

SUMMARY THE GIFT OF FEAR

Gavin de Becker



Summary of «The Gift of Fear» by Gavin de Becker

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A guide for learning how to follow your intuition and knowing the warning signs of impending danger.



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Introduction

Gavin de Becker, the man who Oprah Winfrey calls the nation's leading expert on violent behavior, wants to help you spot the warning signs of danger. He believes that contrary to popular belief, most acts of violence aren't unpredictable. In fact, you are designed to predict danger yourself with your intuition. But even if you don't listen to your intuition, you can spot the signs of a person who wishes to do you harm and learn how to protect yourself. De Becker breaks down how to act when approached by a stranger, when you should feel fear of a stranger or someone you love, and how to interact with people who seem volatile. Knowing the signs and learning how to follow your instinct can save your life as well as the lives of those you love.

Intuition Can Save Your Life

Call it instinct, call it a hunch or even a sixth sense, whatever you call it, intuition is one of the most critical ways in which we can protect ourselves from upcoming danger. People experience intuition in different ways, whether it's an overwhelming sense of fear or even a dream that woke you up in the night, these feelings are critical and are best not to ignore. In fact, your dreams can accurately present you with an intuitive sense of impending danger.

A popular profession that relies on their instincts is that of police officers. Officers and detectives are instructed to follow their hunches as they can result in either evading danger or catching a criminal. For instance, De Becker tells the story of Michael Cantrell and his patrol partner, David Patrick. One day, Patrick told Cantrell about a dream he'd had in which "one of us gets shot." Cantrell advised him to not ignore this premonition and consider it a warning of possible danger, he replied with "Well, you should pay close attention to that dream because it isn't going to be me."

Patrick later brought the topic up again and stated: "I'm sure I will be shot." Cantrell took this to heart and recalled a time when the two partners pulled over a car with three men inside. While the driver was cordial, Cantrell immediately sensed danger while Patrick casually focused on lighting his pipe. Immediately, Cantrell noticed the two men in the back seat of the car refused to make eye contact and kept looking straight ahead. This behavior seemed suspicious to Cantrell, fortunately, when Cantrell asked the driver to step out of the car, he noticed a gun on the floor of the car before any of the men had the chance to grab it. Luckily, they survived this ordeal with no hiccups.

Ignoring your intuition, or warning signs can sometimes have life-threatening consequences like in the scenario above. Had Cantrell not followed his gut and asked the driver to step out, the situation could have turned deadly. However, despite recognizing the potential dangers of not

spotting the warning signs, Patrick still didn't learn his lesson. In fact, later when Patrick was on patrol alone, he noticed a pair of men driving by who resembled the armed robbers that police had been looking for. One of the men was standing near a payphone not talking to anyone, while the other repeatedly looked through the window of the supermarket. Once the men spotted Patrick in his police cruiser, they walked away. At this point, Patrick had more than enough reason to call for backup, the men were suspicious and they matched the description; however, he simply followed the men in his car.

He eventually waved the men over and asked to search them. During the pat-down, one of the men pulled out a gun and shot Patrick. Luckily, he survived the harrowing incident. However, this whole situation could have been avoided if only Patrick followed his gut and recognized the potential danger of approaching two armed robbers.

Forced Teaming and the Use of Charm

Sometimes it's hard to believe that people have the worst intentions. More times than not we as humans trust that most people are good; however, we've all experienced betrayal in some form or another. For instance, how many of you have experienced infidelity in a relationship? You trust that your partner would never commit such a terrible act and betray your trust, but it happens. Or, how many of you have shared personal information with a friend only to find that "friend" use it against you later on? Again, you trust that a friend would respect you and the personal stories you share, but again, people aren't always good. If we experience such betrayal from friends and loved ones, is it so hard to believe that a criminal would use a similar tactic? There's even a name for such a scheme, the befriending of someone before betraying, and it's *forced teaming*.

This tactic is used by criminals who pretend to befriend their victim; however, the criminals are so deceiving that deception is usually only detected when that friend has an incredible sense of intuition. For example, a woman named Kelly was once carrying a bag of groceries upstairs to her apartment, it was getting dark outside and she didn't want to take two trips (something we can all relate to), so her hands were full as she made her way up. Suddenly, a bag ripped and her cans of cat food began to roll down the stairs. She remembers watching one as it rolled out of sight when suddenly a man called "Got it! I'll bring it up." Kelly didn't like the sound of that voice, and when he finished collecting the cans, he offered to bring them up to her apartment.

