines his decision making capabilities by understanding the decision cycle process and his awareness of the physical and biological responses he goes through when faced with a dynamic situation. Refining these skills and understanding the effects they have on his mind and body make him more capable.

Context and Scanning

Our eyes give us a majority of the information that our brain processes in order to gain situational awareness and build a picture of your surroundings. Our brain, however is a very powerful tool and has a tendency to fill in the blanks or make some things look like they belong when they actually do not because of the context that the objects are in.

For instance for Canadians, all the years of reading from left to right allow human brain to fill in things that may not actually be there when scanning a scene in that direction because of the context that they are in. Context is a powerful tool which enables us to make quick decisions. However, observation at times requires you to take a detailed look at areas, objects and/or people in order to assess a possible threat or course of action. It is important to see what is actually there and not what others want you to see or what your brain is causing you to believe is there. Scanning an area in the opposite direction (right to left) than your brain is used to seeing things is one way to allow you to break out the details necessary to accurately assess the environment.

The Nine Elements of Visual Perception

1. Line, Edge and Outline

Everything, especially man-made items, have a line or edge to them. These lines and edges often lead to the outline of an object. The human eye picks up lines, edges and outlines very easily. An untrained individual may see a line or edge while a trained individual will see outline.

Any object silhouetted against a contrasting background is conspicuous. Any smooth, flat background, such as water, a field, or best of all, the sky, will cause an object to become well delineated. However, special care must be taken when searching areas with an uneven background, as it is more difficult to detect the silhouette of an object.

2. Shape

A shape is the visual characteristic surface configuration of a thing. It is distinguished from its surroundings by its outline, contour, or figure.

Outlines are created when lines and edges come together. When we perceive the outline, it becomes a shape. The human eye readily picks up shapes, especially of other humans or potential threats (e.g. rifle). Some objects can be recognized instantly by their shape, particularly if they contrast with the background. Experience teaches people to associate an object with its shape or outline. At a distance, the outline of objects can be seen well before the details can be determined. The human body and the equipment that it carries are easily identified unless the outline has been altered.

3. Contrast or Value

Contrast is a difference, especially a strong dissimilarity, between entities or objects compared. Value is the relative importance or tone of something, darkness or lightness of colour.

4. Colour

The aspect of things that is caused by differing qualities of the light reflected or emitted by them, definable in terms of the observer or of the light as:

- The appearance of objects or light sources described in terms of the individual's perception of them, involving hue, lightness, and saturation for light sources.
- The characteristics of light by which the individual is made aware of objects or light sources through the receptors of the eye, described in terms of dominant wavelength, luminance, and purity.

Colours have a value to them as well as a baseline. The greater the contrasting colour, the more visible the object becomes. This point is especially true when the colour is not natural for that area. Colour alone will usually not identify the object but is often an aid in locating it.

5. Texture

Similar to colour, texture has a baseline. An object with a smooth surface reflects light and becomes more obvious than an object with a rough surface that casts shadows on itself. An extremely smooth object becomes shiny. If an object has a surface that contrasts with its surroundings, it becomes conspicuous.

6. Rhythm and Flow

The patterned, recurring alternations of contrasting elements, movement or variation characterized by the regular recurrence or alternation of different quantities or conditions; a pattern created by lines, forms and colours.

7. Movement

Movement is one of the biggest disturbances to a baseline. The human eye is strongly attracted to any movement. The human eye can detect another human or animal within seconds by watching the movement of an appendage.

- a. Physical movement is from the person actually moving. This is readily detectable.
- b. Visual movement is from the person disturbing vegetation or an object, thus causing the vegetation or object to move. This could also be a lack of movement which creates an anomaly in the baseline.

8. Light (reflecting, sunlight and shadow)

Light impacts colour and the value of colour. Some animals have a dark back and light underbelly. The sun lightens the dark back colour and the shadow cast from above darkens the lighter underbelly near the ground making the animal seem less three-dimensional. Flat surfaces reflect light while rough surfaces absorb it. The reflections from a belt buckle, watch, or optical device can be seen over a mile away from the source. Any shine will attract the observer's attention.

