

Sales trainer, motivational speaker and business guru Traci Smith takes a creative look at how to ensure failure and return to the bottom rung time after time.

Never Sell to Strangers

10 steps to Staying safe in a deadly profession

We teach children at a tender age to never ever let a stranger in the house. But when we earn our living doing just that there are some basic strategies to keep in mind every time we meet with a client.

Paranoia is an unattractive quality – unless you're agent Fox Mulder from the X-files, but keeping your guard up every hour of every day is one of the best ways to make sure you go home safe and secure every night. Most of us women should know better than to ever meet a client alone or show a house to someone who hasn't gone through the loan process, but many men have a false sense of security. While men don't experience the same frequency of violent attacks against them statistically, the possibility does exist. Not too long ago, a male realtor got a call to show a million dollar home. Thrilled with the idea of a big check he ignored the following rules and met the buyer—it was days before his body was found in the vacant house.

1. Know Your Clients

Never ever ever ever show a property unless the buyer has been prequalified. This rule will save you countless wasted hours and heartache, but more importantly, it will serve as the first line of defense. If a criminal has a diabolical intent they are going to attempt to get away with it. If they know a loan officer has their address, social security number

and place of employment, they're less likely to risk getting caught.

2. Use the Buddy System

Before you go on an appointment, make sure several folks know exactly where you're going to be and when you should be done. On a first meeting, have a coworker call you 5 minutes into the appointment. Set up a code – like 'the green folder is on my desk,' means all feels safe. Referencing a yellow folder means someone should head your way and call back in 5 minutes for a status update – regardless of how inconvenient it might be. Not answering the call or a reference to red means call the police. Your clients will understand a brief interruption.

3. There's Safety In Numbers

When you're showing a house or getting a tour from a seller on a listing appointment, make sure everyone stays together. Walk behind the clients at all times and pay attention to their body language. If anything feels strange, leave immediately – no commission is worth an assault.

4. Don't assume taking a friend is enough to keep you safe.

Though there is safety in numbers, there are no guarantees. My first year in the business, a fellow agent got a call that made her a little nervous. She asked her office mate to go with her on the appointment. The man tied up both ladies—they were extremely lucky that he was only interested in their jewelry and purses, it could have been so much worse.

5. Keep Valuables in Your Car.

Never take your purse or jewelry into an appointment, and if you're driving buyers around, put them in your trunk. Never tempt anyone.

6. Trust Your Gut.

I've been wrong hundreds of times, but my gut has a perfect record. Anytime I have an uneasy feeling in my stomach, what I fear comes to fruition. If it feels wrong, leave.

7. Fight Dirty

God forbid you're ever put in a hostile situation, but if so, fight like a banshee. Kicking a man in the groin will distract him for at least a few seconds. If you can bite then do it with vim and vigor. Use your keys, a pen, or anything you can get your hands on. I carry a tiny can of mace that looks like a nice pen. It may take some searching, but there are all kinds of ways to protect yourself. You can order pepper spray in pen and lipstick containers at www.safety-n-protection.com.

8. Keep Your Wits

If something goes wrong, don't panic and lose your head. Take a deep breath and focus on staying as safe as possible. Make sure your assailant knows someone will be calling to check on you. Protect yourself with fervor. Often, assailants want an easy target—put up the fight of your life.

9. Give Them What They Want

Hopefully an assailant will only be interested in your possessions. If so, throw anything they might want in one direction and run the opposite way. No possession is worth more than your life, so give them anything and everything that will help you to escape.

10. Don't Give Up

Never stop looking for an escape route. If you're ever thrown in a trunk remember that almost all cars now have

some sort of a release lever. Use a cell phone, scream and do everything possible to escape.

Lastly, know that would-be assailants don't always commit their crimes on the first meeting. Don't let down your guard just because someone seems nice and says all the right things.

Traci Smith owns the 4th highest producing Century 21 office in the nation. She is the author of the critically acclaimed book *Defy the Odds* and does motivational and sales training. Visit her online at www.TraciSmithOnline.com.