

Applying the KISS Principle to Survival

Have you ever heard of the KISS principle? It's the invention of some business guru, who came up with it for the U.S. Navy and wrote about it back in the 1960s. This acronym, which might sound a bit insulting, stands for "Keep it Simple Stupid!" The basic idea he presented is that simple systems are generally better than more complex ones; therefore, whenever a system has to be developed to do something, try to keep it simple.

As a former engineer, I can vouch for the validity of the KISS principle; but I can also vouch for it from a survival viewpoint. I've been in the survival game for a lot of years and have even been stuck in a few survival situations myself. If there's one takeaway from those experiences that I can share, it's that survival is hard, so you want to make it as simple as possible.

I've never understood why the prepping and survival community makes things harder than we need to. Mankind has been surviving since the dawn of time. Backpackers have gone into the wilderness, sometimes for weeks at a time, long before any of us was interested in putting together a bug out bag. Yet there are way too many times, when we act like we're the first people who were ever interested in survival. That's actually a bit absurd. I was a prepper and survivalist at least 20 years before anyone thought of using the term "prepper."

As with any other movement, we have our fads; tools and techniques that gather a following and become popular. Some are like the proverbial flash in the pan, appearing and disappearing even before they spread their light around. Others seem to stick around longer... perhaps even longer than they should.



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I don't care what survival scenario you conjure up, unless you're over-prepared with equipment and supplies, it's going to take all you have, all day long, to make it through. There's just too much that we need, in order to survive, for any of us to do it in a few hours a day. That need has driven the invention of much of the technology and infrastructure we have available to us today. Doing what needs to be done, without that technology and infrastructure, is challenging at best.

That's why I'm a big believer in the KISS principle in survival. The next time I'm faced with a survival situation, I want to make sure that my basic survival necessities are taken care of as simply and easily as possible, so that my mental and physical energy can be used to take care of the unexpected, rather than things like starting a fire.

So, let's take a look at a couple of examples of what we do in the prepping community and what we could do to apply the KISS principle to those areas. I'm going to be dealing specifically with wilderness survival, but the same concept applies to bugging in.

Fire-starting

Probably the most popular fire starter in the prepping community is the Ferro Rod. I'm not sure how it got to be so popular; but it is. Perhaps it's nothing more than the low cost, allowing companies which make products to sell to the prepping and survival niche to add a Ferro Rodfire starter to their product for a very low cost, making the buyer think

they're getting more for their money.

In reality, the Ferro Rod is a very poor fire starter, producing only a few sparks per stroke. While that's still enough to get a fire started, in an emergency, it's not efficient. If you're in the midst of a storm, or even just cold weather, and you need a fire to keep you from getting hypothermia, the last thing you need is to have to struggle with a Ferro Rod. You need something that you can count on to get that fire going in a matter of seconds.

My go-to fire starter is a stormproof and windproof lighter; something that I know will get my fire going, regardless of weather conditions. It's refillable, so all I need is a can of propane to ensure that I'll be starting fires for years. There are no parts that wear or that will need replacement.

Some people might ask, "Well then, why not just use a disposable butane lighter?" Have you ever tried starting a fire with one of those? The slightest puff of breeze and they go out. That's a no-go in my book. Chances are too great that I'll need to start a fire in inclement weather, including wind, rain and/or snow.

My secondary fire starter is the stormproof matches that are available today. While expensive, they are much better than the old waterproof ones. But the cost is why I use them as my backup, rather than my primary.

The other big thing that's touted in the survival community is friction type fire starters, like a bow drill. These come primarily from survival instructors, who want to impress their students with their overall manliness and ability to start a fire anywhere, anytime, using any materials. I have nothing against learning these techniques, because there can always be a situation where you don't have a stormproof lighter available; we should learn all the methods we can for that possibility. I just don't want to have to depend on that, if I

can use something simpler.

Building a Shelter

Besides building a fire, building a shelter is the most important thing to do when establishing a camp. This too is an area where we can apply the KISS principle. Looking over the articles and videos about prepping and survival online, it appears that everyone has the idea that the debris shelter is the best shelter you can possibly build.

But gathering the materials and building a debris hut takes time; time that you might need for other things. While they are great for keeping your body heat inside, that's not always your number one requirement for a shelter.

Backpackers, or more likely manufacturers who provide products to backpackers, solved this problem long ago, making ultralight backpacking tents and sleeping bags. But you'd be hard pressed to find a bug out bag list, which includes either a backpacking tent or a down sleeping bag. I carry both in mine; but haven't seen others mention either of them.

Another option, which I also carry, is an ultralight tarp. I'm not talking about the cheap blue tarps you can buy anywhere. Those are actually rather expensive for what you get. Rather, I'm talking about ones which are made for the backpacking community. They are much lighter and I believe, actually stronger. You can make a decent summer shelter, even if that's just a rain fly, out of one of these. If you have to put up your tent, the tarp can either go under it for moisture protection or over it for additional insulation.

That's not to say you shouldn't learn how to make a debris hut... and as many other types of shelter from natural materials as you can. You should. But rather than planning on going through the work of erecting a debris hut every night, it's much simpler to put up a tent.

Water Purification

Water purification isn't as much of an issue here as the two categories I've just mentioned. Few people go out into the woods, with the idea of making a bio-filter for survival. About the worst that anyone might think of trying is using water purification pills, which make the water taste horrible, or boiling their water to purify it. But most people carry along some sort of water filter, either a straw-type filter or a bag type one.

Still, the question remains, what are they going to do if their filter gets clogged or breaks? The old adage of "two is one and one is none" really applies to water purification, especially in a bug out situation.

First, I'd recommend carrying a metal water bottle, instead of a plastic one. While slightly heavier, they really aren't all that heavy. They provide one big advantage though; they can be put in the fire, if you have to purify some water. Plastic won't work that well for that.

The other thing I'd recommend is a WAPI (water pasteurization indicator). These were originally invented for use in third-world countries, where purified water is hard to come by. The WAPI consists of a wax bead in a plastic capsule. The wax melts at 160°F, indicating that the water is hot enough to be pasteurized. In other words, it's safe to drink. That saves on energy, as boiling water requires bringing it up to 202°F.

Extra Clothing

Here's another one that people leave out of their bug out bag lists. I don't know what those people are planning on wearing when they're bugging out. Are they planning on keeping the same clothes on for days or weeks at a time? Are they planning on stripping naked, out in the woods, so they can wash their

clothes? Personally, I don't like wearing dirty clothes, at least not for more than a day or two.

Backpackers regularly carry along a week's worth of clothing and food in their packs. I would think that if they could do it, we could to. Even a couple of extra outfits allows us to wash our clothes or at least rinse them out, so that we're not wearing dirty clothes after the first day. Just be sure to keep the overall weight of your pack in mind, when choosing the clothes you'll pack.

Socks are probably the most important single clothing item to have in your pack. Sweaty socks can lead to blisters on your feet, which is something you really want to avoid. Change your socks often; when it's hot, more than once per day. Then wash out your socks and carrying them on the outside of your pack to dry.

A Final Word

These aren't the only things that can fall under the category of the KISS principle; they're just meant to be representative of the overall idea. The more you can come up with on your own, to make your own survival easier, the better. Keep your eyes open for new ideas, and don't be afraid to come up with fresh ideas of your own.



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Took With Them When They
Traveled For Months**

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