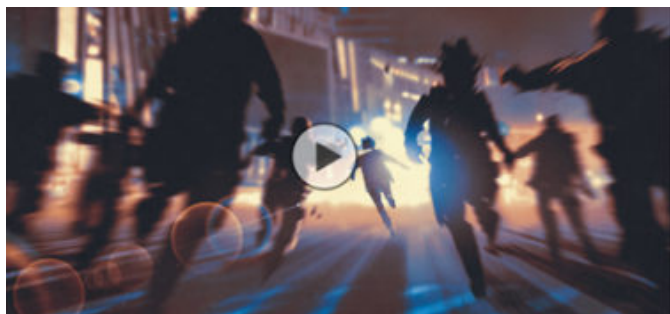


How Ambidexterity Can Boost Your Survival Skills

I find myself in a unique position today, as I sit here writing this. It's not the first time I've found myself in this position; but it hasn't happened all that many times. I've been fortunate in my life that I haven't had all that many injuries, and of those I have had, this is only the second serious injury to my hands. The first one happened about 30 years ago.

Yesterday evening, I was in my workshop, making something out of wood. Woodworking is my hobby and I have a two-car workshop, filled with tools and wood. I enjoy nothing more than building things, whether that be furniture for our home, gifts for my family or even survival gear. As far as I'm concerned, the ability to build and repair things is a survival skill in and of itself.

This time, I was working with a chisel to clean up a joint between two pieces of wood. This wasn't the type of chisel work where you pound the back end of the chisel with a mallet, it was careful work, using hand strength to shave off slivers of wood no more than a few thousandths of an inch thick. Such work requires a really sharp chisel and I had just sharpened the chisel I was using, to the point where it was sharper than any surgeon's scalpel. I know that from experience, because the chisel slipped and went through my finger. Ouch! Big ouch!



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Unfortunately, that chisel nicked an artery as it went through my finger, making the wound bleed profusely. Even with the extensive first-aid kit I have, I couldn't staunch the flow of blood and off we went to the emergency room. After spending half the night in the emergency room, getting my finger sewn back together, I sit here with a couple of yards of gauze wrapped around my left index finger. Amazingly enough, I'm still able to type.

The reason I'm able to type is not that the injury was minor by any means. I've got seven stitches in that finger. It's because I'm a rather good typist. But when I say "good" there, I'm not just good in the way that most people would think. Yes, I can type fast, but I also know the keyboard well enough that if I can't use a finger or two, I can substitute other fingers and still get the job done. I might not be typing 100 words a minute; but I can still type faster than most people.

That's not an accident. It has been very intentional. Ever since childhood I've experimented with doing things in different ways than I normally do. There was a time, I wanted to show my friends that I was fully ambidextrous. I never made it to that point; but I could do a lot of things with the "wrong hand" or even the "wrong finger. That remains to me today, at least to some extent.

As with most things in my life, this got me thinking about how important that skill could be in some future survival scenario. What kind of shape would any of us be, survival wise, if we couldn't use our dominant hand? I'm not talking about the ability to sign checks here; I'm talking about doing the things we need to be able to do, in order to survive, even while injured.

Let's look at a few examples:

I'm sure this list isn't going to cover all the bases; but that's not my goal. Rather I want to get you thinking about

those things you will need your fingers and hands for in a survival situation.

Shooting

Probably the most obvious skill that requires dexterity, especially of our trigger finger. There was a Tom Clancy book, where one of his principal characters lost the use of his trigger finger, due to someone taking a hammer to his hand in an act of torture. While that ruined his ability to shoot the way he was used to, that character could shoot better with his off hand, then most of us can with our good hand.

Working with Tools

There are a lot of things involved in survival, which amount to using one sort of tool or another. More than anything, this applies to using a knife. But it can also refer to using an axe or hatchet just as well. There are two issues to consider here, strength and dexterity. If you're using that axe or hatchet to split wood, can you strike where you want to and can you strike there with enough force to split the wood?

Carrying Things

You may not think of this as a being something that is "handed" like writing, but all of us have one arm that is stronger than the other. How badly will it affect your ability to carry firewood, if your stronger arm is the one that is injured? What about hauling water? Even working in the garden?

Cleaning and Preparing Game

Can you imagine trying to clean and prepare game for the table, using only one hand? I doesn't matter if we're talking about game you've hunted or animals you've raised, the problem is the same. This is a definite two-handed operation, requiring strength and dexterity in both hands. Improperly

handled meat, and that especially includes the handling of cleaning the animal, can be dangerous to eat.

Let's Talk Solutions

Fortunately, this is a fixable problem. Of course, the best possible fix is to not get injured in the first place. But sometimes that's outside our control. What then?

We have all learned how to do the things we do, using whichever hand we use. Granted, we had a natural propensity to use one hand or the other; but we still had to learn how to do those skills, developing the dexterity and strength needed. Well, if we can learn it with one hand, we can learn it with the other too. It just takes some time and effort to develop the other side of our body.

Shooting

I used to attend tactical shooting events at a local gun range every week, before I moved. If you've never been involved in one of those, I'd highly recommend it. Shooting tactically is much different than shooting in a controlled range situation and it will show you just how good a chance you have of actually doing the right thing, when it all becomes real.

One of the things they would throw in a shooting scenario from time to time would be shooting with your off hand. That meant not only pulling the trigger, but drawing the pistol with the wrong hand and reloading it one-handed. It's possible to do, but the first time you are faced with it, you'll think that you'll be dead before you can even get the gun out of the holster.

This led me to start doing some of my shooting practice with my off hand. I also learned to shoot using my middle finger as the trigger finger. The easy part was actually learning how to replace my magazine one-handed. Considering that I kept my

mags on my left hip, they were at least easy to reach.

Working with Tools

As a woodworker, as well as through working on my cars, I've had to do things with both hands. While I mostly use my right hand for working with, there are times when I just can't reach what I need with my right hand. Since that's how things are, I take the opportunity to use my left hand when practical, rather than just when absolutely necessary. This has improved my dexterity in that hand, making it possible for me to do more things. Should I get caught in a situation where I had to do things with my left hand, instead of my right, I would be fine.



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It's amazing just how far we can go with this. My dad used to have a secretary who could write upside-down. She could sit across the desk from someone and write things out so that they were right-side-up for the person across the desk from them. She had developed that skill to the point where people couldn't tell whether she had written something right-side-up or upside down.

Strength Training

Any body builder worth their salt will work to strengthen both sides of their bodies equally. You can I can do the same, without having to become body builders. All we need to do is to make sure that we use both sides of our bodies, when doing

normal tasks around the home. Gardening is especially good for this. Try digging a hole... say for planting a tree, with your off hand and see how much harder it is. That's a pretty good test for whether that side of your body is as strong as your predominant side.

There are ample opportunities to strengthen that weak side – carrying bags of mulch, digging holes and other gardening tasks. The more you do, the more it won't make any difference which hand takes the lead. Then, when you really need to do something with your off hand, you'll be ready to do it.