



TPOP + RLPSA
FIELD GUIDE SERIES

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS DURING MAJOR EVENTS

Preparing Restaurant Teams for
FIFA 2026 and Other High-Impact Events



RECOGNIZE CHANGES

Spot unusual behavior, crowd movement, and warning signs before situations escalate.



COMMUNICATE EARLY

Build shared awareness through timely reporting and team communication.



RESPOND WITH CONFIDENCE

Give employees practical tools to assess, assist, and escalate when needed.



**HELPING RESTAURANT TEAMS NOTICE EARLIER,
COMMUNICATE FASTER, AND RESPOND BETTER.**

Who's Behind This Guide

This field guide grew out of a live webinar presented by The Power of Preparedness (TPOP) and hosted by the Restaurant Loss Prevention & Security Association (RLPSA), featuring Global Awareness Professionals (GAP) - three organizations that approach workplace safety from complementary angles.

■ The Power of Preparedness (TPOP)

A workplace violence prevention training company serving food service, retail, healthcare, manufacturing, and hospitality. Its scenario-based, micro-lesson approach makes awareness practical and repeatable for frontline teams - built to build confidence, not fear.

Learn more at thepowerofpreparedness.com

■ RLPSA

The trade association dedicated to loss prevention, safety, and security professionals in the restaurant and food service industry, connecting practitioners to share what actually works in real operating environments.

Learn more at rlpsa.com

■ Global Awareness Professionals (GAP)

Expert-led security training and preparedness for venue safety and security - behavioral threat recognition, active-threat response, crisis de-escalation, life-safety crowd management, and red-team exercises.

Learn more at gapglobaltraining.com

THE PANEL



Tom Stein, LPC, CFI, CFE

Vice President, RLPSA - Session Host

A veteran asset protection and enterprise-risk leader who has designed and directed loss-prevention strategies for major retail and food-and-beverage brands across domestic and international markets.



Mark Herrera

President & Chief Security Strategist, GAP

Retired SWAT sergeant and "Top 25 Most Influential" security leader with 500+ live trainings, teaching teams to recognize concerning behavior early and de-escalate before it escalates.



Ruben Olivas

Director of Asset Protection, Whataburger - RLPSA Board

Leads asset protection and physical security across one of the nation's largest quick-service brands, using technology and frontline engagement to cut losses and protect people.



Dan Stechow

Founder, President & CEO, TPOP

Dan works at the intersection of creativity, technology, and human behavior. After founding multiple digital companies, he built TPOP on one belief: education, creativity, and technology can change behavior at scale.

DISCLAIMER

This field guide is provided for general informational and educational purposes only and does not constitute legal, security, or professional advice. It summarizes a live panel discussion and reflects the views of the individual panelists, not necessarily those of their organizations. Organizations should consult qualified professionals when developing workplace violence prevention policies.

THE BUSINESS CASE

The Painful Costs of Workplace Violence

Aggregate and downstream costs often go unmeasured.

Workplace violence - or even the threat of it - reaches the bottom line of every organization. Beyond the human harm, it drives turnover, lost productivity, manager distraction, and legal exposure, and it can damage a brand's reputation long after an incident. These costs are routinely underreported because organizations track only the direct, visible expenses rather than the aggregate, downstream effects.



Cost Category	Business Impact
Employee Turnover	Roughly one in five employees exposed to workplace violence consider leaving.
Lost Productivity	Disruption, distraction, and fear reduce output across whole teams.
Manager Distraction	Incidents pull leadership attention away from operations for extended periods.
Legal & Liability Risk	Out-of-court settlements commonly reach \$250,000 or more per claim.
Insurance Pressure	Claims drive premium increases that compound over time.
Lost Customers & Reputation	Publicized incidents damage customer and partner relationships.

PART 1

Awareness Is a Shared Responsibility

"Safety is not a department. It is a culture."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

Safety Is Not a Department - It's a Culture

Organizations are safest when safety is owned by everyone, every day.



- **Leadership sets the tone**

Expectations start at the top.

- **Everyone plays a role**

Concerns are everyone's business.

- **Teams recognize what changes**

Frontline staff see shifts first.

- **Communication moves concerns forward**

Observations reach the right people fast.

Safety culture is not a program or a department - it is the collection of daily behaviors that shape how teams notice and respond to concerns. Leadership sets expectations, frontline employees see changes first, and clear communication ensures important observations reach the right people quickly.