In sunlight, an object or a man will cast a shadow that can give away his presence. Shadows may be more revealing than the object itself. Care must be taken to detect alterations of the natural shape of a shadow. Where light is excessively bright, shadows will look especially black. Contrast will be extreme, and in this exaggerated contrast the observer's eye cannot adjust to both areas simultaneously. This requires the observer to "isolate" the shadowed area from the bright sunlight so that his eye can adapt to the shadow.

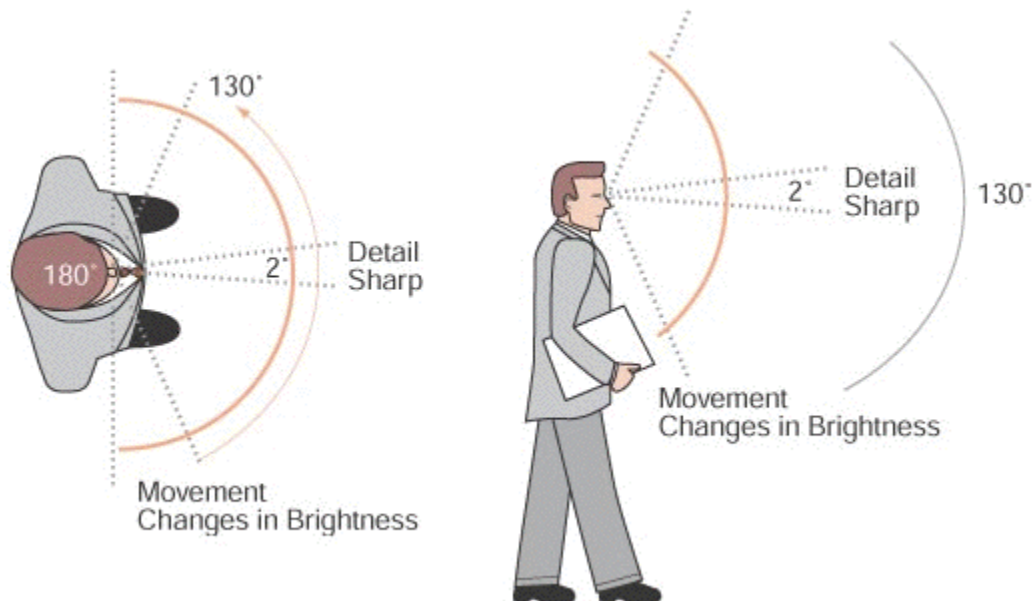
9. Positive and Negative Space

Positive space is a space that takes up mass (solid objects) such as buildings, trees, signs, vehicles, etc. Typically, you cannot see through positive space. The human eye will naturally move from positive space to positive space, as the eye is attracted to this. Example: Tree lines, your eyes are attracted to trunks and prominent branches.

Negative space is the space between the positive spaces. This is the area of shadow and background activity that an untrained observer often overlooks. Good camouflage resembles negative space; it doesn't resemble positive space, such as a leaf. When observing, you must observe the negative space as well.

Central versus Peripheral Vision

Humans have only a small area of central vision. The rest of the visual field falls under peripheral vision. Your peripheral vision will usually not notice an object that remains still, but your eye will be drawn to anything moving in the periphery. Paying attention to the periphery is important because it will make you more aware of your surroundings and help you be prepared to respond to things that may not be directly in front of you.



We also have a perfect blind spot at night. Our retinas consist of rods and cones, with the cones only active when there is light available.

On a dark night the cones do not detect imagery, leaving a blind spot at the center of our vision. When operating in low light areas, slowly scanning in a figure of eight pattern will let us see what is directly ahead of us.

OBSERVATION TECHNIQUES

Observation techniques include:

- the Hasty Search
- the Detailed Search, and
- Maintaining Observation.

