

Bartering Your Skills in a Post-Disaster World

There has been much said, at one time or another, about bartering in a post-disaster world. Some preppers go so far as to build a stockpile of extra supplies, over and above their family's needs, specifically for the purpose of bartering them. Should we see a TEOTWAWKI event in our lifetimes, those people would be able to set up shop, becoming something like the general store of Old West towns, trading their stock of barter goods for pretty much anything they want.

There's only one problem with that. That is, they will eventually run out of stock. Unlike those general stores, there won't be any drummers, with their cases of samples and catalogues, trying to sell their companies wares to stock those shelves, nor will there be any wagons, driven by teamsters, bringing them more merchandise. Business may be good for a while, but only for a while. Once they trade away their stock, they'll be out of business.

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But any post-apocalyptic world is going to need business if people are going to do more than just barely survive. It's not enough for any of us to just survive; we need to think about our children. Even if we can't leave them with a world where they have all the comforts we have available to us today; they're going to need more than just subsistence-level survival. That means a society of some sort, complete with commerce.

Ok, so just where is that commerce going to come from? It will

have to come from the skills of the people living in those communities. The only problem with that, is that few people today have skills that will be useful in that sort of world. There's not going to be much use for social media influencers, marketing gurus, public relations consultants, bankers, or people with liberal arts degrees of any sort. Oh, those people will try to convince others of their value; but in reality, the only people who will be of any value will be those with skills which will be of real help to the community survive.

While there are lots of skills that would be useful during such a time, we can pretty much divide them into two general categories: providing a service that people need or providing products that they need. A few skillsets, like that of a blacksmith, could conceivably provide a little bit of both; but those skills are by far in the minority.

Providing Products

Providing a product will mean scrounging the materials necessary to make that product. If things get as bad as the report of the EMP Commission suggests, that probably won't be all that hard to do. With a large percentage of the population dying, there will be vast amounts of good, both new and used, that will be left behind. While many of those things won't be all that useful, without electrical power to make them run, there will be an abundance of basic materials and supplies, even though most of the most critical supplies, like food, will run out quickly.

What will be needed, is the creativity to take the manufactured good that are left behind and turn them into useful products, specifically products that can be used without electrical power. An electric saw, for example, may not be of any use, without electricity. Even so, the blades for that saw will still be able to be used for cutting, if someone comes up with an alternative power source.

We need only look at our own history to find many such things. Sawmills existed long before electric saws, either run by water power or animal power. While the saw blades used in those mills were much bigger than the ones we use in our power tools today, recreating the same technology would allow us to make use of our saw blades to cut wood.

This obviously requires the skills necessary to turn those saw blades, and whatever other parts are necessary, into usable saws. The one thing we've got going for us though, is that we can look back at how they used to do things, rather than having to invent things from scratch.

The goal here, will not be so much trying to create a service, as to create a product. In other words, the person building that saw won't be doing it so that they can offer a sawing service; but so that they can build things that people need. Of course, there will be much in the way of goods that are left behind by those who die, so the types of things that they will need that saw for is likely modifying existing products, so they can be used without electrical power.

Most of the people who will be creating these products will likely be people with hands-on skills, like mechanics and repairmen. They will be the ones who will be accustomed to modifying things to make them work. Others, who have other skills, will provide services to those who need them.

Providing Services

There are a fair number of skills that will translate directly into providing services to people in a post-disaster world. One easy example of this is medical services. Doctors, nurses, EMTs, midwives, and anyone else who can help people who are struggling with illness, injury and other medical issues will be in high demand.

The problem for these people will be in finding the necessary

medical supplies to care for their patients. Pharmacies will quickly run out of medicines, leaving medical personnel to improvise. So, not only will medical practitioners need to be able to care for their patients, they will need to find ways of coming up with everything from bandages to antibiotics.

But the medical field isn't going to be the only service that people will be able to barter in that post-disaster world. Pretty much anything that has to do with some area of repair will be needed, either to repair things that can no longer be purchased, or to modify those things so that they can be used in that post-disaster world.

If you've ever read the book "One Second After" and its sequels, you see a pretty good picture of how people will be trying to rebuild, after an EMP. While an EMP isn't the only TEOTWAWKI event that might befall us, it is largely representative of the world we would face after any major catastrophe. The possibility of having electrical service or any of the infrastructure and supply chain that we are accustomed to ranges right about none. Yet the people of that community worked hard to slowly restore things like water service, telephone communications and electricity. While the use of those was limited, they worked hard to reestablish them for community service, if for nothing else.

An interesting offshoot of this was that while the community was working hard to keep everyone out, they made exceptions for those who had skills which could help them restore those services. People like linemen, who could help restore their local phone service were given instant residency in their community, while others were kept out. Not only were they given residency, but they were also given food rations, out of the town's limited food supplies.

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There are actually a number of useful skills, which could result in the same sort of treatment by a community, in a post-disaster scenario, besides medical skills. Here are just a few:

- **Mechanics** – While there probably won't be much fuel available for cars, there are many things that can be done with car engines, using the little fuel available to power a variety of things.
- **Blacksmithing** – The old-time blacksmith made anything you could think of, out of metal. This was done with hand tools and a forge. Blacksmiths can also repair just about anything made of metal, including tools.
- **Seamstress** – Few people anymore know how to sew clothing. While there will probably be a lot of clothing available, it won't fit properly, as people lose weight. Just taking in clothing could become an entire industry.
- **Growing Food** – Of all the skills possible, anything to do with growing food will be some of the most useful and most sought after.
- **General Repairs** – People who can repair just about anything, can also modify those things to be used in other ways.
- **Gunsmithing** – With the importance of self-defense in such a time, the need for gunsmiths will rise.
- **Practical Engineering** – Making things that work.
- **Counseling** – People will have trouble dealing with the times and some will need professional help to deal with it, whether that comes from the clergy or from

psychologists.

- **Chemistry** – If there's anyone who will be able to create the medicines which are no longer available, it will probably be chemists.
- **Herbal Medicine** – Knowledge of herbal medicine will be used to replace the pharmaceuticals that won't be available.
- **Ropemaking**
- **Tanners** – Turning hides into leather.
- **Harness Making** – Assuming that people can find draft animals to use for farming and transportation, there will be a need to create harnesses for use with those animals.

The tricky part in all this, will be in getting value for your work. People may not have the types of items that will be needed, which they can trade for services. Over time, a standard value system for trade will develop, with something taking the place of money. But that will take time. In the beginning, it will be negotiated bartering for every transaction.