"Safety is not a department. It is a culture."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

Every Employee Is an Early-Warning System

Frontline staff often see customer behavior before anyone else



- **Security can't be everywhere**
Coverage always has gaps.
- **Managers can't see every interaction**
Most moments go unwatched.
- **Employees observe conditions in real time**
They see it as it happens.

Cashiers, servers, and hosts often see customer behavior before anyone else. The goal is not to turn them into security professionals - it is to help them recognize meaningful changes and communicate early.

Communication Is Key

Shared observations reveal patterns no single person would catch



- **Different employees see different things**
Each vantage point is partial.
- **Multiple observations build a fuller picture**
Pieces combine into a pattern.
- **Early communication reduces uncertainty**
Sharing closes the gaps.

Awareness grows when information is shared. One person's small observation, combined with another's, can reveal a pattern neither would have caught alone.

"The people closest to the guest experience often see those early indicators."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

PART 2

What Changes During Major Events

"Just pretend you're next to a stadium - and you'll always hit that home run."

- Ruben Olivas, Whataburger

Why Major Events Matter

Major events don't create new problems. They amplify existing ones.



- **Traffic rises**

More people, faster pace.

- **Customers are unfamiliar**

New faces, new expectations.

- **Staffing is strained**

Teams stretched thin.

- **Small mistakes escalate**

Minor issues grow fast.

Most people picture stadiums and checkpoints when they think about FIFA. For retailers and restaurants, the challenge is closer to home: higher traffic, unfamiliar customers, staffing strain, and service disruptions all raise operational stress. Situational awareness helps teams recognize issues earlier and respond more effectively.

THE RESULT

More volume, greater pressure for speed and accuracy, and higher emotion with lower frustration tolerance - small mistakes escalate faster than on a normal day.

Language and Cultural Gaps

Major events bring communication challenges many employees rarely face



- **Language barriers**
Words don't always carry.
- **Unfamiliar behaviors and norms**
Customs differ widely.
- **Different service expectations**
Norms vary by culture.
- **Misunderstandings escalate faster**
Small gaps grow quickly.

Global events bring communication challenges many employees don't face day to day. Small misunderstandings can escalate quickly when neither side shares a language or set of expectations.

Preparing Employees for Global Visitors

A few simple service habits prevent most misunderstandings



- **Use simple language**
Short, clear phrasing.
- **Use visual aids; confirm understanding**
Point, then check back.
- **Be extra patient; stay calm**
Give the moment time.
- **Listen first; avoid assumptions**
Hear before you judge.

A few simple service habits prevent most misunderstandings: speak clearly, point to menus or payment options, allow extra time, and confirm understanding before proceeding.

"Listen first, stay respectful - we're asking people to do what we already ask, just more so."

- Dan Stechow, *The Power of Preparedness*

PART 3

Preparedness Begins With Awareness

"Teams that recognize signals early have more time, more options, better outcomes."

- Tom Stein, RLPSA

The Guest-Service Interjection Model

Using a genuine service interaction to assess - not accuse.



- **A non-threatening reason to engage**
Service is a natural opener.
- **A genuine approach lowers defenses**
People respond to authenticity.
- **Every interaction gathers information**
Behavior reveals more than answers.
- **The goal is to assess, not accuse**
Read the response, not the person.

Approaching someone with a genuine offer of help gives an employee a natural, non-threatening way to engage - and how a person responds is often more revealing than anything they say.

"You're not profiling people. You're profiling behavior."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

What Good Situational Awareness Looks Like

Awareness is observable and coachable, not a vague instruction



- **Scanning periodically**

Look up from the task.

- **Noticing changes**

Spot what shifted.

- **Staying engaged with customers**

Present, not distracted.

- **Communicating concerns**

Say what you see.

Many organizations tell staff to "be aware" without defining it. Good awareness is observable and coachable: look up from tasks, notice changes, stay engaged, and speak up when something feels different.

"You have to be in condition yellow - prepared to react to a perceived threat."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

The Recognition Window

Most incidents give warning signs before escalation occurs.



- **Escalation is often gradual**
Few incidents begin at full intensity.
- **Warning signs usually appear first**
There is something to notice.
- **Recognition creates options**
Noticing early expands the response.
- **Time improves outcomes**
Seconds and minutes both matter.

