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How to Protect Yourself from an Active Shooter

This month's newsletter topic may surprise readers who know I am someone who has a positive attitude, who optimistically welcomes each New Year as an opportunity to enhance personal growth and happiness. I have always believed in the power of positive thinking. Yes, I know that a positive attitude alone doesn't guarantee success, but it certainly beats negative thinking and living under a raincloud. However, given the recent attacks in Paris and San Bernardino and the ongoing terrorist threats, I look to the year ahead understanding that committing to a positive attitude can no longer ignore for preparing for the worst.

An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth, written by Chris Hadfield, embodies this "pursue your dreams, but prepare for the worst" philosophy. You may recognize Hadfield from the famous YouTube videos produced at the International Space Station. His book departs from those scientific presentations to offer inspirational lessons regarding the pursuit of one's dreams.

Chapters like "Sweat the Small Stuff" and "The Power of Negative Thinking" made me appreciate how astronauts must react quickly without panicking to potentially life-threatening events in order to protect their lives and complete their missions. In today's world, this disciplined thinking is important for all of us.

We can incorporate the "be prepared for the worst" approach Hadfield learned at NASA into our lives in a couple of ways. In our investment work, we can routinely conduct "bear market drills" to help us mentally prepare for market downturns so we can better protect our financial assets during the next bout of market volatility. Additionally, in today's unpredictable world, we also should reflect on how to respond to a terrorist attack or active shooter like we saw in Paris and San Bernardino—and we should share our thinking with our family and friends.

I found some valuable resources worth sharing on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) [website](#). Among them are the following:

- A booklet called "[Active Shooter: How to Respond](#)"
- A wallet card called "[Active Shooter: Pocket Card Information](#)"
- A four-minute video called: "[Options for Consideration Active Shooter Preparedness](#)"

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also offers a valuable video, "[Run. Hide. Fight. Surviving an Active Shooter Event.](#)" The FBI's advice, which is consistent with what the DHS offers, is straightforward enough to review with your children:

RUN: When an active shooter is in your vicinity:

- If there is an escape path, attempt to evacuate.
- Evacuate whether others agree to or not.
- Leave your belongings behind.
- Help others escape if possible.
- Prevent others from entering the area.
- Call 9-1-1 when you are safe.

HIDE: If an evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide.

- Lock and/or blockade the door.
- Silence your cell phone.
- Hide behind large objects.
- Remain very quiet.

Your hiding place should:

- Be out of the shooter's view.

- Provide protection if shots are fired in your direction.
- Not trap or restrict your options for movement.

FIGHT: As a last resort, and only if your life is in danger:

- Attempt to incapacitate the shooter.
- Act with physical aggression.
- Improvise weapons.
- Commit to your actions.

9-1-1: When law enforcement arrives:

- Remain calm and follow instructions.
- Keep your hands visible at all times.
- Avoid pointing or yelling.
- Know that help for the injured is on its way.

If you are involved in security at your workplace, you may be interested in these additional DHS resources:

- A 90-minute webinar: [Active Shooter Awareness - Virtual Roundtable](#)
- A [poster](#) summarizing survival steps

Additionally, I'd like to share a security lesson from Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) in Boston. [When It Comes to Hospital Shootings, Emergency Color Codes Don't Work](#), published in *Boston Magazine*, details how color codes like Code Blue or Code Red have long been used to help hospital staff respond to emergencies without inciting alarm. However, this traditional system fails when an emergency such as an active shooter threatens visitors, patients, and others who are strangers to the spectrum of codes.

In the article, Robert Chicarello, director of security at BWH, says the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, which claimed more than 30 lives, prompted him to re-examine the hospital's plans for responding to an active shooter situation. Given that approximately 26,000 people walk through the hospital's doors every day, most with no training in hospital codes, Chicarello insisted the active shooter warning needed to be in "plain English so untrained visitors, patients, anybody who is in the building, can hear it and know what's happening."

Under BWH's old plan, a shooting would have been met with a Code Gray. Through a series of roundtables and trainings, the decision was made in 2013 to replace the Code Gray with a scripted announcement. Therefore, in 2014, when a beloved cardiac surgeon was shot at BWH by a disgruntled relative of a patient, instead of sounding a vague Code Gray warning, a woman's voice came over the public address system and stated: "A life-threatening situation now exists at Watkins Clinic B—Shapiro 2. All persons should immediately move away from that location if it is safe to do so. If it is not safe to move away, shelter in place immediately."

The clarity of the message saved lives. After the incident, BWH re-evaluated their emergency announcements, attempting to further clarify "shelter in place."

As Hadfield underscores in his book, when the stakes are high, preparation means everything. Whether it's a college final exam or the deciding game of the World Series, he argues that the outcome is heavily influenced by the level of preparation. Just as we manage your finances to handle life's surprises, our increasingly dangerous world demands that we prepare to defend ourselves from a terrorist attack or an active shooter that we could encounter at school, the theatre, or the workplace. To help ensure that you are never caught off-guard, I'll continue to share resources as I come across them.

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