

The Martialist Issue Seven Subscriber Content

The Tactical Cubicle

By Phil Elmore

It's relatively easy to discuss tactical preparations in your home and when hiking, camping, and traveling in uncontrolled areas. In environments over which you have little control – or, more appropriately, in environments strictly controlled by those with power over you – these issues become more complicated. I am speaking specifically of corporate office environments as typified by the “cubicle farm.”

Any corporate environment presents specific challenges to the otherwise prepared individual. Political correctness renders any discussion of tactical matters an iffy proposition. Company policy generally prohibits the possession of weapons, even those for which the owner has a state license. The semi-public nature of an office building makes such places a personal security nightmare, especially in large firms with frequent visitors. What, then, is the martialist to do?

As a writer, I have worked in a variety of office environments ranging from “totally informal” to “Dilbert Dystopia.” The challenge to create – and the need to work within – a “tactical cubicle” has varied from place to place, but I have tried to stay aware and prepared at each. Presented here are guidelines for making your office space as secure as possible.

Stay Visually Alert

The joke in any cube farm is that employees pop up like prairie dogs whenever anything interesting or unusual happens. The average cubicle is about five feet tall. This means that it

screens most visuals from without unless the occupant is tall enough to see over its walls when standing. If you can see over your cubicle walls, stand and stretch periodically. Look around and be aware of who's moving about. Do you see anything out of the ordinary? Does anyone look odd, upset, disturbed, or unhappy? Do you see anyone you do not recognize and, if so, are they behaving as if they don't belong there?

Take a “prairie dog survey” periodically when working. If you can't see over your cubicle walls, leave the cube and tour the immediate area. It never hurts to stretch your legs. I walk around the building twice a day with coworkers and supplement these trips with frequent “prairie dogs.”

Stay Aurally Alert

Listen to what is going on around you. Stay quiet in your cubicle and simply “keep an ear out” for conversations and activity within earshot. What are the moods of those in your vicinity? Is anyone having a domestic dispute or ongoing personal problems? Do any of your fellow employees sound ready to snap? Do they speak jokingly of this? Is there any chance an angry spouse or lover could show up at the office? (This happens more often than you might think.) Who dislikes whom in your office, and how deep do these feelings go?

You must, of course, listen for any disturbances that indicate trouble or danger. Loud crashes or bangs, breaking glass, insistent pounding on doors... all could indicate an emergency condition.

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If you listen to the radio (I love radio talkshows, for example) and must wear headphones, use a “mono” capable radio connected to a single earphone. That way you can listen to the radio while hearing environmental sounds without difficulty.

For best results, get a very long audio extension cable and run it behind your office furniture. That way you’re free to move around the cube without feeling tethered to your radio.

Check Your Mirrors

If you cannot or don’t wish to arrange your cube so you are facing *out* when seated, use mirrors to see what’s going on behind you. Not only will you know when a coworker wants to speak with you while you’re using your computer or intent on some paperwork, but you’ll be able to monitor other activities outside your cube without being obvious about it.

Self-adhesive blind-spot mirrors work well attached to your monitor, but they distort the image and are sometimes too small. I use a pair of rearview mirrors I bought at a nearby automotive supply store. Whatever you use, the point is simply to see what’s going on without being forced to turn around. Do yourself a favor and don’t tell your coworkers you’re keeping tabs on them.

Stay Prepared

My shoulder bag is a mobile survival kit, containing everything from my files and personal items to my Pock-Its survival kit and tools. If you carry a bag or briefcase you have no excuse not to be

carrying a phone, a tactical light (great for power-outages in windowless cube farms), and other supplies you might need to stay organized and equipped.



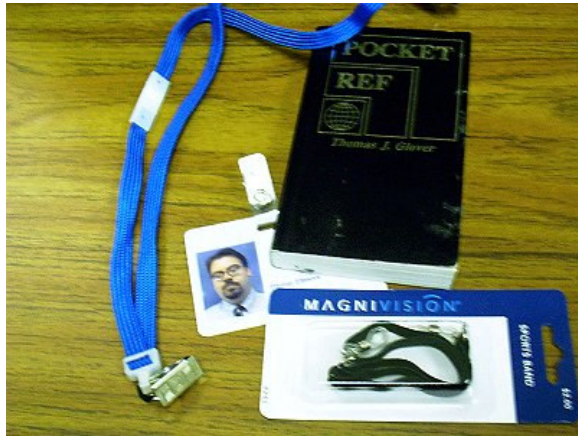
You have no excuse not to carry these.

Keep personal items on hand, too, such as extra eyedrops or contact solution if you wear contact lenses. If you take medication, keep an emergency supply in your desk, securely locked away. For eyeglasses, keep a small repair kit (these consist of screws, a small screwdriver, and sometimes nose pads) and a keeper strap in your desk.

While we’re talking personal items, don’t use a lanyard for your company ID card unless you have no choice or unless you’re packing a Hideaway knife (a small neck knife designed specifically for use with your ID card). The lanyard is just one more potential entanglement that isn’t justified unless it’s supporting

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something of greater tactical value than your ID.



You Are Armed

Most companies forbid possession of firearms and many restrict knives. Only you can decide how to conduct yourself in these environments. I strongly encourage you to obey your employer's policies to the letter.



The office environment is rich with improvised weapons. These include everything from pencils, pens, and scissors to hammers used for hanging bulletin boards. Staplers and tape

dispensers make good fist loads when heavy enough, too.

Office shootings are rare, but they still happen. The average cloth-covered cubicle wall affords no protection from bullets. Office equipment and cube farms can mask your movement and provide *visual* cover, but an office shooting provides employees with few options. Keep this in mind and stay alert in order to *avoid* shootings before they begin.



The average office worker is so complacent that you can pile firearms on your desk without alerting anyone for hours. I've seen it done.

Entire books could be written on the topic of personal security in the workplace. I've touched on only the basics for corporate office environments here, but if you adhere to these you'll be significantly ahead of the rest of your less-aware coworkers. There are, of course, no guarantees, just as there is no way to anticipate every emergency.

Stay awake and alert at the office. More than your job is at stake. ♠