The Recognition Window is the period between the first observable concern and the moment a situation escalates. Sometimes it lasts minutes, sometimes seconds - but recognizing and acting within it is what creates the opportunity to reduce harm.

"Teams that recognize those signals early have more time, more options, and ultimately better outcomes."

- Tom Stein, RLPSA

PART 4

Train Your Team on These Seven Things

"Would a reasonable, prudent person say this is worth reporting?"

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

1. Escalating Emotional Behavior

One of the most common indicators leaders should train employees to recognize



- **Raised voices**
Volume climbs.
- **Increasing frustration**
Patience runs thin.
- **Aggressive pacing or invading space**
Movement turns tense.
- **Repeated complaints**
The same grievance, louder.

Most confrontations begin with frustration, not aggression. Recognizing rising emotional intensity early creates room for de-escalation and manager involvement.

2. Threatening Body Language

Physical warning signs often appear before physical aggression



- **Clenched fists**
Tension shows in the hands.
- **Invading personal space**
Distance closes fast.
- **Aggressive pointing**
Gestures turn sharp.
- **Sudden silence after yelling**
A quiet that signals escalation.

Employees aren't expected to predict violence - only to recognize behaviors that signal elevated risk. Physical indicators often appear earlier than verbal ones; the response is distance, communication, and safety.

"Eighty percent of our communication is nonverbal."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

3. Unusual Crowd Movement

Crowds often signal trouble before anyone understands the cause



- **Sudden gathering**
People converge fast.
- **Rapid dispersal**
A crowd scatters at once.
- **Unexpected bottlenecks**
Flow jams without reason.
- **Panic movement**
A rush in one direction.

Crowds often communicate before anyone understands the cause. Sudden gathering, rapid dispersal, unexpected bottlenecks, or panic movement are all data. When many people suddenly change direction, that movement itself is the signal - move first, understand later.

4. Suspicious Interest in Operations

Concern rises when attention turns to restricted areas and procedures



- **Restricted areas**
Focus where guests don't go.
- **Staffing patterns**
Who works, and when.
- **Security procedures**
Cameras, routines, access.
- **Repeated visits**
Return trips with no clear purpose.

Most customers are simply curious. Concern rises when attention focuses on restricted areas, staffing patterns, or security procedures - repeated visits without normal purpose, excessive questions, or photographing exits and cameras. Employees should know when and how to report it.

"All of these should be warning flags - indicators that people should report on."

- Dan Stechow, *The Power of Preparedness*

5. Disoriented, Impaired, or Intoxicated Individuals

Unpredictable behavior calls for distance, calm, and help



- **Stay calm and respectful**
Set the tone.
- **Create space and get help**
Distance, then support.
- **Focus on safety**
Not enforcement.
- **Don't judge**
The cause may be medical.

Impairment, medical distress, or crisis can make behavior unpredictable. Employees should know when to seek help and keep distance, and avoid escalating a situation that may need support rather than enforcement.

6. Trusting Intuition

A sense that something is off is often the brain reading real cues



- **The brain detects danger pre-consciously**
It reads cues you can't name.
- **"Off" feelings rest on real cues**
The signal is grounded.
- **Trusting it early buys time and distance**
Act before you can explain.

A sense that something is "off" is often the brain processing subtle cues below conscious awareness. Security professionals train to treat that feeling as a prompt to observe, report, and follow procedure.

"We need to be listening to our intuition."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

7. Anything That Sounds Like a Firecracker

Assume the more serious possibility and act without delay



■ Assume the worst - it's the right call

Default to caution.

■ Every second matters

Reaction time is everything.

■ Don't fear being wrong

The cost of caution is small.

Real gunfire is frequently misidentified as a backfire or dropped object. The training principle is to assume the more serious possibility and act. If you're wrong, the cost is a moment of inconvenience.

"Assuming the worst is the right thing to do under those conditions, because every second does indeed matter."

- Dan Stechow, *The Power of Preparedness*

PART 5

Why Employees Miss Warning Signs

"The number one threat costing organizations millions is complacency."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

Normalcy Bias

The quiet assumption that today is no different from yesterday



- **People seek non-threatening explanations**
The mind wants it to be nothing.
- **Familiar settings create false reassurance**
Routine feels safe.
- **Concerning behavior gets rationalized**
Excuses come easily.
- **Delay shrinks the response window**
Hesitation costs time.

