# How has agent safety changed since Beverly Carter's death?

Four years ago this month, Arkansas real estate agent Beverly Carter was brutally murdered while showing a home to a deranged killer masquerading as a potential homebuyer. Her death sparked an industry-wide conversation about agent safety, pushing agents, brokers, and other real estate professionals to come up with solutions.

Her family made agent safety a personal mission as well, with her son Carl Carter, Jr. launching the Beverly Carter Foundation as a way of remembering his mother's legacy and providing easy and accessible safety education.

In honor of Beverly and the National Association of Realtors (NAR's) Realtor Safety Month, Carter spoke to Inman about his work with the foundation, and a boots-on-the-ground perspective of how the industry has improved, and how far it as yet to go when it comes to safety.

Carl Carter, Jr.

**Q: It’s been a little over a year and a half since you launched the Beverly Carter Foundation. How has the foundation evolved since its start in 2017?**

Since we started in January 2017, we have facilitated more than 50 instructor-lead courses in a number of states across the country. Just this month alone, I will be conducting eight instructor-lead safety courses spanning seven states. So, we’ve just had a flurry of activity.

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Next, we have an amazing partnership through the kindness of the folks at My Florida Regional MLS. Through their generosity, we are about to completely revamp and relaunch our website. I just saw a beta of it yesterday, and it will launch next month.

I know every brand and every non-profit is excited about their new website, but this will help us better tell our story, better tell the stories of other agents that have been victimized, and also have a better platform to share information.

It’s been my experience as I’ve traveled that there are a lot of people who, whether they have the title or not, really want to be safety leaders within their brokerages and their associations, but they just don’t have access to the information that they can share that’s short, timely, and relevant. So, this [new] platform is going to help us do that, and I’m stinkin’ pumped about it.

**Q: So, what information do you share with the audience during these courses?**

The thing that's always top of mind for me because of the relevance of it to my mother's story is the importance of screening and verifying the identity of new clients. This goes deeper than just having a potential client text you a copy of their driver's license, which is certainly a step in the right direction. But, you must verify their identity, verify their financing, and really understanding their true intent. Are they truly seeking to buy a property or do they have other intentions in mind?

So, screening and identity verification are always at the top of my list.

**Q: Beyond screening and identity verification tactics, what are the most common concerns that agents tell you about?**

Something that's been eye-opening is the stories agents will come up to me and share. These could be short stories about a moment in their business where they felt vulnerable, or I've had agents share with me that they've been raped while showing a property.

So, as my presentation has really matured over the past couple of years, it's just not the Beverly Carter story. It's been about giving agents a voice and learning from the way they have been victimized.

The thing I see with agents the most [during my presentations] are these deer-in-the-headlights looks of "Oh my gosh, I had not considered that we could be such targets for theft, harassment, and unwanted physical contact."

As tragic as what happened to my mom is — my mom's story is crazy and complex, and these people had this plan and they deceived her, and I think it's easy for us to kind of discount it and be like, "Wow, that is a lightning strike that will never happen again."

Yeah, what happened to my mom was crazy, and we can definitely learn from it, but I always say, "Here are the everyday stories of people who are being harassed, who are having things stolen from open houses, etc. You need to be paying attention to these things because it could happen to you."

**Q: On the other hand, what have brokerage leaders asked you about? What pain points have they faced in creating a safety protocol for their agents?**

In speaking with brokers and broker-owners, I've found out that they have a real challenge in getting agent engagement, getting people to come to classes. And, that's for any topic at all, such

as getting people to sales meetings, getting people to trainings. But if you add to that, “Hey, agents, next Tuesday we’re going to provide a safety training seminar,” the uptake is almost non-existent.

So, what we work on with brokerages is talking to them about things they can do to improve agent safety in small ways. So instead of being discouraged about having a safety event and only three agents showed up, just give [your agents] small [pieces of] content they can have and use. Have a 30-second safety spot during each sales meeting, so it’s there, and if people lose interest, it’s just 30 seconds.

Another thing I do is encourage every, single brokerage to form a safety committee so there are actual agents who have a stake in the development of a safety culture within the brokerage. And I’ve seen so many success stories come from that activity. It helps agents have safety conversations, it helps build a safer community, and it builds a strong safety culture where people are constantly thinking about safety.

**Q: Looking back over the past four years, how do you think the conversation about agent safety in the real estate community has changed? What has improved? What still needs more work?**

This is a little controversial, but leaders hang agent safety on this peg that [agents] are an independent contractor and although they don’t want any harm to come [the agents] way, [they say] the agent’s personal safety is their own responsibility because of their independent contractor status.

I have had many, many conversations with brokerages and associations that say, “We are afraid to do more for the safety of our agents because of fear of liability. Our attorneys have advised us that what we are doing is the most that we can do for fear of liability.”

I think it’s a real shame because we can do more, especially with technology. I think every broker needs to have a strong technological platform to know the daily ins-and-outs of agent’s activity, because with many brokerages, mine included, I couldn’t tell you what agent Sally down the hall is going to be doing today.

**Q: Agents’ independent contractor status has clearly caused a conundrum for brokers and broker-owners, but what’s the solution?**

There are brokerages out there that are more rigid than others — they have really, really strong expectations and standards of their agents and they are able to legally get away with that.

They say [if you want to work here], you will have time in this office, you will attend sales meetings and training classes. For the life of me, I cannot understand that if these mature brokerages are able to have very clear expectations of their agents, then why everyone across the industry isn't doing it.

NAR has pushed to raise the level of professionalism in the industry, why can't having safe practices be a part of that professionalism? I firmly believe that safety can become a core value, and I don't see how it compromises the independent contractor status, which to me, is only for tax purposes. I don't know why we have to hold on to that so much.

**Q: So, looking forward, what are your goals for the year?**

For 2019, we're releasing an e-book that will contain 52 chapters and each chapter will represent a safety topic, and within each chapter will be a video featuring an industry leader. Not only will that will help us expand our library, but it will show an industry commitment to safety by having these amazing people contribute to it. It will also help brokerages and associations who are struggling to create relevant safety content, have that.

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Source: click here