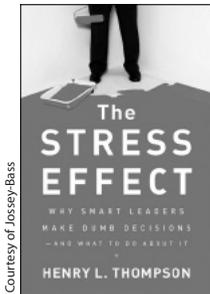


than the general public, *Dogface Soldier* nevertheless fills an important gap in military historiography. These observations aside, Heefner has produced a comprehensive biography of a soldier arguably considered as one of America's most highly-rated battlefield commanders in World War II. We remain in Truscott's debt for his distinguished service during the century's bloodiest conflict. We are in Heefner's debt for introducing "this great soldier and patriot to a new generation of military historians."



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## ***The Stress Effect: Why Smart Leaders Make Dumb Decisions—And What to Do About It***

by Henry L. Thompson

**Reviewed by Colonel Charles D. Allen, USA, Retired,**  
Assistant Professor of Cultural Sciences, US Army War College

There are several recent books and articles that explore leader failures, often attributing to them bad behavior, character flaw, or dysfunction. *The Stress Effect* offers a different approach and perspective that may be useful to leaders and managers across several domains.

The author has impressive credentials garnered from three careers, which provide a unique perspective on the topic of leader decisionmaking ability. Dr. Thompson began as a military officer whose experiences extend from Vietnam to assignments in the Center for Army Leadership, then as a university professor and psychology department chairperson, and now as a leadership consultant with his own firm.

The book is intended for those interested in leader development and organizational dynamics. Some chapters will be more comfortable for readers with backgrounds in industrial and organizational psychology or organizational behavior. Leadership practitioners will be tempted to jump right to the latter chapter, "The Seven Best Practices to Prevent Stress"—that would be a mistake. That chapter is an integration of a number of best practices introduced in several other books so nothing new is presented. The uniqueness is the use of the acronym **ARSENAL** to frame the practices—**A**wareness, **R**est, **S**upport, **E**xercise, **N**utrition, **A**ttitude, **L**earning. However, to appreciate how this framework may be useful, all readers should expend the requisite effort with the earlier chapters.

As befitting an academic, Thompson provides a primer on several high-level constructs presented in this book. He includes a literature review of the seminal theories of psychology combined with research findings on how individuals process information (perception and assessment), what drives them (motivation), and how they use the information to achieve goals (action).

The material in the early chapters will be familiar to former faculty of at least two senior level colleges. Most of our strategic leadership curriculum is based on the work of Elliott Jaques's *Stratified Systems Theory* and the research

of T. Owens Jacobs with students of the National Defense University (Industrial College of the Armed Forces). Thompson provides a spate of vignettes and anecdotes to illustrate the concepts across levels of direct, organizational, and strategic leadership. Military members will embrace the stories about Ranger and Airborne qualification courses. Business leaders will identify with examples of individuals in organizational settings. Most readers will nod their heads as the author builds the case for the effects of cognition and emotion on decision-making under “normal” conditions and under stress. The book is a marriage of ideas and brings to mind the old adage, “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.”

“Something old” is the long-debated question of whether leaders are born or made and the search for the specific traits of “good leaders.” The most innate attribute of individuals is cognitive intelligence. The author cites several studies that establish senior leaders (CEOs, general officers, elected public officials, etc.) generally have above average intelligence as measured by the traditional intelligence quotient. The consistent theme is that proper selection of potential leaders begins with identifying those who have the requisite intelligence to do well in complex situations that require judgment.

“Something new” is the recent contributions from neuroscience as it applies to cognition and decisionmaking, particularly for leaders. The author effectively explains the regions of the brain that are functionally related to primal responses, emotions, and higher-order thinking. This exploration helps the reader to understand the physiological and biochemical processes of thinking and decisionmaking.

“Something borrowed” is the concept of interpersonal competencies and the re-emergence of emotional intelligence as a key competency for leaders. While emotional intelligence as presented by Dan Goleman has gotten a lot of attention in the past decade, the foundational concept has been around since the mid-1960s. This is an important competency if one accepts that leadership is the process of influencing others. In order to influence, leaders have to possess self-awareness and be able to relate to the feelings of those who may choose to partner or follow.

“Something blue” is the discouraging aspect of leadership in the modern era marked by complexity and ambiguity that make leading organizations an inherently stress-filled endeavor. The conjecture is made that smart leaders generally make dumb mistakes based on the stresses that are part and parcel of organizational life. Rather than focus on traits or the character of the individual, Thompson presents evidence that leaders are limited by their innate cognitive abilities and have shortcomings in emotional intelligence necessary to assess pertinent information, to render appropriate judgments, and then make effective decisions.

As the title suggests, stress degrades the quality of decisions made by leaders and so the author offers that developing resilience is the inoculation that leaders require. Developing stress resilience has three components: increasing

stress management capacity, cognitive resilience, and stress resilient emotional intelligence.

*The Stress Effect* is a timely offering that complements the efforts the US Army has placed on resiliency over the past year. This era of persistent conflict has had an accompanying rise in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and suicides at the level of individual soldiers. At the operational and strategic levels, military professionals are being challenged on the quality of their strategic thinking and decisionmaking. I do not expect that this book will solve all our problems, but it may provide a greater understanding of how to define and approach problems that leaders face in this new century. This book will serve as a handy reference to mid-grade and senior leaders with practical techniques for their personal self-development as well as for members of organizations they lead.