



GHOST OPS: Make Yourself Practically Invisible and Disappear Without a Trace

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Ghost Ops: Make Yourself Practically Invisible and Disappear Without a Trace

When she walked into my office, I expected to hear the same old tragic tale — an abusive spouse... death threats... mental and physical violence...

It's an all-too-common story in the disappearing business.

But she had a different tale to tell.

Her spouse wasn't verbally or physically abusive. In fact, he treated her quite well.

He just so happened to be a total deadbeat. He'd never been able to hold down a job for more than a month at a time. And she was sick of supporting his dead weight.

She told me she wanted "to just get on a plane and vanish."

Of course, it doesn't take a genius to realize she didn't actually want to disappear. She wanted the romance and mystery of the movies — a second chance at life, preferably somewhere sunny near the beach.

The truth is disappearing isn't a vacation. It's a mentally exhausting undertaking that requires serious discipline. You have to leave everything behind — family, friends, work — and start over from scratch.

If the mafia sends a hitman after you, you need to disappear. If the cartel wants you dead, you need to disappear. If your marriage isn't what you'd hoped it would be, you need a good divorce lawyer and a travel agent.

I'm telling you this now because I want to be honest upfront.

Disappearing — truly disappearing like an intelligence operative — is a serious solution for a serious problem. If you're in deep trouble, I want you to have the tools to escape and survive. But if you're not in a life-threatening situation, maybe there's a better, easier solution to your problem.

With that said, let's get down to business...

The Basics

The art of disappearing can be broken down into a basic three-step process. Execute these steps right and you'll be able to throw off all but the most tenacious pursuer.

Step One: Misinformation

The first step involves spreading false leads about yourself and your plans. The aim is to create fake breadcrumb trails to confuse and overwhelm your pursuers.

You could post on Facebook that you're moving to Hawaii, Europe or a town on the other side of the country... casually mention to your barber that you're taking a new job in Alabama... or tell your boss you're planning on taking a few years off to study abroad.

A trick of the trade is to base your stories on half-truths to make them more believable. Maybe you have relatives in Italy and you're always talking about visiting. Or you always wanted to go back to college to finish your degree.

Build off these half-truths to create a blockade of smoke and mirrors to confuse your pursuers.

Step Two: Disinformation

Next you're going to want to create a paper trail that backs up your misinformation.

Do everything in your power to make it look like you are following through with your "plans."

Fill out applications for apartments. Apply for jobs. Get yourself a P.O. Box in your false destination.

To go the extra mile to protect yourself, you should fly down for a couple of job interviews and check out some apartments in person. Head to the tourist office and strike up conversation with the person

on the desk. Tell them you're new in town and looking to make friends.

Get your face seen by as many people as possible. This will make your sudden disappearance all the more confusing for your pursuer.

Step Three: Reformation

The final step is the move to your actual intended location. Obviously, you can't just jump on a plane and fly straight to your home. You have to zig and zag to throw pursuers off your trail.

You can accomplish this by taking a combination of trains, planes, cars and buses to get to your destination. Change at stops that are inconvenient to you so your next move isn't obvious. Use cash as much as possible. Try to pick up an old junker that can be bought for a few hundred dollars and scrapped when you get to your destination.

Of course, you can't disappear just anywhere. It's important you choose the right place to go...

Choosing a Secure Location

Thanks to Hollywood, most folks think disappearing means living out your days in a secluded village overseas. But in real life — and for most of the people that I consult with — I recommend staying in the good old United States.

After all, the U.S is the third-largest country in the world. There are plenty of places to disappear to.

You're looking for a town with a population of about 25,000–50,000 people. Any smaller and you're going to have trouble blending in. Any larger and it's more likely that whoever is pursuing you will have contacts in town.

This small town should be in a state where:

1. People don't ask a lot of questions.
2. They respect other people's privacy.
3. It's not a "big government" type of place.

Think of towns in places like Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Alabama and Tennessee. In these states, you can get a job or rent an apartment without going through all the “red tape.”

Try to rent an apartment in a place like New York City and they want 25 forms of ID, a DNA sample and a notarized copy of your family tree.

But in these small towns, you can go to a mom and pop property management company. You can rent an apartment without being forced to hand over your Social Security number. As long as you have a cashier's check with the first and last months' rent, you're good to go.

This isn't blind conjecture, by the way. I've used these techniques in small towns and had no problem renting an apartment without showing ID or giving my Social Security number.

Just remember, the key is going to a mom and pop real estate place, not a national chain like RE/MAX.

For work, seek out jobs that pay cash under the table. Working construction or in a restaurant are two of the best options for steady work while home tutoring in a variety of subjects is a good way to convert old skills into cash.

The Art of Disguise

Changing your appearance is a surefire way to minimize your risk of discovery.

With a little time on your hands, it's possible to naturally change the way you look. (A few small changes in diet, exercise and grooming can drastically affect your appearance.)

But when you're actively disappearing, that's time you don't have.

In this case, you're going to need a good old-fashioned disguise. This is especially important for travel. The last thing you need is a clerk at the bus station recognizing you and divulging your travel plans.

