

Becoming a Post-Disaster Community Leader

I've been reading William Forstchen's "One Second After" trilogy for the umpteenth time. It seems I never get tired of his narrative, but there's something more to it than that. I think Forstchen has managed to capture the reality of what a post-EMP world will look like and the problems people will face. While not everyone lives in such an idealistic setting as he does, we can all expect to face the same basic problems should an EMP ever take out our electric grid.

We here in the prepping and survival community tend towards being lone wolves. At the most, we share our plans and prepping with our families and our survival team, but it rarely goes beyond that. While there are certain benefits to that in the short-term, it ignores some very real problems about long-term survival; namely that we need more skills than just survival skills, and our children will need those other people even more. Unless we want to consign our children to a caveman sort of existence, we need to think about more than just survival.

Granted, living in a cave is much better than dying; there's no question about that. But would you want to live in that cave, by yourself, for the rest of your life? Wouldn't it be better to find your soul mate and share that life with them? Wouldn't it be great to have some friends? Wouldn't it be great to have all the benefits that modern society provides us, and preferably without the problems?

This is one thing that I think Forstchen got right in his story. John Matherson wasn't just trying to survive himself, hiding off in the woods; he was helping his community to survive. Even the town prepper, who didn't share his food stockpile, ended up playing an important part in helping the

community. The only ones who were living in the woods formed their own community and eventually became allies of Matherson's small community, working with them for mutual defense and trading goods with them.



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Fortunately for them, the town of Black Mountain, North Carolina, was an almost ideal location. With natural defense provided by the surrounding mountains, and gravity-fed water from their local reservoir, eliminating several of their biggest survival concerns. Those are advantages that none of us are likely to have. But at the same time, our own communities have advantages as well; we just have to figure out what they are.

A big thing that Forstchen got right is that it will be easier to survive in a small community than it will be in a large city. While small rural towns aren't the treasure-trove of food and supplies that so many people seem to think they are, the ratio of many critical supplies, especially food and water, to people will most likely be better than it is in the city. On the other hand, cities have resources that don't exist in the country, like hospitals and warehouses full of usable equipment. As I said, we have to figure out the advantages of the community we find ourselves living in.

Leadership Will Emerge

Unlike many people think, some sort of leadership will arise in a post-disaster world. What that leadership is will depend on the severity of the disaster and the kind of people who are

there. I'm sure that there will be cases in which the local leadership steps up to do what's needed; but I'm just as sure that there will be cases in which the local leadership abandons their posts, probably in fear, realizing that they just aren't big enough to fill the need.

Sadly, many of those who stay around will probably be the wrong kind, people who will see the situation as a chance for personal benefit. They won't make decisions based on what's best for their community. Either their decisions will be for personal benefit or because it increases their personal power.

The other risk that our communities face is that when the elected and appointed leadership abandons their posts, warlords will rush to fill the power vacuum. They may not call themselves that, but that is what they will be. In the worst cases, they will have fought for the right to take over the community, thereby confirming their role as a warlord.

We know this about warlords because of countless examples from around the world. While nature may abhor a vacuum, warlords love one, and they can sense it faster than a shark smelling blood in the water. Their only concern is if they can establish control before others try to take it from them.

I know of no sure way of keeping warlords from trying other than to make sure there is no power vacuum. If we ignore the situation and leave it to others, we will eventually have to deal with those warlords ourselves. So, the question really boils down to whether we take a leadership position ourselves or if we back someone else who rises to the occasion. I'll tell you this, if we back someone else, we'd better be sure we know who they are and what they're going to do.

Setting Yourself Up as a Community

Leader

If you're already fulfilling a leadership position in your community, more power to you. But since you're a prepper, I doubt you are. That doesn't mean you shouldn't, especially in a post-disaster world. We will probably be the only ones around who have any idea of what to do to keep the people in our communities alive.

Since we are not warlords, the key to leadership is the people putting us there. That means that they decide for themselves that we are the kinds of leaders they need and that we are the ones who can make things better for them, even if we can't just make the problem disappear.

It all starts by gathering people together in your community, bringing people up to date with what has happened and what it means for both the short and long term. Most will not know what's going on and expect the government to come in and bail them out. I imagine it will be a hard blow for most people who have been raised to believe in the nanny state to accept that the government is no longer there for them and that whatever government is left is not in any condition to help themselves, let alone anyone else.

This is where your opportunity to show your leadership potential begins.

Information

The first thing you can do to show your leadership potential is to help people understand what is happening around them. As a prepper, you've studied all kinds of potential disaster scenarios, so you're more likely to be able to identify what is happening than anyone else around you. While that may not seem like much to you, to those scared people who don't have any idea what's going on, it will make you sound like the

smartest person around.

