

Put Your Gut in Your Safety Toolbox

By: Tracey Hawkins aka "Tracey, the Safety Lady"

What if I told you that there is a tool that could prevent you from being victimized?

What if I told you that you already possess such a tool?

As a former agent who now works in close contact with agents, I know how important tools of the trade are to your profession. I know that you love the latest and greatest technology tools. Those tools are an important component to operating your business. They can even help protect you. However, right now I want to discuss an important tool that should always be in your "toolbox." Especially when you are working in what the Department of Labor classifies as a high-risk occupation.

This tool issues a warning that tells you when you are about to make a dangerous mistake. This tool requires no batteries and is always "on." What if I told you that this tool is free? You would be interested, right?

Gut. Intuition. Instinct. 6th sense. That funny feeling. A small voice.

No matter what you call it. It can save your life. Police officers and rape crises counselors state that when interviewing victims, over 99% of the time the victim will say, "I knew something was wrong," "I knew better" "I had a bad feelings," and so on. It is important to note that trusting your gut is not about embracing prejudice. When you trust your gut you are acting on an instinct, a feeling that something is wrong. You may be in a vulnerable position such as at a showing alone but there are ways to minimize your risk. For instance, always have someone you trust like another agent with you at the showing or leave someone detailed information about where you are and when you should return, that way they can call you if they feel like you've been gone too long.

Gavin de Becker, author of *The Gift of Fear*, wrote an entire book about trusting our gut instinct and believing in intuition. Having been a real estate agent, there were plenty of times when I felt fear and wondered why I was in an empty house with a complete stranger or why I was driving strangers around in my car. Like you, I hushed that warning voice and focused on earning a commission.

Ignoring your gut can get you hurt, killed, assaulted or robbed while working.

As a safety expert, I often get questions about what is the right or wrong way to do the job. There are right ways to show and host open houses, specific safety techniques, but in situations where there are variables and no clear right or wrong answers, listen to your gut. One of the most popular questions is: which is correct, locking the door or not

locking the door when showing? The answer is listening to your gut, trust your instinct. It will tell you what the right answer is for that situation (and actually any situation that you will find yourself in as agents).

According to Stacey Johnson-Cosby, a Reece and Nichols sales agent who works in Kansas and Missouri, her gut comes into play when she enters a house. She typically locks the door behind her. At one time her inner voice told her a potential problem may exist. Johnson-Cosby, a 25-year sales veteran says that sometimes the voice is more overwhelming, demanding that she lock the door. Other times, she doesn't feel the serious need.

Agents often assure me that they work in a "safe" part of town, or never show after dark. Your gut, not the address, nor time of day, will dictate when you need to be extra careful. Criminals have cars, (often very nice cars) therefore they can go anywhere that you may be, even upscale neighborhoods, (especially upscale neighborhoods). Don't let your preconceived notions, for example, apparent affluence equals safety, get in the way of seeing criminals or potential criminal opportunities. Let your instinct guide you, not what you see or other prejudices you have. Following your gut is not about making snap decisions about prejudices you have or the people around you it simply means that when you feel unsafe, in any situation, you remove yourself from that situation. Oftentimes, you will not understand why your gut is sending you fear signals. You can't determine what is wrong. Don't try. Instinct sees something before you realize it. Don't worry about being polite when your body tells you to flee and get out of a dangerous situation. Just go. Your safety is more important than hurting someone's feelings. Prioritize.

Chantay Bridges, an agent with Clear-Choice Realty and Associates in Los Angeles, California, had an experience where her gut prompted her to do something logic would advise against and talk to the neighbors next door. When preparing for an open house she noticed a group of unruly teenagers on the porch next door. She knew it wouldn't be good for potential buyers to see them there. Instead of being scared, intimidated and leaving, her instinct told her that there was no danger. She approached them and recognized one of the youth. She was able to diffuse the situation successfully. She advised that agents take proper precautions, including having a partner host with you, carrying pepper spray, and utilizing safety apps.

Here are 3 things that you need to start doing today to respect that inner voice and to ensure that you are not victimized when you can avoid it:

1. Acknowledge that like all animals in nature, we all possess a gift that allows us to sense danger. However, we are the only ones who routinely ignore it in the interest of being polite. We all have a built-in survival mechanism that is hardly ever wrong. Think about situations where you had a "bad feeling", or were uncomfortable. That was your gut warning you. Once you are aware of what that feels like, be in tune

with it and learn to recognize it. Don't try to figure it out or to use logic. Just listen and escape the situation.

2. Respect that inner voice and act on it without hesitation and without questioning the validity. Once you get a bad feeling about a potential client, a showing situation, or even strange behavior in an open house, believe that feeling. Do some research on all potential clients; find out who they are and if they are legitimate. However, background checks on clients and potential clients must be done consistently and should never be affected by the person him/herself. And then if you are unable to verify who they say they are, whether they really own the property, where they work or anything about them, be ready to let them go.
3. Yes. Be willing to let a potential client go. You can't put a price on working safely and just taking your chances and hoping that the bad feeling you get about these potential clients is wrong. Nothing is worth jeopardizing your safety.
4. Defend your right to put safety before politeness. Do not waiver from your safety practices just because someone else thinks they are silly. Johnson-Cosby says buyers often laugh when they are leaving a house and find the doors locked. "I don't mind. At least they know I take their safety seriously." Crimes often happen when you relax regular safety practices out of convenience or embarrassment. Just that one time, is often the time something goes wrong.

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