A good disguise is simple and easy to maintain and will hold up under close inspection.

Choose clothes that look natural but that you would never normally wear.

Use hats, glasses and false facial hair to hide the shape of your face and eyes.

Wear clothes of a slightly different fit (one size bigger, for example) to change your body shape.

Here's a picture of me in disguise during one of our disguise training courses versus a picture of what I really look like...



My disguise is what's called a "close disguise" — meaning it should hold up even if folks get right up close to me.

There are also "distance disguises" that are good from a distance or on a low-definition CCTV feed. A common distance

disguise technique is to simply throw on a ball cap and change your shirt.

I could talk about disguises all day. But instead, I'd like to introduce you to an old buddy of mine. He's also a former CIA officer and, more importantly, a master of disguise.

He's going to let you in on some of the tricks of the trade and give you a peek inside his master disguise kit.

Please note, for security reasons, he's requested to remain anonymous:

When you're assembling your disguise you should start by asking yourself a few key questions:

Who is the disguise for? What is the weather like? How do the locals dress? How long are you expecting to remain in disguise?

The answers to these questions will inform the type of disguise you need.

For example, when I was tasked with recruiting a member of the Japanese triad as an informant, I wore what I call my “Columbian drug lord” disguise. This included a long, light-brown wig tied into a ponytail reaching the small of my back. I wore a bushy walrus mustache to match, a tailor-made Italian suit and thick, gaudy glasses.

In the early stages of recruitment, our PMs (personal meetings) were set up on his turf, in a dangerous part of Tokyo where he felt more comfortable. If there was a deal to be made, this is where it would all go down.

It wasn’t enough that the disguise hid my identity. Blending in was critical to the success of the mission, and the slightest mistake could prove deadly for me.

One of the most common mistakes when putting together a disguise is failing to monitor and maintain your disguise. The last thing you need is your mustache falling off at a crucial moment.

You’ll need a portable disguise kit for on-the-job touch-ups and maintenance.

Here’s what I keep in my kit:

1. **Mascara in several shades** for quick root touch-ups to match my natural hair to the color of my wig.
2. **Alcohol wipes** to remove makeup quickly and effectively.
3. **Good facial adhesive** to apply facial hair. Keep in mind this is difficult to work with when heat and perspiration come into play.
4. **Wigs in a variety of colors and lengths.** If you have long hair, using a wig might be too much trouble. If this is the case, consider cutting your hair short.
5. **Makeup** that can be used for minor and major changes.

6. Several sets of glasses. Only if you normally don't wear glasses.

7. A small mirror to aid in quick changes when a full-length mirror is not accessible. Catching a flaw in your disguise before the enemy does will protect your cover and can save your life.

For quick disguises when the threat of discovery isn't as severe, you can use coverings like hats and coats that can be slapped on and quickly removed. The simplicity of changing colors by adding or removing articles of clothing can do wonders in helping you lose a surveillance tail.

If you find yourself trying to shake off a tail, take it to the next level by changing your shoes. This simple change is notorious for being the hardest to affect with any disguise but can easily throw off even trained surveillance.

It's imperative to be comfortable in your disguise and adept at applying it. The purpose of a disguise is to take on another persona to protect your true identity, family and friends. Immerse yourself in the persona to avoid blowing your own cover. Grow your confidence and comfortability and practice, practice, practice.

The good news is you probably won't be meeting with a triad gang member in Tokyo, so you don't have to put as much effort into a disguise as I did. But a quick change of a hat and jacket will do a great job of helping you escape a dangerous situation when you want to ensure you're not noticed.

Of course, you can have the best disguise in the world and still get caught if you're checking into Facebook every 20 minutes.

Staying off the internet is an important part of disappearing. Facebook and other apps actually track your location in the background, which makes tracking people a relatively simple task.

You can never check your Facebook page. In fact, you should ditch any electronics that can be used to track you. Especially your cellphone.

Even if you smash your phone into 1,000 pieces, any calls made beforehand can be traced. Ditch the phone before you leave and buy a prepaid phone when you arrive in your new town. These are great because you don't need to hand over any ID to use them.

Delete Yourself From the Internet

Jackie Garner was a customer service rep who decided to quit her job and row the perimeter of Lake Michigan. She knew it sounded crazy, but she wanted an adventure and guessed it would take her about two months to complete the journey.

Jackie had recently started a nonprofit organization for breast cancer awareness and thought this adventure would be a great way to raise money for her nonprofit. To prepare for the trip, she began a rigorous workout regime of rowing every day in the morning as well as attending CrossFit and yoga at night.

About a year after she began her training, she purchased a 19-foot boat that would be her home during her trip. It was a small boat with no kitchen but with a sleeping area and place to store food.

She set out on her trip from Chicago and had her satellite phone, GPS and laptop so she could stay in touch with her family.

