





## OPINION

## Agent/broker perspective: What can brokers do to improve agent safety?

Brokers should create an atmosphere where safety is the top priority and reinforced with frequent reminders and qualified training

BY ANTHONY ASKOWITZ   Today 2:00 A.M. 

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In this monthly column, *Anthony Askowitz* will explore a hypothetical Miami real estate situation from both sides of the broker/agent dynamic.

*A female Miami real estate agent has concerns about safety and security while doing her job and wants to know what support she can expect from her broker.*

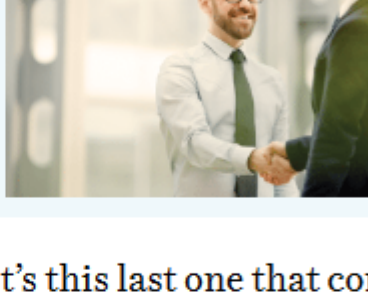
### Agent perspective

As a veteran real estate agent, I am well aware of the many things I must do to protect myself out in the field. I only show homes to qualified, verified buyers; I check out prospective buyers on social media and Google; I meet unknown buyers first at my office; I only walk into the homes after the buyer has entered first; I bring “buddies” with me to showings; and I make sure my office knows where I am at all times.

With open houses, I lock the door, carry pepper spray with me when I answer the door, and keep 911 ready to be clicked on my phone should I find myself at risk.

However, if I’m being totally honest, I don’t follow all of these rules all the time. If a trusted friend or colleague vouches for a prospect, I may not take the extra steps of looking up their backgrounds. And in a competitive market, I must admit to maybe being susceptible to someone eager to meet with me on short notice.

Many of my colleagues throughout the country recently reported getting frequent, urgent calls from a character named “Dwayne Bergeman.” who seemed to only target females, calling from different area codes and phone numbers and only offering a one-day window of availability.



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It’s this last one that concerns me because if I’m having a slow month, would I perhaps let my guard down to meet this mysterious buyer?

As an anonymous colleague in Minnesota (who provided audio of the call to Inman) mentioned, “When you are a rural Realtor, you go out all the time. I have to. So now I have this sense of fear, and I don’t want to be dramatic about it, but it is there.”

Rural, suburban and urban agents alike all feel urgency to get their listings sold, and with 63 percent of Realtors being female (according to the [2017 NAR Member Profile](#)), this is a problem that primarily affects my gender.

What can I expect from my broker and agency to help improve my safety while doing my job?

### Broker perspective

This is very tricky and sensitive issue, but one we should address head-on. Every successful real estate agent must learn to manage awkward and uncomfortable situations, but that is very different from concerns over safety and security. I worry about my agents’ safety all the time and remind them to make it their top priority, but we all can become complacent when months and even years go by without any incidents or close calls.

Most of our agents are successful producers who gather leads, calls and referrals directly, which puts the responsibility of vetting and researching potential customers directly on them. Furthermore, all agents are independent contractors, which limits the extent to which we brokers can enforce safety requirements.

Also complicating this issue is a lack of coherent, central mandate over responsibility for agent safety: our industry does not have a safety or oversight enforcement division, and while NAR recently mandated that state and local associations offer safety and security training to members, there are no set criteria or requirements.

Finally, experience has taught me the challenges of getting agents to attend voluntary workshops and programs that do not directly improve their bottom line, regardless of true intrinsic value.

Still, it doesn’t have to become a broker obligation for proactive brokers who genuinely want to protect their agents to put some systems in place.

### How to meet halfway

Real estate safety expert [Tracey Hawkins](#) has provided *Realtor Magazine* with outstanding advice for brokers who want to establish their own safety programs, which can be unique to individual markets and communities.

Essentially, each agent must take the primary responsibility for following steps to ensure their safety, while brokers should create an environment where safety is repeatedly prioritized through training and communication.

What follows is my distillation of her advice, my own experiences and “best practices”:

- 1 Outline and communicate a formal safety policy:** Prepare a document that spells out the “common sense” advice outlined in this column and its links, and have each new and existing agent commit to follow the policy by signing it.
- 2 Post the policy:** Have a poster created with the policy spelled out, and clearly display it in the office.
- 3 Safety training:** Host a required safety workshop once a year, with [a qualified trainer or speaker](#) requiring a “yes or no” RSVP, to show that the agent has chosen to participate or declined the opportunity.
- 4 Keep it fresh:** Introduce agents to [new apps and devices](#) that can make safety even easier and more effective.

For more on real estate safety, check out the following articles as well:

- [“52 everyday safety tips for real estate agents and brokers”](#)
- [“12 safety ideas for your next open house”](#)
- [“6 simple steps for agents to increase personal safety”](#)
- [“6 safety apps all agents should have at the ready”](#)

*Anthony is the broker-owner of RE/MAX Advance Realty in South Miami and Kendall, leading the activities of more than 170 agents. He is also a working Realtor who sells more than 125 homes a year. In 2017, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce honored him with the R.E.A.L. award in the category of “Real Estate Broker – Residential.”*

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