Hasty Search

The hasty search technique is the first phase of observing a target area. This should take approximately 10 seconds. The hasty search is carried out by making quick glances at specific points, terrain features, or other areas that could conceal an individual. The observer should not sweep his eyes across the terrain in one continuous movement. This will prevent him from detecting motion. The observer should view the area closest to his position first, since it could pose the most immediate threat. The observer then searches further out until the entire target area has been searched.

Detail Search

After the hasty search, the observer starts a detailed search using the overlapping strip method. Normally, the area nearest the observer offers the greatest danger; therefore, the search should begin there. The observer systematically searches the terrain from his right flank in a 180-degree arc, 50 meters in depth. After reaching the opposite flank, the observer searches the next area nearest his post. The search should be in overlapping strips of at least 10 meters to ensure total coverage of the area. The detailed search should cover as far out as the observer can see, always including areas of interest that attracted the observer during the hasty search.

Maintaining Observation

The observer must memorize as much of the area as possible. This cycle of a hasty search, followed by a detailed search, should be repeated every 15 to 20 minutes, depending upon the area of responsibility.

ORIENT: BASELINES, GOALS, AND ACTION PLANS

Being more observant isn't enough to master situational awareness. You have to know what you're looking for, and then put that information into context so it has meaning and becomes actionable. That's where the Orient phase comes into play.

The Orient step provides three things to help us achieve situational awareness:

- Baselines and anomalies for our particular environment
- Mental models of human behaviour we should look for, and
- Plans of action depending on our observations.

Profiling

Profiling is a method of proactively identifying threats through human behaviour pattern analysis and recognition. It is a tool you can use to improve your ability to move through the Decision Cycle. Whatever the threat there are certain observable and measurable characteristics that the threat must have to be successful. Profiling works on people, places and events, vehicles, things, and in any culture or location.

Humans, by nature, tend to follow predictable patterns of behaviour.

Profiles are deviations (anomalies) from a normal or typical behaviour (the baseline) which would lead you to believe that an observed situation (persons, events, vehicles and objects) may have the potential for harming you or other people.

These deviations are anomalies that stand out from the surrounding area's baseline.

BASELINE+ANOMALY=DECISION

Criminals and terrorists attack targets of opportunity (the soft target). The targets they choose to attack will give them maximum payoff. In order to conduct their attacks, they will have to conduct preparatory operations. They may steal cars before a bank robbery, or materials to make methamphetamine or explosives.

Criminals will conduct planning and may even rehearse their activities prior to carrying out their plan. It is important to understand that all terrorists are criminals; however, not all criminals are terrorists. Their small crimes seem harmless, but all of those crimes added together lay the foundation for larger threats.

Establishing a Baseline

Everything has a baseline, places, events, cultures; and especially the Human Terrain. A baseline is a basis for comparison and a reference point against which other things can be evaluated. You create a baseline by looking at the current situation, and then determining the context and relevance of your observations. You then measure that against the template (norms) and prototypical matches (usual activities). Baselines are dynamic and are in a constant state of flux. A baseline must be constantly updated to incorporate changes and to identify anomalies. This constitutes the first two steps of Boyd's Decision Cycle; **Observe and Orient**.

The PO observes the environment to establish a **Baseline** and Identify **Anomalies** or action indicators within the environment.

- **Baseline**
An initial set of critical observations or data that is used to establish what is normal for comparison at another time because a baseline is dynamic and will continually evolve. A baseline is everything in its natural state of existence and everything has a baseline.
- **Anomaly**
A deviation from the baseline that is the presence, absence, or change of something.

Establish a Baseline Wherever You Go

Every environment and person has a baseline. A baseline is what's "normal" in a given situation, and it will differ from person to person and environment to environment. For example, the baseline at a small coffee shop will usually entail people reading a book or working on their computer or speaking in hushed tones with their friends. The baseline at a rock concert would be loud music and people looking at the stage while either jumping up and down to the music or swaying their bodies to the beat.

