

Answers to Questions of Bartering

Where is Amazon when you need them?

One of the first casualties of an extended emergency is **standard of living**. We have come to rely on this standard in our privileged, every-day lives – standard of income, quality and availability of employment, quality and affordability of housing, hours of work required to purchase necessities, amount of leisure time, access to quality healthcare, quality and availability of education, life expectancy, incidence of disease, cost of goods and services, infrastructure, economic and political stability and safety. We all enjoy a different standard of living to varying degrees and, for the most part, we understand the measures that apply to these elements and what it takes to achieve them.

Not only would the quality level of our lives be compromised in the extended aftermath of a calamitous event, but the measurements of the elements that make up our daily existence would themselves be turned inside out. Depending on the **Type** and **Time** of a disaster, our usual tools of measurement may be unavailable.

Our current currency provides a medium, a measure, a standard and a store of value and thanks to companies like Amazon and Google, we can learn the relative value, quality and availability of virtually any good or service at will. Free delivery tomorrow. Now imagine there is no electricity. No Internet. No Alexa. Worse, no ATMs and no stores open or stocked. How would you know what a bottle of vodka is worth? How would you find out where to get one? What about my morning latte? I shudder to think.

Aside from the disruption of the supply chain that provides all our needs, your ability to facilitate transactions would default to whatever currency is physically available to you individually. Cash on hand, children's piggy bank, couch change... (**What's in Your Safe?**) Many would find themselves woefully short on the means to buy even the most basic necessities after their **Default** supply is gone, assuming that a retail market even existed. Enter the time-tested method used since the dawn of civilization – barter.

First, some context. Barter is common in good times and bad. From trading baseball cards as kids to swapping wine as adults, most of us do some form of barter from time to time. Usually this is done between friends and family and with luxury or surplus items, sometimes exchanging labor for goods. The difference here is that a sustained breakdown of the supply chain brought about by **Power Grid** failure, **Economic Collapse** or similar, wide-spread disruption would sail us into uncharted waters. Barter in that environment would become more of a necessity and would include more critical products and essential services.

The **Why**, then, is obvious. The **Who**, less so. There is one school of thought that suggests that you never want to barter with someone in a collapse environment who you don't absolutely know and trust. Once you **Learn to Say No** to freely sharing your limited resources with those outside your loved ones and close friends, there is the question of who you trust enough to trade surplus resources with, knowing they won't turn on you or take unfair advantage. Extended family, co-workers and friends are the best candidates for barter. Strangers and casual acquaintances are the worst candidates. The test should be whether you would trust that person to be in your home unattended. If not, then they may not be a solid candidate for trading goods and services since you become vulnerable in that trading process. You have now broadcast that you have extra resources and could be a target for the unscrupulous and the desperate.

Alpha planners will have formed **CommunityReady™** groups consisting of people who have coalesced around a common mission of emergency readiness and division of labor, and are prepared to support each other after a collapse. These groups contain the necessary skillsets, knowledge and resources to withstand the rigors and challenges of an extended period of deprivation. More importantly, they will have developed systems and protocols to address these challenges and a familiarity with each other that will easily facilitate cooperation and interactions such as barter.

Deciding **When** to barter should hinge on the stabilization of the initial disruption and a sober inventory of available resources, combined with a time horizon of the return to some kind of normalcy. This is more art than science. The more you have prepared with provisions to carry you through a given calamity, the less pressure there is to expose yourself to acquire things you need to survive.

Where to conduct a barter transaction would depend on the nature of the other party. An extended family member, who already knows where you live, might be trusted to come to your home to trade. You probably want to meet those less familiar away from your storehouse assuming you can do so safely and securely.

One of the first tasks after a disruptive event is to take inventory of your range of available resources and rank them in order of importance. Essential items will trump comfort items. With food, you also have to determine freshness and shelf-life of the provisions and assign a “use by” date. Knowing the **3 Rings of Food Readiness** helps to sort your stocks and meal-plan for the group. This process will reveal what you are missing in your supplies and what might be needed to supplement your inventory. You will also learn **What** you have a surplus of and are willing to trade with someone else.

As a general rule, you should only trade surplus or renewable items and not essential and finite goods. Trade labor or soon-to-expire food for medicines or canned goods; liquor or coffee for needed tools, shelter or sundries. Resist the temptation to trade shelf-stable foods and potable water for non-essentials (art work and gold watches are not essential). If you have an abundance of fresh water from a reliable, renewable source such as roof catchment like the [WRAP™ System](#) you may be able to leverage that resource very successfully.

Those that have heeded our advice on the [EmergencyReady™ Priorities](#) should have a good range of options when it comes to bartering. Some of our favorite surplus items are personal hygiene & paper products (especially wet-wipes & toilet paper), books & magazines, aspirin, spices and bourbon. None of these are survival essentials but they sure contribute to quality of life on the **New Frontier**. Also, having a supply of various containers to break-down bulk items and liquids is smart.

One category that we advocate never trading in is **Weapons & Ammunition**. Simply put, you never want to provide someone with the means of your destruction. Beyond that, in terms of renewable resources and skills, gunsmithing ranks well down the list of things you can do from scratch. You may well be able to learn how to grow your own food or build your own shelter but just try and forge a gun barrel.

How you barter is key. Ask for specific items and avoid what is just simply available. Be ready to walk away from a trade if you are uncomfortable and try not to appear too eager. Be **skeptical**. Don't hesitate to ask questions. Only trade for what is immediately in hand. When trading goods for labor or services; get the service before handing over the goods. Even in normal times, promises can be a pocket full of mumbles.

Recognize that assessing a value in a deconstructed environment is challenging. The usual metrics are absent. Value has now become relative to immediate wants and needs. Understand that value **Before the Event (BtE)** is very different than value **After the Event (AtE)**. Unlike some doomsayers, we believe that life in an extended collapse would look more like [Colonial Williamsburg](#) than [Waterworld](#), at least after a period of adjustment. Oh, and the houses would be better.

Alexa, like a past lover, would be a fading memory.