As she began her trip she posted daily updates to her Facebook page and blog. When she posted online the people following her could see her exact location due to the GPS on her boat. About a month into her trip, she decided to dock one night at Seul Choix Point Lighthouse, which is a remote location on Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The area was mostly desolate except for the lighthouse gift shop. Due to the storms in the area, Jackie decided to spend a second night at the lighthouse and planned on leaving at 5 a.m. the next day to resume her trip.

Around 2 a.m. that night, Garner was awoken by her boat slamming into the dock. She immediately looked out the window and saw a man climbing aboard her boat. He forced the door open and was inside before she knew it.

How Police Trace Cellphones

Let's say a terrorist used a cellphone to detonate a bomb. Obviously, the phone connected to the bomb would be destroyed, but law enforcement could immediately contact cellphone companies and request a tower dump.

A cellphone tower dump is when law enforcement requests cell service providers give them all the phone numbers that are using a specific tower. For example, in a case in New York, the police could contact the cell service providers and ask for every phone number that is using the tower for the area in the Chelsea neighborhood.

Now, in a large city like New York, the list of numbers using any given tower would probably be in the hundreds of thousands. However, law enforcement could begin going through these records and checking for the number that disappeared at the exact second the bomb went off.

You see, once the phone is destroyed, it would no longer be using the tower. Once law enforcement figured out that number, they could trace the other number that called in to trigger the bomb and then attempt to trace it back to the suspect.

In the unlikely event that we are dealing with a very careful and intelligent criminal who knows how to properly set up burner phones, law enforcement can still trace a prepaid cellphone back to the store it was purchased from and hopefully get quality surveillance video to identify the suspect.

As you can see, our cellphones provide a lot of information about our movements and can be traced to us in multiple ways.

This is why you would never use a cellphone again or any other such device if you truly wanted to disappear.

As the man tried to grab her and pin her down, she yelled and attempted to fight back. During the fight, the man said to her, "I know who you are and I knew where to find you."

At some point, she was able to throw him off of her and she ran to the lighthouse bathrooms. The man chased after her and when he entered the bathroom, she shoved him into a mirror, which fell over and shattered on top of him. Jackie was then able to run back to her boat and call 911.

She was taken to a hospital for examination and interviewed by the police. She told the police she didn't know how this man could find her in such a remote area and know so much about her. But then she realized he must have been following her blog and her updates on Facebook, so he was able to see exactly where she was at any given moment.

This is why even if you don't want to truly disappear, it's critical that you protect your digital footprint so it isn't easy for people to find you. To accomplish this, one of the best things you can do is to get rid of social media.

I know this is hard for many people, but social media gathers a ton of information about you and it's easy for people to use it

to find you. So the first step is to delete or deactivate your social media accounts.

If you don't want to delete your social media accounts, then at the very least give misinformation. In other words, don't list your real birthday and don't list the anniversary of your marriage.

Next, you need to delete all of your other online accounts. For example, delete your Amazon, eBay, PayPal and all other online accounts you have. If you can't delete or deactivate these accounts, I would again provide misinformation. I would change the address or phone number associated with the account so that it doesn't contain any accurate information.

The second major step is to remove yourself from data collection websites. Obviously, we know when we surf the internet on sites such as Amazon information is constantly being gathered about us. This is done so advertisers know what sort of products to target us with.

So how do you stop this data collection? The truth is you can do it yourself but it will take a good amount of time. I recommend looking for a company that will do this for you.

A company called Abine provides a service called DeleteMe. You pay a yearly fee of \$129 and they will remove you from data collection sites. There are about 30 different data collection websites that this service can delete your information from. The one drawback to this service is that it doesn't work with data collection companies located outside the U.S. But they check U.S. sites every three months and delete any new information found.

Another popular company that offers a similar service is called ReputationDefender. This company is one of the most well-known in the business and was one of the first to offer a service that deletes your information.

The yearly fee for this service is \$1,000. That is a lot of money, but with their ExecutivePrivacy service, they delete you from the top 53 data collection websites and they complete five checks during the year to make sure your information doesn't reappear. So while this is a huge price difference from DeleteMe, this company does remove information from more websites. If you need the best service possible and

don't mind the expense, this is definitely a company I would look into.

When it comes to private websites, it's important to remember that private sites do not have to remove your information. So if you've ever posted a foolish comment in the past or written a blog you want removed, you should contact the website owner directly and ask them to remove your information.

Also, if a website refuses to remove private information from their site such as a Social Security number or bank account information, you can contact search engines sites such as Google and they can remove the URL from their search engine.

For example, if you wanted to remove your Social Security number from a Google search, you would go to www.Support.Google.com. Once there you would type in "remove information from Google" in the search bar at the top. From there you would need to answer a series of questions about which website contains the information you want removed. Once you answer these questions, you submit the request to Google and they should remove the information from their search engine within five days.

Once you have deleted all of your social media and shopping accounts and taken care of any personal information on private websites, you can then delete your email address. Make sure this is the last thing you do because to complete many of the tasks above you need a valid email.

I realize this is a lot of work and this all depends on how much you want to disappear.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this guide, disappearing isn't easy and should not be taken lightly. But now you have the tools you need to vanish and start over.