Kelly initially felt afraid, inviting a strange man to learn where she lived seemed dangerous, so she tried to decline his offer. However, the man didn't give up and even exclaimed: "We have a cat to feed up there!" Did you spot the clue there? You see, criminals who use forced teaming will commonly use the pronoun "we" to gain trust and pretend that they share a common goal.

Unfortunately, Kelly didn't spot this clue and it turns out that her first instinct was correct. The man charmingly made his way into her apartment where he brutally raped her. After he held the gun to her head, after he raped her, he got up from the bed, got dressed, then closed the window. He told her not to move, he was just going to grab a drink from the kitchen and come right back. He promised he wouldn't hurt her. Kelly's intuition knew exactly what he was planning, so as soon as he walked out of the room, she followed behind. The man went into the kitchen and rifled through drawers while Kelly walked out the front door and straight into her neighbor's apartment (which she instinctively knew would be unlocked). She knew what the man was planning and she escaped with her life.

She knew if she stayed in that spot, that man would have come back to kill her. All the signs were there. He closed the window, he told her not to move, he went to the kitchen to find his weapon of choice, a knife, a much quieter alternative to a gun. Kelly's fear saved her life that night, it told her "Just be quiet and don't doubt me and I'll get you out of here."

Another tactic that criminals use is a seductive charm. Of course, not all charming people have evil intentions, but charisma and charm is a powerful tool among criminals trying to disarm you from their true intent. It's best to determine if a person's charm is natural or a tool of manipulation. In the case of Kelly, the man appeared friendly, offering to help her bring her groceries up; however, her intuition told her that his charm was simply a tool to deceive her and find a way into her apartment.

Know the Warning Signs

While people with ill intentions will try to charm you or get you on their team, it doesn't stop there. In fact, criminals will use a variety of tactics to get you to trust them. For instance, those who wish to deceive you will also use a simple technique called: too many details.

You see, when people are telling the truth, they don't fear being doubted. However, when a person lies, even if the lie sounds credible to you, *it doesn't sound credible to them*, so they keep talking. By offering up too many details, the criminal tries to distract the victim from the obvious and gain a sense of trust. This distraction causes the victim to lose sight of one simple context: the person is an absolute stranger.

Next, criminals will typecast their potential victims. A man will typically label a woman in a critical way, hoping she will feel compelled to prove him wrong. For instance, they might hurl an insult to get you to prove yourself otherwise. By saying "You're probably too snobbish to talk to the likes of me," the victim then feels the need to prove she is not too snobbish and offer to help in any way. If you engage in this conversation, you might win something but lose something even greater.

Loan sharking is another tool that criminals will use to make the victim feel they owe their predator something. By helping out their potential victims with her groceries, for example, it makes saying 'no' much harder for the victim. Therefore, it's important to remember that he approached you and you did not ask for help. While sometimes a person may truly just be friendly and want to help, you should watch for other signals as well.

Criminals will use an unsolicited promise to get their victims to trust them. When Kelly's rapist said "I'll just put this stuff down and go. *I promise*," he had no intention of keeping that promise. Promises are used to convince us of an intention, but they are not guaranteed. You should meet all unsolicited promises with skepticism and ask yourself: Why does this

person need to convince me? “The answer, it turns out, is not about him—it is about you. The reason a person promises something, the reason he needs to convince you, is that he can see that you are not convinced. You have doubt (which is a messenger of intuition), likely because there is a reason to doubt. The great gift of the unsolicited promise is that the speaker tells you so himself!”

Lastly, another tactic that men will use is probably the most popular one used by criminals: a man’s ignoring or discounting the concept of *no*. When a man declines to hear “no” it is a signal that he is seeking control or refusing to relinquish it. Never relent on the issue of “no” with strangers because it sets the tone that you are in control and they are not. If you let someone talk you out of the word “no,” you might as well have said, “You are in charge.”

On a flight to Los Angeles, De Becker sat next to a lone teenage girl and witnessed these tactics firsthand. A man in his forties who had been eyeing her engaged the girl in conversation and introduced himself, “I’m Billy.” While stating his name seems like a simple statement, his intention is more of a question and he got exactly what he was looking for when she replied with her name. He continued to spout information to the girl, saying things like “I hate landing in the city and not knowing if anybody is meeting me,” which, of course, prompted the girl to reveal that she wasn’t sure how she was leaving the airport either. Billy then contradicted himself saying, “I love the independence of arriving in a city when nobody knows I’m coming. But you’re probably not that independent,” which prompted the girl to reveal she had been traveling alone since the age of fifteen. He then offered the girl a sip of his scotch drink which she refused. Of course, he didn’t take no for an answer and she eventually conceded. Once Billy got up, De Becker felt the need to intervene and simply told the girl, “He is going to offer you a ride from the airport and he’s not a good guy.”

