

Take My Purse—Please

I had an experience the other day that gave me pause to think about the responsibility that each of us has to society. Allow me to share.... I had parked my vehicle at the gym I belong to, and as I got out I glanced inside the car parked next to me. It was a BMW; sitting on the passenger seat, in plain view, was a woman's purse. It was open and I could see at least several dollars protruding out the top. A further examination of the inside revealed a cell phone and roll of quarters clearly visible on the center console. The back seat held several unopened cardboard packages. In brief, it was a thug's dream come true—a virtual neon sign beckoning the criminal element in our society to break in and take what they want. I shook my head and went inside, thinking about how naïve some of our fellow citizens are.

An hour later, I had finished my workout and made my way back to my truck. As I approached it I saw the lights on the BMW flash on and off, indicating that someone was using a remote to unlock the doors. I looked around and saw a young woman walking toward the car. I waited to get inside my vehicle, and as she was about to open her door, I asked her, "Miss, do you realize that you left your purse on your car seat where everyone could see it?"

"Yeah," she replied. "It's okay; I do it all the time."

I followed up with, "But there's money sticking out of the top, and your cell phone and roll of quarters are right there on top of the console. That's really an invitation for someone to break into your vehicle."

"Well, nobody's broken in yet," she curtly replied, as she got into her vehicle and turned the ignition. Without another word, she backed out of the space and was on her way. I don't know what her perception of me was; perhaps she thought that I was just some old-timer who should be minding his own business, or some grumpy old man with too much time on his hands. But her nonchalant attitude about her belongings, her naiveté, struck me as one of the many things wrong with our society.

Her behavior is not unique. I see this type of carelessness all over the country. Women who leave their purses unattended in shopping carts at the store, wallets left lying on countertops, people using walk-up ATMs while listening to MP3 players, vehicles left unlocked—with the keys in them. The sad part about these errors in judgment is that there are always consequences: some are immediate; others come to fruition somewhere down the road.

If that woman in the BMW had not been in such a hurry to blow me off, I would have explained a couple of things to her. First, by leaving anything of value clearly visible in your vehicle, you are facilitating a crime. When that car is broken into, the bad guys

then recognize that this parking lot is a fertile hunting ground...they'll be back. Next time it may be my vehicle that's broken into.

Second, the loss and inconvenience of having your wallet stolen doesn't stop with the money that's lost, i.e., the cash and credit card charges. That's just the tip of the iceberg. The worst is the inconvenience of replacing all of your identification, credit cards, membership cards, etc. And of course, the very distinct possibility of Identity Theft, which if it occurs, may take years to resolve.

What are the residual effects of careless behavior? For the individual, a possible rate hike in their insurance, and by extension higher insurance rates for that geographical location should the thefts continue. That means my rate goes up due to her carelessness.

Often times I'm amazed at the apathy displayed by some of our fellow citizens. They seem to enjoy living in a vacuum, not realizing that everything that they do, or for that matter, fail to do, affect the community in which they live. When a person sees a crime being committed and fails to notify the police, they are contributing to the crime rate as sure as the subject who is committing it. On a smaller scale, when an adult sees children behaving inappropriately or using foul language, it's our responsibility to step in and make an effort to correct those kids. If we fail to do that, if we stand by idly while perhaps our own family is forced to listen or observe unacceptable behavior, we send a message that the behavior is perfectly fine, that there are no consequences.

I know that I will get emails from some of you reading this article, telling me that you're afraid of being sued; the legal system is such that you're afraid to step in and do anything. Folks...therein lies the problem. We have become a nation of cowards, afraid to teach our fellow citizens and the generation that will take our place about what's right and wrong. This fear and indifference only breeds more disrespect for authority and an increase in poor behavior.

One of the most appalling and egregious trends that I've observed the last several years is the total lack of respect for authority, and the marginalization of our senior population. It's popular to mock authority, even the latest video games promote things like car-jacking and cop killing. Old people...? They're a drain on society—get rid of them. In my day, senior citizens were respected and treated with dignity. We revered them and looked to them to share their experience with us. We never denigrated their importance in our lives.

Unless more of us stand for what is right, and accept the mantle of responsibility to teach and correct our neighbors whenever possible, we can only expect that the fabric of our society will become soiled and torn. I intend to do my part. If that woman would have taken the time to listen, it was my intention to educate her quickly about the danger of her irresponsible behavior. Instead, she chose to drive away, most likely forgetting that the encounter ever happened. I wish her well and only hope that a Higher Power will watch over her.

Stay safe, brothers, and sisters!