

8 Skillsets that Separate Novice Preppers from Advanced Survivalists

Being prepared requires more than just acquiring survival gear and supplies. Having your equipment and stockpile squared away should be a natural byproduct of practicing survival skills, not a steppingstone to building those skills or a substitute for them.

The intelligent novice prepper quickly realizes that true preparedness cannot be ordered from Amazon or bought at a gun show. Having all the beans, bullets and Band-Aids won't matter if you don't know to store them and prepare them and possess enough sense and discipline to not put all your eggs in one basket.

Today some claim that they will never have any use for survival skills, but I benefit from survival skills on an everyday basis. These are not all the skills that separate the novice from the more advanced student of survival, merely what I can fit into an article.

1. Food Production

It is very common for folks who are new to survival to focus on firearms and tactical gear and that isn't necessarily a bad thing unless they fail to progress and invest in the other things they need such as food storage and then food production.

Maine Prepper used to describe these folks as, "All guns, no groceries." Some of these types think they are hard core action heroes and as long as they have firearms and ammunition, they can get anything else they need. There are

entire groups of these guys whose survival strategy is to rob “preppers” at gunpoint, bypassing the hard work and planning required to build a well thought out retreat and stockpile.

This strategy falls apart things go sideways, and they are pulled from the realm of “what if” into reality. The reality is that as soon as they use up whatever they had in their cupboards and the two cases of MREs they picked up at the military surplus store or off eBay, they are now armed and starving. When it’s time to put up or shut up, they are going to have to try to trade weapons and ammo for food or they attack someone who has been preparing for precisely this threat for years or decades ... and not only them, but all the other serious folks they have networked with.

That’s a strategy with a short life expectancy. In any survival scenario that goes beyond a few weeks, the less than 2% of Americans who produce any of their own food at all, will have all the power. Everyone else will be dependent on them. Which group do you want to belong to? Why do you think billionaires are buying up farmland?

2. Medical Skills

If the historical record is any indicator, survivors are far more likely to be killed by microbes than high velocity lead poisoning. In fact, far more military personnel were hospitalized due to disease than battlefield injuries during WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. I haven’t seen statistics yet for the Global War on Terror, Afghanistan, and Iraq, but I suspect this still hasn’t changed.

Do invest in self-defense, but training time and funds invested in medical and first aid training, equipment, and supplies, should exceed investments in security, and you should probably have a trauma kit handy any time you are armed.

A good library, a modest medical stockpile, and basic medical skills have saved my family countless trips to the ER and doctor's office and scores of times what I have invested in them. I have seen the panic that ensues when some is seriously injured and people who care about the injured party are clueless as to what to do. The pain, panic, and absolute helplessness etched in their faces imprinted more permanently on my memory than the victim laying there bleeding.

I can't imagine a greater feeling of helplessness than a parent unable to save their child experiences. Start with how to diagnose and treat the 3 Killers: Airway & breathing, uncontrolled bleeding, and shock. Those three things cause most preventable deaths.

3. Security Skills

The advanced student of survival seeks out expert self-defense training and puts in the time in the dirt, at the range, in the dry fire bay and on the mat to survive not only the fight for his life in his home or on the street, but also the battle for his freedom in the courtroom.

Here are some areas that separate the more advanced survivalists from the rest:

- **Tactical Shooting Skills** – “A first-rate shooter with a second-rate weapon is far more effective than a second-rate shooter with a first-rate weapon.”
- **Less-lethal Defensive Skills** – You will fight like you train and if you only train with your sidearm, what do you think you'll reach for in a fight? Chances are, you'll either reach for your pistol, even if the scenario doesn't meet the criteria for use of deadly force, or you'll freeze up. Neither outcome is effective. Self-defense training should involve scenario-based role play and should involve every tool

in your tactical toolbox, including unarmed and less-lethal options.

- **Long Range Shooting Skills, Combat Tracking, Improvised Munitions, Small Unit Tactics, & Guerilla Warfare Tactics** – Survivalists have different goals, logistics support, and unit makeup than most military units so not all military tactics are effective. These are worth considering.

