

ARE WE WILFULLY BLIND TO WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND US?

Recently I read an article written by Eric Tucker, a reporter in Washington, DC who writes for The Associated Press. In his article he highlighted the dangers faced by travelling salespeople. The article began, *“The morning started like any other for the travelling jewellery salesman as he checked out of a motel in northern Virginia and placed his luggage in the car’s trunk. Then a Honda blocked him in and two black-clad men in hoods emerged, smashed his windows with a pistol and robbed him of roughly \$350,000 in jewellery.”*

Sound familiar. It should. The same thing has happened numerous times right here in Canada. The most recent in Edmonton, Alberta at the end of May and prior to that in Calgary at the beginning of May with total losses over 1 million. Vancouver police have indicated in the last three years they have had similar robberies or thefts totaling 12 million.

In a recent lecture I had the pleasure of presenting along with Detective Doug Bedford of the York Regional Police, Detective Bedford told the audience of watch salespeople of a cat-and-mouse game where organized bands of jewellery thieves staked out locations where there is a large number of jewellery vendors in one building and how these bandits would follow sales people for days. His investigation dubbed “BOT” (band of thieves) revealed a level of street smarts and sophistication as the subject’s regularly switched cars and license plates and cell phones.

The police used their own techniques and were watching the cat following the mouse. York Regional Police made several arrests and a number of subjects were deported from Canada. These officers later received the JVC appreciation award of merit.

The general public does not realize the amount of work and cost that goes into a major investigation such as the one conducted by York Regional Police. Hours and hours of police undercover surveillance and following the suspected criminals took place. It would be impossible for two officers alone to conduct such surveillance. It may require 8 to 10 officers in unmarked vehicles. Long detailed affidavits which can be as long as 1500 pages in order to get a court order to intercept communications. To obtain search warrants or production orders for cell phone records or DNA warrants. On occasion officers may have to deal with confidential informants. *(A major task in itself)*. They may have to involve other agency or departments such as forensic services, emergency response units, canine units, probation and parole, border services and sometime police agencies from the USA. This has a huge amount of cost and man-hours.

Sometimes this is not the case. S/Sgt Bruce Walker of the Calgary Police indicated the frustration a number of his officers are having in many of these cases. Travelling salespeople are not investing or taking any precautions to protect themselves. There are no security devices of any sort used by some salespeople. No chain locks, no trunk safes, no tracking devices, no camera systems installed in the vehicle. All inexpensive systems compared to the dollar losses and the potential of injury to salespeople. Travelling

salespeople must take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their product and if something does happen like a robbery they have something to give police for them to work on.

The same holds true for jewellery retailers. JVC's alert program has been in operation now for several years. Just last month an alert was instrumental in the apprehension of a diamond switcher in Windsor, Ontario. The store staff had seen the alert and knew who the man was when he came in the store. They called the police who arrived just as the male swallowed the \$25,000 loose diamond. Police arrested the thief and eventually the diamond was recovered after it passed through his system. (*How would you like to be the officer that recovered that diamond? Yuk!!!!*). This all happened as a result of a jeweller in Toronto who had this individual switch a diamond in their store and they gave the picture of the subject to JVC. In turn JVC sent it out over their network. The system works if we try. Not trying turns us all into victims.

Security equipment today is not as expensive as it once was. There is a wide range depending on your needs and the size of your location. GPS tracking devices, security film on showcases, key retention locks and proper safes and alarm systems can all help to protect you, your staff and your merchandise, as well as assisting the police in apprehension and recovery.

The police are a thin blue line of defense against criminals. If we stand up and do your part to support them, the thin blue line can become a barrier to crime.