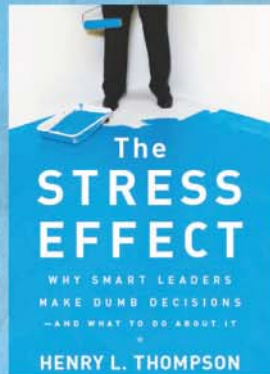


# The Stress Effect

Why Smart Leaders Make Dumb Decisions — And What To Do About It

Author  
Henry L. (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D.

## Book Review Leader's Guide



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## Book Review Leader's Guide

### Purpose

The purpose of this Book Review Leader's Guide is to help individuals and organizations process the information in *The Stress Effect* and apply it to themselves or their organization. This Guide gives step-by-step instructions on how to lead a book group. It also includes questions for each chapter to help ensure that participants understand the information presented. Most important, activities are included that encourage participants to probe their own or their organization's stress and to understand how stress may affect their decision-making abilities. Last, participants are encouraged to create their own Stress Reduction Development Plan using the suggestions provided.

### Part I: Discussion Leader Preparation

- Read *The Stress Effect* before assigning it to the group.
- Make notes of important points and page numbers for easy reference later.
- Use the thought-provoking questions in the Appendix to guide your reading and to help participants focus their reading. Adapt as needed to the specific needs of the group.
- Decide who will purchase the book, the company or participants. Each participant needs his/her own copy for future reference.
- Determine when, where and how often the group will meet.
- Divide reading assignments so that by the end of the schedule, the group will have covered and discussed the entire book.
- Determine the format of the meeting, for example, large group, small group, virtual, etc.

### Part II: Discussion Leader Responsibilities

- Send all participants an agenda with a calendar that includes dates and assignments so that participants have all of the information they need from the beginning. Include the book's title and information about where and how to get a copy and the list of questions in the Appendix to help them focus their reading.
- Lead the discussions and the Q&A sessions using questions from the Appendix or others you've generated.
- Connect ideas and comments made by others.
- Encourage balanced participation by all participants.
- Monitor the time and pace of the meeting.
- Keep the group on track and focused on topics related to the book.
- Have someone take notes that can be distributed to participants.

### Part III: Meeting Material Suggestions

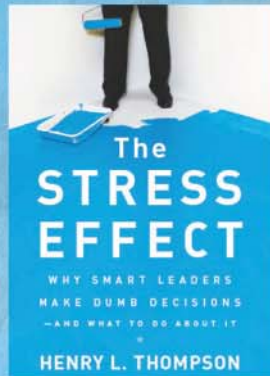
- A sign-in sheet with name, department and email address
- Pencils or pens and index cards, Post-its and blank paper
- Flipcharts and markers to record discussion ideas
- Ask participants to bring their copies of *The Stress Effect* to each meeting.
- Both leaders and participants should bring their notes.

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## *Part IV: Follow-Up*

Even the most cognitively and emotionally gifted leaders can make poor decisions when they are under stress. For that reason, as well as for their own health and well-being, leaders must learn to understand and manage their stress in such a way that they maintain their performance even in the most difficult circumstances, just as Captain Sullenberger did.

Now that you have read *The Stress Effect*, participated in a discussion group and started your own Stress Reduction Development Plan, we recommend that you complete your personal plan, encourage the participants to complete their individual plans and develop a plan for your department or organization.

Then you must take the most important step: implementing your plan and following through. Doing so does not mean that you or your colleagues no longer have to deal with stress, but understanding how stress affects you and having a plan to help leaders manage their stress will provide safeguards to prevent Catastrophic Leadership Failure™ (See Resources pg. A-11).

# Appendix: Discussion Questions

## Introduction

1. How did Captain Sullenberger of Flight 1549 demonstrate his ability to handle stress in the story of the Miracle on the Hudson? How did he manage the stress of others on the plane?
2. How have some CEOs and business leaders reacted to stress during the financial crisis?
3. Based on the information in the Introduction, how might you account for the decisions these leaders made during times of crises?

