

Security Briefs – Situational Awareness Series with Resources

Part 2 – Informed and Observant: How to See What’s Coming

Introduction

In our last episode, we explored what situational awareness is—and why posture matters. Today we’re going to talk about how to become more aware in practical terms by being informed and observant. Remember that we provide helpful resources in the downloadable transcript of this episode.

Cooper Color Code

Just a quick aside: You may have learned about the Cooper Color Code approach to Situational Awareness, and this is a good model. We use it in some of our training, and it is helpful. It looks at how much attention you pay to a given situation using a color scale: White, yellow, orange, and red with white being completely unaware to red being what is called “action mode.”

But I chose not to focus on that in this series because while helpful, it was developed for law enforcement and firearms training. Instead, I we will focus on a more incarnational model of situational awareness which more easily fits with our calling and mission.

So, let’s get to it.

Be Informed

Good awareness starts before you step out the door. Being informed means knowing what’s happening in your community—politically, socially, and culturally.

This includes:

- Staying up to date with embassy alerts, local news, and community bulletins.
- Knowing which neighborhoods are safe - and which are under surveillance.
- Understanding the local calendar: holidays, election days, or protest anniversaries.

Here’s an example: One missionary in South Asia always reviewed the week’s news on Monday mornings. One day, he learned that a prominent nationalist leader had called for a “day of resistance” on that Friday. He changed his schedule and stayed away from a typically busy downtown area. That Friday, protests turned violent right where he would have been.

Being informed doesn't mean being glued to the news—it means building habits of curiosity and asking locals what's happening.

Be Observant

Being observant is what you do when you're already out in the world. It's not about staring at people—it's about noticing patterns and disruptions.

The key skill here is called “baseline and anomaly.” Learn what's normal in your area: how people gather, what traffic looks like, where vendors set up. Then, when something breaks that pattern—an angry face, a stalled vehicle, a crowd forming—you can take note.

We were speaking to a Global Worker who told the story of passing the same intersection every morning. One day, he noticed something off. There was a police presence, fewer vendors, and a slow trickle of pedestrians. So, he took another route home. That evening, a political riot broke out right at that corner.

The difference between an alert worker and a distracted one can be the difference between safety and regret.

Now you know. In the next episode, we'll talk about what to do with the information and observations you gather—how to be prepared.

Resources:

- U.S. State Department Travel Advisories: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html>
- Global Incident Map: <https://www.globalincidentmap.com/>