

New Year, New Plans

If there's anything the last few years should have taught us, it's that things are never as they seem. The most glaring example of that is that after thinking about and preparing for a pandemic, when it came, it wasn't like any of us expected. We can say the same for just about every problem we've encountered the last few years, especially the supply line shortages that we're still dealing with.

One of the habits I have, which we all should, is to take the time for an AAR or 'after action review' if every disaster I encounter, whether I am directly affected by it or not. Hindsight is still 20/20, so we can see a lot, looking back at what happened, that we might not see from the other side. If we can learn those lessons and apply them to our future preps, we'll be much better off if something similar happens again... and if there's one lesson history teaches us, it's that it will happen again.

The tricky part in this is looking at it honestly, so that we can see our own failings in the process. While we can and should try to learn from the mistakes of others, the best lessons come out of our own mistakes. Not only are they better lessons, but they're also the ones we need to learn the most, so that we don't repeat them.

With that in mind, here are a few of the lessons that the last couple of years have taught me.

It Doesn't Have to Look Like a Disaster

We all have an idea in our heads of what a disaster is going to look like, even a major disaster. Perhaps those images are a bit too much like Hollywood would make them to be. Real

world disasters don't look like that and can even look like business as normal. Yet when it comes down to it, we lived through a global pandemic, which seemed more like an inconvenience, than a true disaster.

I literally had preppers ask me what they should do for toilet paper and food, when the supermarkets ran out and they had plenty of both in their basements. Because the pandemic didn't look like the disaster they were expecting, they didn't react to it like a disaster. So, while they were sitting on a good stockpile, they were suffering like the people who hadn't prepared.

We're still dealing with shortages from that disaster, but there are still people who won't use what they've stockpiled, because they might need it someday. Uh, isn't today included in the group of "someday?"

The Power Won't Necessarily Go Out

The power going out during a disaster has become an article of faith in the prepping community. We are so accustomed to thinking that the power will go out, that we tend to think we're not in a disaster if it stays on. Yet power and disasters are not mutually exclusive. As we've seen, the power can still stay on, even in the midst of a disaster.

Even the big hit that the Texas power grid took during winter storm Uri didn't affect the power in most of the state. While there were several million people without power, there were many times more who still had the lights on. For those people, the biggest problem was that the water was out.

We need to revise our understanding of what makes a disaster, a disaster. It's not necessary that we see ten different things happen, before we call it a disaster. Rather, we can call it a disaster if anything is happening that keeps our family from operating as normal and we can't make up the

difference without going into survival mode, at least to some extent. In that sense, a shortage of one important item in the grocery store, like toilet paper, should be enough for us to move slowly into survival mode.



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You've Never Got Enough

I prepared for a pandemic, back when the big Ebola outbreak happened in West Africa, in 2014. So, when 2020 came around, I thought I was ready. Little did I realize just how many masks, gloves, Tyvek booties, hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes I'd go through. What I had lasted about two months, which is all I thought I'd need. Obviously, I was wrong.

As we all know, none of us have any idea of what the future holds or what any disaster we're going to encounter is really going to look like. With that in mind, never assume that you've prepared enough or stockpiled enough. While I'm sure there is a point where stockpiling can become ridiculous, I'm not sure where that is. Maybe that's when your prepper friends tell you that you're going too far.

My former wife was almost fixated on stockpiling toilet paper. We had two years' worth in the garage and attic at one time. I don't know what she did with all that, but when COVID hit, she could have made a nice pile of money off of it. We talk about bartering supplies and there it is, in living color.

Disasters Don't Wait in Line

Perhaps one of the more surprising things in the last few years has been how the disasters have kind of piled up on each other. We all tend to think of disasters as isolated events, which come at us one at a time. But that's not what happened. We had a large number of small to medium sized disasters happen during the pandemic, some of which came two at a time. The combination of disasters became harder to deal with, than dealing with one alone.

Now that this particular dam has been broken, we can expect more of the same to happen in the future. This is going to require a change in our thinking, where we no longer think of dealing with disasters as isolated incidents. Rather, we should expect disasters to run into each other, with little time for recovery between them.

One of the things we're going to have to do, to deal with this, is to develop a system of a "rolling stockpile." What I mean by this, is to be constantly working on building our stockpile, even while we are using it. The first-in, first-out system they use for perishable goods in stores is an important part of that rolling stockpile, as well as keeping good records. If you're going to be working out of your stockpile in any sort of emergency, you've got to be able to keep track of your inventory.

Bugging in is Harder Than Anyone Thought

The prevailing thought in the prepping and survival community is that it is better to bug in, than to bug out. That hasn't changed any; but few of us had taken into account the mental strain of bugging in. Many people had serious problems being cooped up for that much time, including relationship problems

with family members. There were a lot of COVID-induced divorces, which had nothing to do with anyone getting sick.

We need to work on developing strategies for maintaining our mental health while bugging in. About the only things I've heard anyone talk about are books and games. While those are good, from an entertainment point of view, they don't get down to the nitty-gritty of people's emotional and psychological problems.

We could take a page from Alcoholics Anonymous here. An important part of their 12-step program is to teach people to involve religion or a "higher power" in dealing with alcohol. Making ourselves accountable to something bigger than us, is a great strategy for dealing with problems. Letting God into your prepping plans and how you deal with bugging in can make a big difference in how stable you remain.

You've Got to Know How to Improvise

When the store doesn't have something, we've got to be ready to improvise. Just about anything can run out, without notice, as we can see from the current supply shortages. I remember seeing a lot of articles about alternatives to toilet paper, some of which were hokey and others of which were almost genius. But there were a lot of mistakes published too, with people giving some seriously wrong instructions on how to make hand sanitizer and masks.

If we're ever faced by a true TEOTWAWKI event, the shortages we've experienced through the last couple of years are going to seem like nothing in comparison. There will be countless items, from the commonplace to the rare that we will need, but won't be available. Our only option in many cases will be to make it for ourselves, or we'll have to do without.

Keep a Close Eye on the Stores and Gas Stations

One of the surprising things about COVID wasn't that the stores emptied out; but rather, how they emptied out. We've all expected a run on the stores, with near-riot conditions, as people looted to their heart's content. That's not what happened. Rather, it was a quiet sort of panic, that cleaned the stores out more slowly, with people paying, rather than stealing. Oh, the stores still emptied out, it just took five days, rather than three hours.

Something similar happens to gas stations, whenever there's a hurricane on the way. People line up to fill up their tanks and gas cans, sometimes waiting for an hour or more to get to the pumps. The gas still runs out; but other than the long lines, there's no sign of a panic.

Gas prices were artificially kept down through most of 2022, but they have been rising rapidly in the last couple of weeks. I saw gas prices in my area go up 50 cents in less than a week. This rise in prices, on top of the current high inflation, is going to cause more shortages and other economic problems. Don't expect it to turn around again, at least not any time soon.



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