At the baggage claim, De Becker saw Billy approach the girl again. While he couldn’t hear them, he could see the girl shaking her head and refusing his

offer. She held firm and he finally walked off angrily, turns out he wasn't the "nice guy" he appeared to be after all.

Warning Signs in the Workplace

After a tragic incident occurs, like a school shooting, suicide, or bomb threat, we usually find ourselves asking “How could we have known?” However, if you truly look back, the warning signs are always there.

One particular example comes from a USAir employee named David Burke. After the incident, reporters learned critical information that became red flags and would have been useful prior to Burke’s employment with USAir. Not only did he have a history with drug trafficking and shoplifting, but he also had a record of violence toward his girlfriend. He cut the wires in her car, beat her, and threatened her with a gun.

However, his violence didn’t end there, he brought it with him to the workplace where he left a death threat on the answering machine of his supervisor, Ray Thompson. Burke was convinced he was fired over racial reasons after he was caught stealing sixty-nine dollars. Afterward, another USAir employee lent Burke a .44 magnum that he would never see returned.

USAir also failed to collect Burke’s badge after firing him which allowed him to get through airport security with ease on the final day of his life. After confronting Thompson, Thompson refused to give his job back and cut the conversation short to catch a flight to San Francisco. Little did Thompson know that Burke would be on that exact flight ready to greet him with the barrel of a gun. After take-off, Burke wrote a note on an air-sickness bag: “Hi Ray. I think it’s sort of ironic that we end up like this. I asked for leniency for my family...remember? And I got none. And you’ll get none.” At twenty-two thousand feet, the flight crew heard two shots (Burke had just killed Ray Thompson). Seconds later, the plane’s black box recorded three more shots, then some commotion, then a final shot. The control tower tried to contact the pilots, but the jet was no longer under their control. Under the control of gravity, the jet made a seven-hundred-mile-per-hour descent into the ground. Forty-three people died instantly,

making Burke the perpetrator of the single worst workplace violence tragedy in American history.

Violence in the workplace is not a rare or isolated incident. The loss of a job can be just as traumatic as the loss of a loved one; however, there are no condolences and support. While the number of incidents has increased over the years, the factors that come with workplace violence have largely stayed the same. For instance, the most common type of problematic workplace is the “Scriptwriter.” The main characteristic of a scriptwriter is inflexibility; he is not open to criticism or suggestions and typically lives by the motto “This is how I do things.” Additionally, he is the type of employee who asks a question, answers it himself, and walks away angrily. He writes the script during his encounters with colleagues.

While there are many warning signs for predicting future violent behavior, De Becker offers up some specific red flags in addition to writing the script. Employees and managers should also be on the lookout for weapons, purchasing a weapon in the past ninety days, having a collection of weapons, or even discussing weapons when talking about revenge could be indicative of impending violence. Such employees could also have key characteristics like being sad or angry and experience paranoia that others are out to “get him.” Finally, this type of person never takes responsibility for his actions and coworkers may fear or feel intimidated by him. Lastly, he likely uses threats, intimidation, and manipulation towards management and colleagues.

The Addiction to Domestic Abuse

The story is all too familiar. The woman murdered suffered violence at the hands of her spouse for too long, maybe for years or even decades. Perhaps the woman even called the police on a few occasions and took measures to protect herself by buying a gun or putting out a restraining order. But in the end, the violence takes over and she tragically loses her life.

One of the most famous cases that took up the media in the early 90s was that of O.J. Simpson; however, the stories of the thousands of women who suffer from violence at the hands of their partner are all strikingly similar. Each woman has a similar story, each one suffering slowly over the course of years or even decades. As prosecutor Scott Gordon stated, "Simpson was killing Nicole for years - she finally died on June twelfth."

