



Make Your Property Less Inviting And Less Accessible — Starting Today!

A robbery is one of the most frightening incidents with which a pharmacist, store clerk, or store owner may ever be confronted. An armed intruder demanding drugs or money is, obviously, an extremely dangerous person. And the feeling of one's safety and property being violated is a very real one. There are, however, things you can do before, during, and after the ordeal to lessen your vulnerability, risk, and damage to your psyche.

First a couple of definitions. A robbery occurs when one person takes something from another person using force. A theft is taking another's property without force. Thus, if a suspect reaches across the counter, grabs money from the register, and runs away, it is a theft. If, however, the suspect pushes the clerk to the floor to get to the register or brandishes a weapon, it is a robbery. Even the threat of force makes the incident a robbery.

Prevention

Prevention is, basically, making things more difficult (or appear more difficult) for the prospective robber or thief. Placing the pharmacy, register, and most valuable items near the rear of the store, far from an exit (making the suspect traverse the most area possible to make an escape), and restricting access to the pharmacy will make it a bit less inviting and a bit more difficult to commit a robbery or theft. An easy escape route assists the suspect.

Keep the windows as clear as possible of signs, posters, or merchandise allowing passers-by, including police officers, to see what is happening inside.

Get to know your local police officers. Ask to have an officer stop by to give you tips on prevention, report minor incidents and ask to see an officer. Ask officers to stop by from time-to-time, and tell them they are welcome to stop for coffee (even if the officers don't drink coffee they will appreciate the offer).

Most robbers "case" a target business several times before committing a robbery and seeing the local police officer in the store or parked in front will cause them concern that an officer may walk in during their robbery.

Prevention Is The Best Deterrent To Robbery

By Sergeant Bruce Wynkoop, St. Paul Police, Homicide Unit

Workplace Safety

Don't leave large sums of money in the register. Use a "drop-box" (an out-of-sight, locked box) when the register becomes too full. Vary routines, don't make the bank run or money-drops at the same time every day. Tell employees not to discuss money amounts ("Boy, we sure take in a lot of money on Friday nights!") or safety procedures ("That alarm never works anyway.") with non-employees (and remember this yourself).

Watch for people who wander around the store but seem more interested in how the pharmacy works or where the cash register is located and write down a description of them or the vehicle in which they leave for future reference.

While "Minnesota Nice" dictates we not be suspicious of others, "Minnesota Smart" means we should not be naive,

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What to do before, during and after a robbery ...

Prevention:

- ✓ Keep the store windows clear of signs, posters, clutter that blocks view.
- ✓ Get to know your local police officers.
- ✓ Don't leave large sums of money in the register.
- ✓ Watch for people who wander around the store but don't appear interested in buying anything.
- ✓ Install alarms and security cameras.
- ✓ Develop and discuss a plan with your staff.

During the Robbery:

- ✓ Comply with robber's demands — don't do more or less than the robber demands.
- ✓ Push alarm only when safe to do so, stay calm, observe the intruder's clothes, features, scars, any identifying information.
- ✓ Call 911, stay on line until until police arrive.
- ✓ Do not keep a loaded gun in the store.

After the Robbery:

- ✓ Lock the door and preserve evidence (any thing the robber touched). Fingerprints and footprints will be helpful to police. Ask any witnesses to remain until police arrive.



Workplace Safety — Prevention First

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either. Install alarms and security cameras (even a “dummy” camera will deter — as long as you don’t tell the world it’s a fake). Use the alarm properly—only in an emergency! Police will become very annoyed if they rush to your store in “emergency-mode” just to find you have kids stealing gum.

Decide upon a plan for what to do in case of a robbery and discuss it with all your employees. Hopefully, you’ll never need the plan, but be prepared in case you do. Don’t tell yourself, “I’ll freeze up or pass out.” Don’t sell yourself short, if you think about what to do before you are faced with the problem you are more likely to get through it safely.

You’ve probably heard all of these suggestions before but, like “Don’t leave valuables in your car,” we sometimes overlook precautions until something happens. A famous educator (couldn’t have been too famous as I can’t remember the name) once said teaching isn’t so much telling someone what they don’t know as much as reminding them of what they do know.

During the Robbery

Your main objective in a robbery is to get out of the situation unscathed and with no harm to innocent people. You have a responsibility to your employees, co-workers, customers, and your loved ones to avoid actions that may precipitate violence on the part of the robber. There is no property in your store and no amount of money for which you or someone else should die or be injured.

Therefore, complying with the robber’s demands is the best course of action. Don’t take it personally, it is not a personal affront, no matter how much it may seem like it. Don’t argue, make comments (insulting an armed suspect is never a good idea), don’t do any more or less than the robber demands, and do not attempt to thwart the robbery (the fact that you saved \$200 of the store’s money will be small consolation to your next-of-kin).

Push the alarm only when safe to do so. During the robbery notice things about the robber, clothing, facial hair, hair color, tattoos or scars, a limp, or anything else unusual that will help

identify the robber later. If it appears safe to do so go to the window when the robber leaves and try to see a direction of flight or the suspect’s vehicle (or a vehicle leaving the scene at a high rate of speed).

Call 911 as soon as the robber leaves, stay calm, give the dispatcher a description, and stay on the line until the officers arrive. Keep in mind that while one squad will respond directly to the address others will be checking the periphery for the suspect or suspect vehicle.

I am often asked about the advisability of having a handgun behind the counter and my answer is always an unqualified, “No!” The last thing you want is a shoot-out in your store. Police officers must qualify with their weapons (once a month in St. Paul) and go through extensive “Shoot or Don’t Shoot” training in which they are taught to check the area behind the suspect before firing to lessen the risk of hitting innocent people.

And even assuming you can get the gun out and fire before the suspect fires, consider the danger of keeping a loaded handgun behind the counter (I have seen that, by the way), the tremendous liability problems, or the difficulty of falling asleep at night after having shot an innocent person.

I once gave a talk to a pharmacy class and was told by one of the students about a pharmacist in a store in which the student had worked who had chased a robber out of the store and fired five shots at him as he ran down the street. I asked if he had hit the robber and was told he had not. I then asked if he had hit anyone else, as the bullets had gone somewhere, and was told he had not. Lucky!

After the Robbery

Once the robber has left the building, lock the door, preserve evidence — fingerprints (protect anything the robber touched, including paper), footprints, etc. — and ask any witnesses to remain until the police arrive. Ask all witnesses to not discuss the incident until they have given their statements to the police.

By staying calm and being observant during the robbery and acting quickly after the robbery, you can get through the ordeal and help police apprehend the robber, which will go a long way towards soothing your bruised psyche. ❖

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Sergeant Bruce Wynkoop