4. Amateur Radio Skills

In *Lights Out*, Ted Kopple wrote that he didn't think he needed two-way radios because he could simply speak to other survivors and that might sound like a reasonable position to the novice, but anybody who practices what they preach will soon realize that communicating via sneakernet burns a lot of calories ... and calories mean survival.

Unlike landlines, cellphone, and satellite phones, communicating via two-way radio needs little or no infrastructure, just two radios, a way to power them, and a plan to communicate at a particular time, on an agreed-upon frequency.

5. Primitive Survival Skills

I often hear would be preppers disparage primitive survival skills, saying that they are a waste of time, and they prefer to use the most effective tools available to them.

Survivors should use the most effective tools available to survive, but the very nature of survival ordeals means that abundant supplies and the ideal tool for the job are often unavailable to the survivor. If you knew about a survival ordeal ahead of time, it most likely wouldn't be a survival ordeal any longer. It would be one more thing to you know is

going to happen and must prepare for.

In my mind, the practice of primitive survival skills acquaints the survivalist with his own capacity and limitations, and with the fundamental technologies necessary to solve the problems of survival. By layering knowledge and skills upon this foundation, the survivalist can eventually learn the fundamentals of every technology necessary to recreate civilization from scratch.

Practicing primitive survival skills also makes people more effective users of technology. For example, by the time someone becomes proficient at starting fire by friction, they have a sound understanding of the elements necessary to create fire, how to process available tinder sources into effective “bird’s nests”, how moisture and wind impact the process, how to dry out tinder and shield a fire lay from snow or damp ground, how to construct an effective wind break, how to make char materials or char cloth, and so on. Such a person can easily start a fire with a ferro rod, matches or a lighter, but someone who has only started fires with accelerants and road flares cannot be counted on to start a fire when things go sideways, and those technologies are no longer available.

That is just fire, but the same principles apply to security, medicine, shelter, water, food and so on. The study of primitive survival imparts a more advanced understanding of the various technologies used to solve the problems of survival.

6. Threat-specific Skills

Another group of skillsets that separates the novice student of survival from the more advanced is those skillsets which prepare us to survive specific threats such as nuclear war or HEMP. When we start out, we are first concerned with the general necessities required to survive the greatest number of survival ordeals. However, specific threats like these

sometimes require specific skillsets and equipment to survive them.

7. Environment-specific Skills

The advanced survivalist has trained in every environment he is likely to encounter. He knows if his rifle and optics are reliable in extreme cold. He knows it will go “bang!” instead of “click” and he knows he needs to clip a battery extension in the armpit of his jacket to light the reticle of his optics when the temperature drops. He knows he must carry his water filter inside his clothing so ice crystals will not form in the microtubules and crack them when they expand enabling pathogens to pass through the filter and contaminate his drinking water.

8. Auto Repair & Maintenance

As a teenager, I was in a rollover accident out in the Sonoran Desert. I had just knocked out a side window with my face and crawled out of a car that was upside down. Because I had stopped and helped too many stranded motorists to count out in the desert, so I was a little surprised when a vehicle slowed down, the driver said, “You look like you’re OK.” And he sped off to continue enjoy whatever recreational activities brought him out there. But in the end, he was right. Two skinny kids were able to patch themselves back up, flip the vehicle back over, get it running, and drive back home affecting self-recovery on our own.

What would your kids do in a similar situation? Do they know how to use any tools besides their cellphones and their wallets, or would they cry about life being unfair and give up? As Homer Simpson says ... “Can’t win, don’t try.” That kind of thinking was not an option for our ancestors. They either overcame obstacles with the precious few resources at their disposal or they didn’t live long enough to reproduce. There

was no time to muse about victimhood. Those who wasted energy on such things simply didn't survive.

In those days, you couldn't say, "I'm a driver, not a mechanic." And hand your credit card to someone who can fix your problem. And if the electrical grid breaks on a large scale for more than a few days, you'll need to know how to maintain and repair your vehicles and whatever your secondary mode of transportation is when you run out of fuel for your vehicles.