We establish baselines so that we can spot anomalies. Anomalies are things that either do not happen or should, or that do happen and shouldn't. Anomalies are what direct our attention as we take in our surroundings and what we need to focus on to achieve situational awareness.

So the first step in orienting ourselves is to establish baselines so that we can direct our attention to anomalies. How do we do that on the fly? Mentally ask yourself two questions every time you enter a new environment:

- **Baseline Questions:** What's going on here? What's the general mood of the place? What's the "normal" activity that I should expect here? How do most people behave here most of the time?
- **Anomaly Question:** What would cause someone or something to stand out?

Behavioural Clusters to Look For

Our inability to pay attention to everything all at once makes it impossible to obtain complete situational awareness. The human mind can only handle so much information at a given time. Thus in the domain of personal safety, where things unfold quickly and seconds are often the difference between life and death, how we direct our attention is paramount.

So we need to focus on a few things at a time that provide the most bang for our attention buck. And we do that by relying on heuristics. Heuristics are quick and dirty problem-solving and decision-making mental shortcuts our minds use to figure things out when minimal information is available and time is limited. Decisions made from heuristics aren't always perfect, but in the context of your personal safety, they're usually good enough.

The most important category of clues is called kinesics, an area of behaviour that involves people's conscious and subconscious body language. Within the domain of kinesics, three clusters of body language are of particular interest for situational awareness. They are:

- Dominance/Submissive Behaviour
- Comfortable/Uncomfortable Behaviour, and
- Interested/Uninterested Behaviour.

- **Dominance/submissive behaviour**

Generally, most people try to get along with others, so for the most part people act in accommodating and submissive ways. Dominant behaviour “is an expression of the limbic system’s (animal portion of the brain) fight response” and often manifests itself in “gestures and postures that make a person look larger to intimidate ‘smaller’ individuals into submission.” Smaller vs. bigger here doesn’t just apply to physical size, however, but also relates to relative positions of power.

Because most people try to get along, dominant behaviour often constitutes an anomaly, and the person displaying it deserves more attention. If someone acts in a pushy, authoritative, or overbearing way, it doesn’t necessarily mean they’re a threat; context matters. You’d expect a boss to act dominant in relation to their employees and the employees to act submissive to their boss, but seeing extreme dominant behaviour exhibited by a customer towards an employee isn’t as common. That’s something to keep an eye on.

- **Comfortable/uncomfortable behaviour.**

Most people are going to look relatively comfortable in most situations. Think about a bus or a C-Train ride — passengers generally appear pretty relaxed while they stare out the window or read a book. If someone looks uncomfortable, that’s an anomaly that warrants extra attention, but it doesn’t mean they’re necessarily a threat. They could be distressed because they’re late for work or maybe they just heard some bad news about a relative. Again, it’s just something to keep your eye on.

A common display of uncomfortable behaviour you’ll see from individuals up to no good is that they’re “checking their six.” This is when a person looks over their shoulder to see what’s behind them or generally scans their surroundings. People who are comfortable generally don’t do this because they don’t feel any threat. So if you see a guy looking over his shoulder a lot when he should be standing there aloof, that’s an anomaly that should get your attention.

Now obviously, “checking your six” is something that situationally aware good guys do too. If you’re doing it right, it shouldn’t be noticeable to others, but it takes practice, and some guy with his head on a swivel might still be green. But until you verify that through further observation, be suspicious.

On the flipside, someone acting comfortable when everyone else is uncomfortable would be an anomaly. One of the ways law enforcement was able to identify the Boston Marathon bombers was that they noticed in surveillance footage that the men looked relatively calm while everyone else was running around in a panic. The reason they looked calm was because they knew the explosion was going to happen and thus weren’t surprised by it, while everyone else was caught off guard.

