

Safety Scenarios

(With Answers)

To get participants actively engaged in safety issues, it is better to let them consider these scenarios without the answers at first so they will be encouraged to come up with the answers on their own. Later you can recap the quiz and make sure all of the points in each answer are discussed adequately.

Scenario #1: Open House

You are hosting an open house by yourself on a winter day. As the sun is setting and you are locking up, a nicely dressed man pulls into the drive and quickly hops out of his car. He apologizes for coming so late and says that he is very glad to have arrived before you left. He begs you to let him see the property as he has wanted to buy this style of home in this neighborhood for some time now. You had very few prospects visit the open house, so you would hate to miss this opportunity. What do you do?

Answer:

- Open houses are especially dangerous as they expose you to strangers, often while alone, with limited opportunity to pre-qualify the prospect or verify his identity.
- Extra care should be taken at the end of the day when predators may think you are more likely to be alone. There are enough red flags here to warrant not going back into the house with him.
- Don't let his nice clothes influence your behavior.
- Try to arrange for a showing later, after a meeting at the office where you can obtain and verify his identification.

- If you do choose to let him see the house, do not follow him in—wait for him in the doorway (or in your car) so you easily escape if necessary.
- When he is finished looking, answer any questions he has, give him your card and a blank prospect card, and ask him to drop off or mail in his information.

Scenario #2: Listing Presentation

You receive a phone call from a man who says he is interviewing REALTORS® to sell his lakeside vacation home. You can hear children laughing in the background and he apologizes for all the racket his kids are making. He wants to hear your listing presentation and get your ideas about a good asking price, so he asks you to meet him at the property this evening at 8:00. What do you do?

Answer:

- Any time you are meeting a stranger alone, whether it's for a showing or a listing presentation, there is a potential for danger.
- Don't make assumptions. There could be any reasons for the sound of children; he could be calling from a pay phone in a restaurant with a noisy play area. Sometimes violent predators do have wives and kids at home.
- First verify that he is actually the owner of the property by checking tax logs.
- Try to set up a preliminary meeting in your office so that you can record his information before going to the property.
- Even if you decide it is safe to go, make sure that while you're at the property, you call in to the office regularly.

Continued on page 2

Scenario #3: Showing a Property

On your first day with this prospect, you showed him three homes, and he acted like a typical buyer, asking all the expected questions and looking carefully at each home. On this occasion, it is a cold day and he offers to drive you since his car is already warmed up. He mentions that he would really like to see a home with a basement bedroom for his teenage son so he can play his music as loud as he likes. You know a house that fits his needs perfectly so you take him there to show him the nicely finished basement with rec room, bedroom, and full bath. What would you do?

Answer:

- Don't let the fact that he acted normally on other showings cause you to let your guard down. Criminals may try to gain your confidence at first as they size you up.
- Unless you know them personally, never ride with a client; drive your own car and park so you can get away easily if you need to. Park in the street, not in the driveway where you can be blocked in.
- Even when the remote areas of the house are the best features, resist the urge to lead a prospect into a basement or a back bedroom where you can be trapped. Let them explore those areas on their own or, at most, follow them only as far as the doorway so they cannot block your exit.
- Always have an escape route planned, and make sure exit doors are unlocked (or even better, left open even on cold days).

Scenario #4: Answering Calls

You get a cold call from a prospect who says he is about to take a new job in the area and he would like to look at some houses in a particular neighborhood his future boss recommended. He says that he's open to other suggestions, and he asks where you live and what your neighborhood is like. Because he'll need to move quickly, he wants to look at homes that are already vacant. After chatting about the kind of house he is looking for, he says he's looking forward to working with you and asks if you're as cute in person as your photo in the ad. He asks, with a friendly chuckle, if you're still "on the market" or has a lucky guy already snapped you up. He closes by saying he'd like to start his search at a particular house in the ad, first thing tomorrow morning, and asks for directions so he can meet you there. How do you respond?

Answer:

- Always avoid giving out personal information to prospects. Do not put your home phone number on your card, and never give out your personal address.
- Be sure that your photo in your marketing materials presents a professional image. Glamour shots can attract the wrong kind of attention. Predators have been known to use agent photos in ads to choose victims.
- What might seem like friendly banter in a social setting can be highly inappropriate in a business relationship. Questions about marital status should raise a red flag. Let him know, politely, that it's your policy to never discuss your personal life with prospects.
- Make sure the prospect is who he says he is by getting the number of his employer so you can verify his story.
- Asking to see only vacant properties is another warning sign...is he trying to make sure you'll be alone?
- Always insist that first meetings take place in your office, and have him fill out a prospect information form. Let him see that other people in your office know where you are going, with whom you are going, and when you'll be back.
- Trust your instincts. If the prospect's behavior is too out-of-line, walk away. No commission is worth compromising your safety. With this prospect, telling him that you are too busy now and referring him to another colleague might be a good test of whether he is looking for a new home or targeting you for harassment or worse. If it becomes clear that he is not really looking for a home, communicate your experience with him to other agents in your area.

Continued on page 3

Scenario 5: Going to Closings

As you are about to leave a closing, you see three men loitering in the parking lot. When you get in your car, they also get into their car, and they pull out behind you as you leave. How would you react?

Answer:

- You may have been targeted by criminals because they think you will be carrying a large sum of money. If you see something that makes you nervous, go back into the office until you feel it is safe to leave, or ask to be escorted to your car.
You can check to see if someone is following you, not by racing away, but by taking an unusual route (such as circling a block).
If it is clear that you are being followed, drive directly to a police station.

Answer:

- This one is a trick question. There is no need for any more, or any less, caution in this scenario. This prospect has agreed to meet first at the office and appears to be willing to provide the information you need. Most of your prospects will simply be who they say they are, people looking for someone to help them find a new home.
Clothing choices may or may not be reliable in judging a person. Criminals can dress up. A banker who wears a suit during the week may feel more comfortable in knock-around clothes on the weekend. Believing that you can develop skills in sizing someone up by his or her appearance leaves you vulnerable to predators who make the effort to fool you.
Trusting your instincts is no excuse for treating prospects any differently based on their race. Treat everyone with the same level of respect by applying the same safety policies to everyone.
It is possible that this prospect may be concerned that he is being treated differently because of his race. Do not let a concern that a safety policy might offend someone cause you to cut corners on safety. Simply explain that safety is unfortunately an ongoing concern in the real estate industry, that your agency has instituted these policies for every new prospect, and assure him that he shouldn't take these policies personally.
Selling is about building relationships and that's tough to do if you're treating potential prospects as felony suspects. Never compromise on safety issues, but also remember to treat people with courtesy and respect, just as you would like to be treated.

Scenario 6: Sizing up a Prospect

A new prospect agrees to meet you at your office on a Saturday to fill out the pre-qualifying information forms. He is African-American and looking for a home in a predominately white neighborhood. Though he lists his occupation as a banker, he is wearing scruffy jeans and a worn T-shirt. He gives you an odd look when you request his license and registration. He tells you that he'll have to go out to the car to get the registration and asks why you need that. What do you do?

Sources: REALTOR® Magazine, REALTOR® Magazine Online, Washington Real Estate Safety Council, New York State Association of REALTORS®.

Calendar grid showing months from JULY to MAR with dates 1-31.

REALTOR® Safety Week 2003

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