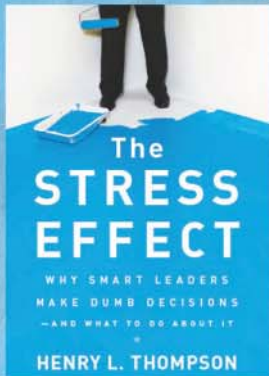
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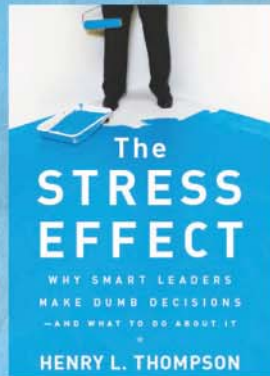


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## Chapter 1: How Leaders Make Decisions

1. What was the most important information in Chapter 1 for you?
2. What did you think or how did you feel when you read the author's assertions that 1) not everyone can be a CEO of a large company or 2) a person's IQ plays a role in determining leader performance?
3. Does this information conflict with the American belief that "anyone can be President"? Does it conflict with your values? Why or why not?
4. What are the implications for our organization?
5. List the four decision-making models presented and try to recall a decision you made using each one.
6. What complexities exist at the different levels of our organization?
7. What kinds of routine and non-routine decisions do leaders at different role levels in our organization make?
8. Which decision-making models do you or your department use to make decisions? Are they effective? Why or why not? Which other model would you like to try?

**Activities:** Choose one decision your department or you personally will make soon and use the Seven-Step Problem-Solving Model to choose the best solution.

Using the same problem or a different one, use each decision-making model presented in Chapter 1 to see which one would be the most effective tool for solving your problem.

**Development Plan:** List major decisions you will make in the next 12 months and decide which model to use when making each decision.

*Notes:*

**Chapter 2: How Cognitive Intelligence Influences Decision Making**

1. What key points did you get from Chapter 2?
2. Did any of the information in Chapter 2 surprise you? Why?
3. Can you recall a time when a mitigating factor, such as lack of sleep or exercise, influenced your decision-making abilities? What was the result?
4. List one job at a different Role Level in our organization. What specific cognitive skills does each Role Level demand?
5. How will this information affect how you choose leaders to work for you?
6. What issues might come up for you or your organization if you apply this information when you choose leaders?

**Activity:** Track your sleep, exercise and nutrition for a week. Are you getting at least 7 hours of sleep a night? How well are you fulfilling your nutritional needs? Do you have a well-balanced exercise program?

**Development Plan:** Design an action plan to help you improve in at least one of these areas in which you are not where you want to be: Rest, Exercise or Nutrition.

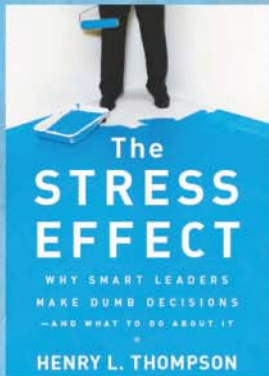
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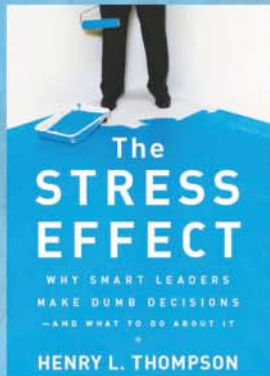


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## Chapter 3: Emotional Intelligence and Decision Making

1. What is emotional intelligence?
2. Why is emotional intelligence important to our organization?
3. What changes should we make based on this information?
4. How will your knowledge of emotional intelligence and its effect on decision making influence you?
5. What emotional hijackers have you observed in yourself or others?
6. How can our organization encourage employees to use the EI moderating factors, such as sleep and good nutrition?
7. Have you ever taken an EI assessment? Was it helpful? How have you used the feedback? Would you like to receive feedback on EI?