Over the course of the relationship, women may notice one or many of the following warning signs but put their intuition aside in favor of giving their partner the benefit of the doubt. At the inception of the relationship, men who are prone to violence may accelerate the relationship, and rush into milestones like living together or even marriage. He resolves conflict through intimidation, bullying, and violence. He uses threats to intimidate and maintain control, which includes threatening violence or even suicide. He refuses to accept rejection. He becomes jealous of anyone or anything that takes her time away from the relationship. He consistently blames others for problems of his own making. He rejects any change and is described as inflexible or unwilling to compromise. These are all just a few ways in which women can identify some key traits of abusive men.

Knowing the signs can help save a woman's life whether she recognizes these traits or the violent man does himself. For instance, De Becker states "We read faxes from around the country sent by victims of domestic violence, but we were equally moved by messages from abusive men, one of which read, 'You may have just saved my wife's life, for as I listened to you

describing Simpson's abuse, I recognized myself.' Unlike some murders, spousal homicide is a crime that can strike with a conscience."

But why don't women leave these relationships? Well, it's not that easy. In fact, being in an abusive relationship is equivalent to an addiction. Addiction can come in many forms, including becoming addicted to abuse. This is why people can't seem to get out of unhealthy, abusive relationships. When the abuse finally stops, the victim feels an addictive emotional high that is much more intense than normal happiness. In order to feel this high again, victims continue to rely on abusive partners. This kind of relationship dulls the battered person's natural fear instinct.

For instance, we can take a look at the case of a woman who called a support line for victims of domestic violence. When the counselor asked if the woman was in any immediate danger, the woman replied no. But, as the conversation continued, the counselor quickly realized that the woman had locked herself in the bathroom, and her husband was on the other side of the door with a loaded gun. To the average person, this situation constitutes an immediate danger; however, because this woman's sense of fear had become so dulled, she didn't recognize the danger of the situation because the gun wasn't pointed right at her head.

The Two Rules of Fear

We all fear people from time to time, but when are those times? While some people walk around worrying about every strange encounter, many of those people are wasting their fear. “When you accept the survival signal as a welcome message and quickly evaluate the environment or situation, fear stops in an instant. Thus, trusting intuition is the exact opposite of living in fear.”

If we relax and stop worrying, we can allow our intuition to take control and guide us. For instance, Meg is a woman who works with violently inclined mental patients each day. Despite the dangers that her job poses, Meg never fears for her life while at work, instead, she feels most fearful when walking from her car to her apartment at night. De Becker offers the suggestion that she would probably feel safer if she just relaxed during the walk. Meg replied with “That’s ridiculous. If I relaxed, I’d probably get killed.” Meg argues that she must be vigilant at all times and stay alert to possible risks. Those possibilities are only in the mind, as humans we cannot perceive what might happen, only what is happening. You see, when you feel fear then you look for a specific danger and fail to anticipate the unexpected.

There are, however, two rules about fear. If you accept the rules, you can improve your use of fear, reduce its frequency, and transform your experience of life. Rule number one is this: the very fact that you fear something is solid evidence that it is not happening. Fear tells us that we should worry about what is coming next, not what is happening now. De Becker gives the following literal example to help explain: As you stand near the edge of a cliff, you might fear getting too close. If you stand right on the edge, you no longer fear getting too close, you now fear falling. Additionally, once you do fall off, you now fear landing. When you fear something that has yet to happen, you are wasting your fear and worrying about the wrong things.

The second rule is: What you fear is rarely what you think you fear - it is what you link to fear. Think of anything in which you have felt profound fear and link it to each of the possible outcomes. When there is a real fear, it will either be in the presence of danger, or it will link to pain or death.

When we receive a fear signal, our intuition makes a connection. When we focus on one link only, say, fear of someone walking towards us on a dark street instead of fear of being harmed by someone walking toward us on a dark street, the fear is wasted. That's because many people will approach us —only a very few might harm us.

Remember, fear says something might happen. If it does happen, we stop fearing it and start to respond to it, manage it, surrender to it; or we start to fear the next outcome we predict might be coming. If a burglar does crash into the living room, we no longer fear that possibility; we now fear what he might do next. Whatever that may be, while we fear it, it is not happening.

Final Summary

Intuition can save your life. Each person is instilled with the gift of fear designed to help save their life when they are in the presence of danger. It's important to listen to your gut and follow your instinct when you know that something isn't right. By knowing the signs of the people who wish to do you harm, you can combine your intuition and your knowledge to protect yourself. Through forced teaming, loansharking, unsolicited promises, and seductive charm criminals attempt to get their future victims on their side and gain a sense of trust. However, now that you know the signs and what to listen to, you can protect yourself and ensure that you stay safe and stay alive.



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