

# Work:life

## SIMPLE STEPS

# SAFE

“It may be common sense, but it isn’t always common practice.” That was the opening line – borrowed from Suzy Lamplugh’s mother, Diana – delivered by director of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust Rachel Griffin at a REWIRE workshop on personal safety.

And that was the case with Lamplugh’s tragic disappearance. Looking back on the event, alarm bells should have sounded over the very name of the client she was due to show the property to (Mr Kipper) and her colleagues should have known where she was going, what time she was due back, how to get hold of her if she did not return on time, etc.

It all sounds like common sense. But is it common practice? A straw poll of the REWIRE audience revealed the answer to be a resounding no.

Griffin put the following statements to the room, asking those present to stay standing if they agreed. People tended to sit down far too quickly. How would you answer?

- **My colleagues will know** where to start looking, should I not return to base on time – wherever that base might be that day.
- **We have a system** for me to raise the alarm covertly in case of emergency while working alone.
- **We have a clear procedure to follow** in case someone does not return on time.
- **I am confident that an appropriate** person will pick up the phone if I call the office in an emergency.
- **If I decide to change my plans** during the day, someone would be aware of this.

## REWIRE

REWIRE is an *Estates Gazette*-established forum for women in real estate. Email [samantha.mcclary@estatesgazette.com](mailto:samantha.mcclary@estatesgazette.com) for more information about how to join

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# TO STAYING

**Awareness** Thirty years ago London estate agent Suzy Lamplugh went to show a property. She never returned. Although she was declared dead in 1993, her body has never been found. That tragedy highlighted the importance of safety practices at work, but at a REWIRE event, hosted by Savills, a surprising number did not know if company policies existed. Is real estate doing enough? Samantha McClary reports

● **When I am working alone** out of office hours, we have a system in place to monitor my safety.

● **There is information available** so that my manager could contact my partner, family or next of kin should I fail to return from an appointment.

● **My partner, family or next of kin** would have contact details of a colleague, should I fail to return from work – even if this should happen outside office hours.

**If you found yourself saying no or hesitating over any of the above, you probably do not have an appropriate safety awareness procedure in place – or the procedure has not been adequately communicated to staff.**

While the above questions relate as much to men as they do to women, taking into account an industry-wide pledge to increase gender diversity in real estate, it is clear that having workplace systems in place that make women feel safer and more confident in their roles can only help to achieve that goal.

Bill Fox, executive chairman of conflict management trainer Maybo, says that while stories such as Lamplugh's are tragic, they are, thankfully, uncommon. He says the odds are that we are all going to be OK, but that does not mean we should ignore the risks.

"There are simple steps we can take to ensure our safety," says Fox. "It's about awareness of the risks, preparation and safe habits and having the right personal skills and strategies in place."

Griffin agrees. She says that to make

those common-sense habits commonplace just takes practice.

Making sure you tell your colleagues where you are going, what time you expect to be back, checking in with them when you are there and when you leave can soon become second nature – meaning that if you do go off the grid, a cursory check or alarm will quickly be raised.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust, which counts Savills as a supporter, offers a range of tips and advice on personal safety, including such simple practices as recording the name, address and contact phone numbers of all clients in easily accessible places, checking clients' authenticity and organising a first meeting at your office before going off-site.

If you do have to meet a client off-site first, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust says it is a good idea to "log them in" as soon as they arrive and before you enter the property with them. The trust suggests calling the office – or your voicemail if no one is available – saying you have arrived at the property with X and how long you will be, and signing off with the promise that you will call at the end of the appointment.

But one of the key pieces of advice that both Griffin and Fox give is to trust your instincts. If something does not feel right, don't tell yourself it is: take action to improve your safety or at least have an armoury of exit strategies (see box) for those "just in case" moments.

FOR MORE TIPS AND INFORMATION ON SAFETY AND AWARENESS, VISIT [WWW.SUZYLAMPLUGH.ORG](http://WWW.SUZYLAMPLUGH.ORG) AND [WWW.MAYBO.CO.UK](http://WWW.MAYBO.CO.UK)

## Defensive thinking

Maybo's Bill Fox says that while much can be done to reduce risks through preparation, communication and teamwork, it is important to develop skills and confidence in dealing with difficult interactions and behaviours.

Maybo teaches practical skills for dealing with unpredictable situations, including dynamic risk assessment and exit strategies:

### Office-based meetings

- Think about how you position yourself in relation to others and exits.
- Have valid reasons for leaving the room such as to speak with a colleague, or to get information from your desk.
- Agree words or signals that indicate to a colleague you would like their support or to "switch".

### Arriving at a site/property

- On approach scan the area for risks and park ready for a clear and quick exit.
- Have a prepared exit strategy when waiting for a lift or entering a stairwell, such as pretending you have forgotten something, or "waiting for a colleague".

### Doorstep moments

- Look and listen as you approach an entrance and withdraw if unsure
- Stand to the side after ringing the doorbell – as well as being polite, this helps you assess and not be drawn in.
- If you are uncomfortable with who answers, have a ready excuse such as getting something from your car, or you just wanted to let them know you can't stop now as you have had an urgent call.

### Inside the premises

- It is harder to extricate oneself at this stage so better to follow your instincts and make an excuse at the entrance.
- Use verbal and non-verbal skills to ensure you stay exit side and less likely to feel intimidated or blocked in.
- Plan excuses to call the office, move to an open area, or return to your car.