Normalcy bias is the assumption that today is no different from yesterday. It encourages harmless explanations for unusual events and delays action. Early reporting beats delayed certainty.

"I Didn't Want to Overreact"

The biggest barrier to early action is hesitation, not awareness



- **Conditioned to avoid "causing problems"**
Trained to stay quiet.
- **Fear of looking dramatic**
Worry about being judged.
- **Reporting confused with "snitching"**
A cultural hang-up.
- **Plain social discomfort**
Speaking up feels awkward.

The biggest barrier to early intervention is rarely awareness - it's hesitation rooted in social conditioning. Effective cultures reframe early reporting as expected, valued, and protected behavior.

"A reporting concern is not the same as accusing someone."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

Focus Locks: The Awareness Killers

Busy environments create tunnel vision that awareness must overcome



- **Headphones mask auditory cues**

Sound gets filtered out.

- **Phones narrow the visual field**

Eyes lock on a screen.

- **Task fixation creates tunnel vision**

Heads-down misses the room.

- **Distraction slows reaction time**

Attention arrives late.

Employees can't observe what they aren't looking at. Busy environments naturally create tunnel vision - which is why awareness depends on periodically looking up and scanning.

"The victims I've interviewed always say the same thing: I wish I'd been paying attention."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

Event Fatigue

The greatest risk may come after awareness declines.



- **Unfamiliar crowds are draining**

Sustained novelty tires people out.

- **Vigilance decreases**

Attention erodes over a long event.

- **Complacency develops**

Unusual starts to feel normal.

- **Indicators get missed**

The thing that stood out no longer does.

As employees grow accustomed to unusual conditions, they stop noticing changes that would have drawn attention on Day One. Leaders should build reinforcement into longer events rather than front-loading it.

"The number one threat costing organizations millions of dollars is complacency."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

PART 6

How Leaders Build Awareness Into Operations

"The body will go where the mind has been. If the mind hasn't been there, the body won't follow."

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

The 5-Minute Pre-Shift Awareness Huddle

A brief pre-shift conversation reinforces expectations and focus



- **Expected traffic levels**
Know the day's pace.
- **Local event activity**
What's happening nearby.
- **Recent incidents**
What just happened here.
- **Behavioral reminders**
What to watch for.

Awareness isn't built by annual training alone. A brief pre-shift conversation reinforces expectations and focuses attention on what matters most that day - often more effectively than a long policy review.

The Questions a Supervisor Should Ask

Open-ended questions surface concerns early and signal that input matters



- **What are you seeing today?**
Surface fresh observations.
- **What feels different?**
Name the change.
- **What concerns do you have?**
Invite the unspoken.
- **What should I be aware of?**
Pull issues upward.

Employees often notice issues long before managers do. Open-ended questions surface concerns early and signal that leadership values what the team observes.

"It's called the front line for a reason - they're out front. Ask, listen, react."

- Dan Stechow, *The Power of Preparedness*

Reward the Behavior, Not Just the Outcome

Recognize employees who speak up early, even when nothing comes of it



- **Early reporting can prevent escalation**

Speaking up changes outcomes.

- **Near misses are successful interventions**

Nothing happening is a win.

- **Recognition reinforces awareness**

Praise repeats the behavior.

- **What gets rewarded gets repeated**

Culture follows incentives.

Recognize employees who speak up early - even when the situation resolves on its own. Treating a "good catch" as a win, not an overreaction, builds the reporting culture that saves lives.

"Celebrate the wins - and when something could have been handled better, make it a coaching moment."

- Ruben Olivas, Whataburger

One Change This Week

Turning "If You See Something, Say Something" into operational action.



- **Identify one communication barrier**

What makes early reporting harder here?

- **Improve one escalation pathway**

Where do concerns get stuck on the way up?

- **Reinforce one awareness behavior**

What should the team notice and respond to?

- **Recognize one employee contribution**

Who spoke up recently and deserves a thank-you?

Preparedness improves through repetition. Pick one concrete move this week and follow through - then pick another next week.

MAKE IT A HABIT

Put a safety moment on the next team meeting: note the exits, ask one awareness question, and acknowledge one good catch. Routine is what makes it stick.