- **Interested/uninterested behaviour.**

Most people aren't paying attention to their environment. They're too caught up in their own thoughts or whatever it is they're doing. So individuals who are showing interest in a particular person or object that most people wouldn't be interested in is an anomaly that warrants further observation.

These three body language clusters establish baselines for every situation in which we find ourselves and allow us to direct our limited attention towards things that are potentially more important and/or dangerous. If a person's behaviour across these clusters fits the baseline for that particular circumstance, you can pretty much ignore them. If their behaviour doesn't fit the baseline, they're an anomaly and you should observe them more closely.

Other behavioural threat indicators

Besides the above three kinesic clusters, Combat Profilers are taught to look out for a couple other behaviours that could apply to civilian situations as well:

- **Shifty hands.**

Military and law enforcement officers typically check the hands first on any person with which they're engaging. This is for two reasons. First, "checking the hands of a person ensures that the person is not holding a weapon and is not preparing to strike," writes Van Horne. Second, hands often telegraph hidden nefarious intentions. People who are concealing something they don't want discovered, like a gun, knife, or stolen object, "will often touch or pat that area on the body where that object is concealed, as if to ensure the object has not been lost or is still hidden from view."

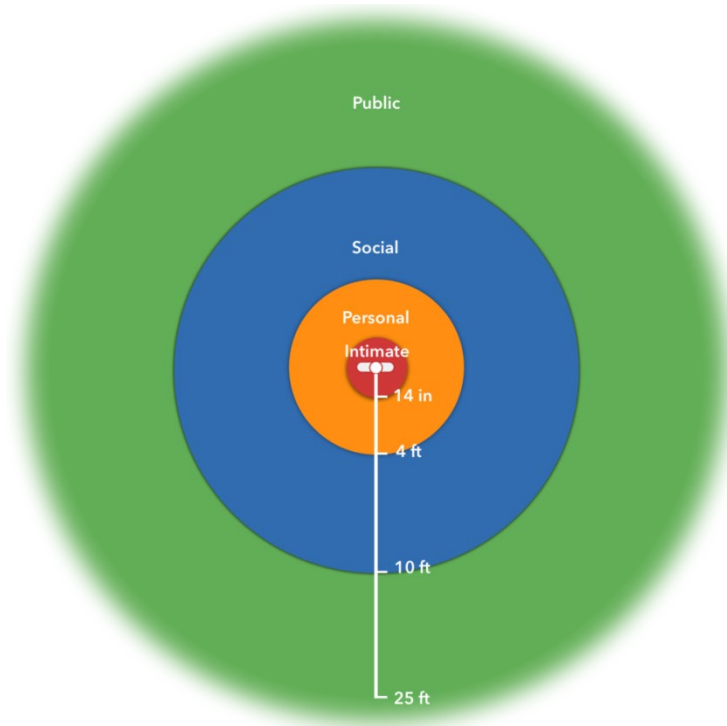
- **Acting Natural.**

It's difficult to "act natural" when you're not completely focused on whatever it is you're really supposed to be doing. People "acting natural" will appear distracted and over- or under-exaggerate their movements. Insurgents in Afghanistan often tried to act like farmers, when they were in fact attempting to collect information on military patrols. Combat Profilers were trained to look for those "farmers" who appeared to be trying too hard.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the act of betraying affiliations through the dynamics of proximity. Literally, this is your proximity (distance) to and from other people based off physiological, sociological, and physical principles. Proxemics are not limited to the relationship between people, it can be applied to a person's relation to things, places, and events. This happens at the unconscious, subconscious and conscious levels.

The relative distance between groups of people is defined in four sub-categories. It must be remembered that different cultures will follow a different set of spatial relationships, for example American, Canadian, British, and Nordic Cultures tend to keep greater distances (Far Phase). Conversely, Latin American and Arab Cultures have much closer distances (Close Phase). A person's pitch and tone of voice will change in each one of these groups, as well as the non-verbal language described earlier, when they are in these different areas.