In One Second After, Matherson's first real action was to pull out a study he had participated in during his Army career dealing with EMP and take it to the community leaders, giving them his analysis of the situation. That one action alone made him part of the leadership of the community, accepted by both elected and appointed officials. While I can't guarantee it will do the same in your circumstances, it will definitely let people know who you are and that you know something about what's happening.

When people don't know what's happening, the person who does is a natural leader. People want and expect their leaders to know, even if that's an unrealistic expectation. Nevertheless, by showing that you have some idea of what's going on, people will continue coming to you for more information.

Instruction

This brings us to the next action that you can do to show your leadership: giving people instructions on how to survive. As we know, very few people have any idea of what it takes to survive. They don't realize their ignorance now, but they will figure it out real quick when the electricity goes out, and there's no water coming through their kitchen faucet.

Even the simplest survival tasks will be a revelation to those around you. Most people know that they can boil water to purify it, but they aren't going to know that they should. Nor are most of them going to have any idea of how to boil it since their stoves aren't going to be working. They are going to need to know what to do, even to be able to survive the first few days without getting sick.

Once again, being the person with the knowledge has the tendency to set you up as a leader. People will come to you with all sorts of questions because they won't know where else

to go. They may actually think of your knowledge as a valuable community resource, to be protected and valued for what you can do for the community.

Direction

Along with instruction comes the need to give people direction. Even something as simple as boiling water needs to be done with efficiency, so that resources aren't wasted. If each family boils water for that day's needs, that's one fire per family for at least the 20 minutes it takes to boil the water. But if two or three families get together to boil water, they can save on firewood. Considering that firewood will probably be scarce to start with, it's worthwhile saving it.

We talk about a survival team in the prepping community, and there is a real need for teamwork. That same principle goes for our communities as well. If water needs to be gathered and gardens need to be planted, who will organize it? Who is going to tell people which task to do? It will have to be someone who knows what needs to be done and how important each task is.

Granted, that's a bigger task than anyone can handle, but it will still have to be done. The best way to approach it is to find capable people who can be put in charge of different areas and then have everyone else volunteer to work in one of those areas. If too many people volunteer for one area, shift some of them to another. If people don't volunteer, assign them a task that nobody wants.

It will be necessary to identify those who have essential and usable skills during this process. Those are the most important people to your community, and their skills and knowledge should be husbanded and utilized. Some special considerations may be needed to be made for these people in order to ensure their survival. While that will be decried as

unfair by some, it will ultimately save more lives. That has to be our number one goal.

This is going to be harder than anyone can realize. As a society, we're not used to people telling us what to do. We're also not socialist in our very nature. Yet this will actually have to be a socialist effort, at least in the sense of everyone doing their part, working for the common good.

Provision

Finally, people will be most likely to be willing to follow those who provide for their needs. No, I'm not suggesting that you feed them out of your stockpile. I keep a few hundred pounds extra of rice and beans to give my neighbors, but even that isn't enough to take care of the whole community. Rather, what I'm talking about is knowing where there are resources that will help people survive and organizing efforts to secure those resources so that they will be best used in the community's interest, especially to keep people fed and alive.

A lot of what Forstchen talks about in his trilogy are the efforts undertaken to use the resources available to them as a community and the discussions that the community's leadership had in how to utilize them. There are many good lessons to be learned from their conversations, especially about how to balance the community's needs with the individual rights of those who own the resources.

This is most apparent in the area of food. There were a few farmers in the area of Black Mountain. Obviously, most of the food and all of the livestock belonged to those farms, which were privately owned. Stealing that food and livestock would be criminal, taking the community down the path towards communism, even though people needed the food. Therefore, some compensation was necessary in the name of fairness to those farmers.

At the same time, they couldn't afford to eat their seed corn, killing all the livestock and eating the seed this year and not leaving anything for the next. Survival has to mean sustainable survival, with plans going farther than the horizon. That requires someone with a vision and enough knowledge to put the vision into place.

Conclusion

I can't see the future any better than anyone else can, but it seems to me that any prepper following these steps would naturally become a leader without trying to become one. People won't want a political leader anyway, probably thinking that whatever disaster was a failure of the politicians. They'll want someone who can keep them alive, and these steps should do just that.

It won't be easy being a leader of a post-disaster community, but it is a necessary job that someone has to do. Filling that role may be nothing more than keeping someone else from doing so, but in keeping that other person out of the role, we can help ensure our own families' survival; isn't that the whole idea of being a prepper anyway?



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