CONCLUSION

Four Take-Aways

Prepared organizations recognize earlier, communicate faster, and recover better.

1 Most threats begin with observable changes

Behavior shifts before violence does. Trained observers with a strong baseline notice it.

2 Awareness creates intervention opportunities

Every moment between first observation and escalation is a chance to change the outcome.

3 Communication speed affects outcomes

The faster a concern is reported and acted on, the more options remain available.

4 Culture and training drive results

No tool or policy substitutes for a culture where reporting is normal, expected, and valued.

THE GOAL IS CONFIDENCE

Prepared teams are calmer, not more fearful. Confidence comes from knowing what to look for, what to say, and who to tell - long before anything happens.

The Path to Reducing Workplace Violence

The most useful shift a leader can make is how they account for prevention training. Treated as a line-item cost, it is the first thing cut. Treated as protection for revenue, brand, and people, it earns its place in the budget.

STOP

Thinking of training as a cost center - an expense to minimize, defer, or cut.

START

Thinking of training as a revenue and brand protector - a measurable investment in resilience.

Move	What It Looks Like
Calculate the exposure	Turnover, liability, and lost-productivity costs are real and estimable. Put a number on them.
Reframe the spend	Position prevention training as protection for revenue, brand, and people.
Pair digital with human	Online micro-lessons normalize the language; live discussion makes it land.
Measure the behavior	Track early reports and "good catches," not just incidents avoided.

Q&A Highlights

Real questions and answers from the session's live Q&A, lightly condensed.

Q How do you get frontline employees to pay attention to all this without making them feel like they're supposed to be security guards?

You have to put real value on those employees and show them how vital their role is. Assign people to identify the risks they have run into - a quick in-service - then reward and recognize those near misses, even just with public thanks. When people become advocates of their own environment, they own it. Build the culture from the bottom up.

- Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals

Q For stores that aren't anywhere near a stadium, is this really something to worry about?

Whether it's a stadium or a late-night drive-thru, people walk in hungry and sometimes angry, and that can grow into something bigger. Just pretend you're next to a stadium and you'll always hit the home run you need to. The most important thing is consistency - not a one-time training, but how you follow up on it.

- Ruben Olivas, Whataburger

Q How does your organization actually make this happen - do you train the trainers?

We lean on our partnerships with the training and operations teams. We celebrate the wins, and when something could have been handled better, we address it collectively. Employees will listen to security, but they really pay attention to their own operations leaders - so that partnership is what makes the message land.

- Ruben Olivas, Whataburger

Q With constant turnover, don't these messages just have to be delivered over and over?

You can't give the training, walk away, and hope it works. They run the same play every year - that's why they haven't won the Super Bowl. Keep it short and selective, designate a 'grand champion' in each restaurant who models it, and above all, follow up to make sure it's executed shift to shift.

- Ruben Olivas, Whataburger

Q We're already short-staffed most days. How realistic is it to expect employees to pay attention to everything around them?

It has to be realistic - there's no escape from these realities, whether you worry about people getting hurt, the hit to your business, or the state of our communities. People won't figure their way around this on their own, so it comes down to training, training, training.

- Dan Stechow, The Power of Preparedness

Q&A Highlights (continued)

Q What's the difference between someone just having a bad day and someone who's actually becoming a problem?

If you're staying left of bang, you catch the pacing, fidgeting, and facial expressions early - and that alone can deter it. Once it crosses over, there's an emotional charge, and how your team approaches matters. Tell your people not to take it personally: they're challenging the authority you represent, not you. That makes it far easier to handle.

- *Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals*

Q Can you share a few near-miss success stories from your business?

We all have intuition - the key is identifying it, reacting to it, and using it. We can't be in the restaurants 24/7, but our employees, families, and customers are. We don't need a hero going for the grand slam; we need everyone working as a team - and using the panic alarms, cameras, and call-for-help they've been trained on.

- *Ruben Olivas, Whataburger*

Q Leave us with some words of wisdom - where is this going, and what can we do together?

Embrace an all-hazard, all-threat approach, because the risk isn't going away. What hurts us most is the disruption of the decision-making process - the OODA loop. We observe, but if we can't orient fast enough, we can't decide or act. Paint the picture and inoculate your teams to the variables through reality-based training.

- *Mark Herrera, Global Awareness Professionals*