- **Intimate Distance** The intimate distance for embracing, touching or whispering; generally only the closest of friends and intimates is less than six inches (close phase) or 6-18 inches (Far Phase).
- **Personal Distance** The personal distance for interaction among good friends is 1.5-2.5 feet (Close Phase) and 2.5-4 feet (Far Phase).
- **Social Distance** The social distances kept by most people when interacting amongst acquaintances is 4-7 feet (Close Phase) and 7-12 (Far Phase).
- **Public Distance** The distance kept for public speaking is 12-25 feet (Close Phase) and 25 feet or more (Far Phase).

Proxemic Push/Pull

These distances will determine if someone, or an object, is "pulled" into a closer ring, or is "pushed" away because they do not fit in that category.

Proxemic Push is the natural tendency for a person or group of people to move away from other people/objects which are unfamiliar or are perceived as threat. This can also occur when a situation or area is un-agreeable or they do not want to associate with a specific person, group of people, or object.

- Security walking through a mall in an area where they are not wanted will see people moving away.
- An average person noticing criminal activity will turn the corner to avoid being within the same proximity.

Proxemic Pull is the natural tendency for a person or a group of people to be attracted to other people, object, or areas which are familiar and perceived as friendly to them.

- Kids running to the ice cream truck.
- People trying to get close to celebrities or important individuals.
- People in a meeting will sit in groups based upon who is familiar with whom.

When a threat is perceived a natural instinct is to move away from it. Manipulating the time and distance gap by moving away (Proxemic push) from the perceived threat provides stand-off and creates valuable time for the observer to react to a situation.

When a threat is not perceived, or in a comfortable environment, the natural inclination is to approach the situation (Proxemic pull), diminishing standoff and reaction time.

Have a plan of action based on what you observe

You visit your favorite coffee shop and a bad guy with a gun decides to drop in as well. But because you've followed the principles above, you're the first to see him as a threat...Great. But what are you going to do about it? Seconds matter here. You don't have time to formulate a well-thought-out plan. What's more, the stress of the event will muddle your thinking and decision-making.

In addition to asking yourself the baseline and anomaly questions every time you enter an environment, ask yourself a third question: "What would I do if I saw an anomaly?" In other words, come up with an action plan.

So let's go back to the coffee shop example. Let's say the anomaly for which you want to create an action plan is "guy comes in with a gun." The best course of action in this scenario depends on a few things. And knowing what those few things are requires you to be situationally aware. If the robber came in from the front door and you're near the rear exit, your best action would be

to book it out the back door right away. On the other hand, if he entered through the back exit near you, your best action would be to immediately close the gap between him and you and incapacitate him.

Establish baselines. Look for anomalies. Have a plan. That's what situational awareness comes down to.

Situational Awareness as a Preventive Tactic

Animals are creatures of opportunity. They'll typically only attack another creature if they look vulnerable. Lions will go after younger, sicker, or older gazelles because they're easier to catch. The same goes with humans. Criminals are typically going to go after a person who looks vulnerable, whether the victim is physically weaker or will simply be easy to catch off guard. Practicing situational awareness goes a long way in keeping you from appearing like an easy target. When you're out and about, look alert. When you're walking back to your car at night, have your keys at the ready and constantly scan your surroundings. The less vulnerable you look, the less likely someone is going to mess with you.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Situational awareness is a mindset that you have to purposefully cultivate. You want to get to the point that it's just something you do without having to think about it. To get to that point, you have to practice it regularly. Starting today, consciously remind yourself to look for entry/exit points whenever you enter a new building. Start observing people, establishing baselines, and generating possible anomalies while you're at work, at the gym, or on a date. Then start coming up with action plans on what you would do in that specific situation if you see a possible threat. Don't be paranoid, just mindful. Do that day in and day out, and situational awareness won't be something you have to intentionally think about, just something you do naturally.

Keep the public safe, keep the client safe, keep your partner safe, and keep yourself safe!