

Thinking your way to a safer life sounds like the title of a paperback book stationed on a rack next to the register at your local bookstore featuring the smiling face of the author in front of a brightly colored soft background. While many people might look at that title and think, “sure, that will work,” I hope you’ll give me a moment to convince you that there is some merit to this idea. Thinking about crime is something most people would rather avoid, especially thinking about being the victim of a person crime. Today, I’d like to challenge you to change that notion in the name of personal safety.

When we encounter danger, like being suddenly confronted by a criminal, our minds race to find a workable solution to the danger as quickly as possible. When a person’s mind is unable to quickly find a workable solution, it will choose from its three default solutions of fight, flight, or freeze. These default solutions are rarely the best choice and may make the person less safe. Fortunately, we can train our minds to pick better solutions. An easy way to help train your mind to pick a better solution to a given situation is to picture the situation in your mind and think through a safe solution. Repeating this mental exercise will help build these connections in your mind between the dangerous situation and the safe response, increasing your personal safety. Athletes use this technique often. Undoubtedly, athletes spend hours and hours of time physically performing the skills required in their sport. Athletes spend time thinking their way through these skills as well to perfect their game and be ready for whatever situation they face. Golfers ponder “swing thoughts,” basketball players visualize their free throw falling into the hoop, and the football place kicker sees the ball travel through the uprights even before the snap. Just like these athletes, you can prepare a safe course of action for yourself should crime find you.

It would be near impossible, and likely an unhealthy exercise, to imagine yourself in every possible criminal situation. In advising people to mentally prepare themselves for the unlikely event of being caught in a crime, I would offer it is best to focus on situations wherein your safety is at risk. How would you react to the approach of a criminal in a public space who is demanding your purse, wallet, or cell phone? Unless you are Chuck Norris or Superman, the best course of action is going to be to trade personal property for your physical safety. Larger metropolitan areas are seeing a rise in car-jacking crimes. How would you react to a criminal who accosts you and demands your vehicle? Once again, trading property that can be replaced for your personal safety is the best course of action. Mentally rehearsing a calm and deliberate response to these situations will prepare you should you ever find yourself in the midst of criminal activity.

Making the recommendation people surrender personal property to protect their safety is easy advice to give from the comfort of my office. In practice, it might be a bit harder to do because of the value of the property to the person. To that end, my advice

is to carefully consider the contents of your purse, wallet, or cell phone to ensure that losing these items, whether to crime or misplacement, is less of a burden. Carrying only the items you truly need with you in your purse or wallet will lessen the effect of their loss. The loss of one credit card and \$25 cash is going to be much easier to absorb than losing all your credit cards, a week's worth of cash, and a handful of items of sentimental value. Ensuring that the data contained on your cell phone is regularly backed up will help mitigate its loss. Ensuring your vehicle is insured to the extent that is financially responsible for you will help soften the effects of both an accident and a crime. When leaving home, travel light with a thought towards only having with you the things that you can afford to lose.

Your first line of defense against becoming the victim of a person crime is being alert to and aware of potential hazards around you. Some people, despite their best efforts, become victims of person crimes every year. Putting some thought into preparing yourself to mitigate the effects of crime and responding safely to person crimes can pay dividends in the unlikely event crime finds you. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.