**Activity:** Examine 3 major decisions you or our organization have made in the last year and assess the impact of emotions on the decision-making process that led to the final decision.

**Development Plan:** If you have taken an EI assessment, write a developmental plan to maximize strength areas and contain weaknesses. If you have not taken an assessment, conduct an honest self-appraisal of how well you understand your own and others' EI.

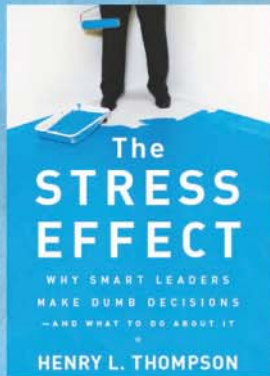
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## Chapter 4: Stress and Decision Making

1. What is stress? How does it affect health and mental functioning?
2. Can you recall a decision you made when stressed? What was the outcome?
3. Which of the four sources of stress—home, work, health or environment—has the greatest impact on your current stress level?
4. What impact does stress have on decision making in our organization?
5. What changes can our organization make to reduce current stress levels?
6. How can our organization help leaders make better decisions even when they are under stress?

**Activity:** List the top stressors in your department or organization. How can you reduce stress in these areas?

**Development Plan:** Plan specific activities on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis that will help reduce or alleviate your stress, focusing on areas where you have the greatest number of stressors.

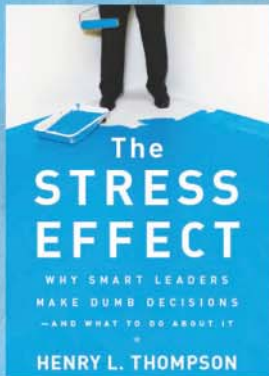
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## Chapter 5: How Stress Leads to Poor Decision Making

1. How does stress affect decision making?
2. What is the impact of having a personal paradigm lens?
3. How has stress affected your Perception > Appraisal > Motivation > Action sequence?
4. What are examples of poor decisions made because information was “filtered” incorrectly?
5. What are examples of unintended consequences that resulted from a decision made under stress?
6. What can our organization do to help leaders stay motivated even when they are under stress?

**Activity:** Using the Grip Meter concept from *The Stress Effect*, track your stress for one week. Do you notice any patterns that suggest which times of the day or week or which particular situations increase your stress level?

**Development Plan:** Write an action plan that will help you reduce stress in particular situations or at particular times of the week. For example, if Mondays tend to be busy and stressful, determine whether you can delegate some smaller tasks to direct reports. Can you put off some tasks until Tuesday? Do you need more rest on Sunday to prepare for Monday? Do you tend to skip breakfast to get to work earlier on Monday? You might want to include that you will eat a healthy breakfast every Monday. To do this, you could pack a breakfast Sunday night to take with you Monday morning.

**Notes:**

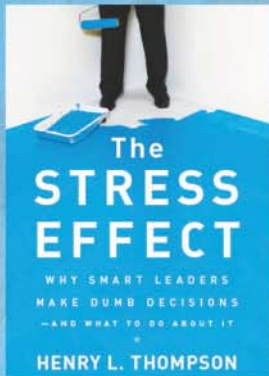


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## Chapter 6: Increasing Stress Management Capacity

1. What is the Comfort Zone and what information does it provide about stress?
2. How did you react to the idea that people can rustout as well as burnout, depending on their capacity for and level of stress?
3. Thinking of your personal Comfort Zone, how do you know when you reach the burnout level? The rustout level?
4. What are the implications for you or our organization of the idea that you can stretch your capacity to manage stress?
5. What changes could our organization make to its training programs or procedures to increase our stress resilience?
6. List the top five stressors in your life or organization from the smallest to the greatest. How can you use the Bubble Model of Stress Management to help reduce your stress?

**Activity:** Create a Bubble Model of your current stressors.

**Development Plan:** List specific ways that you can pop smaller bubbles on your Bubble Model so that you reduce your overall stress level.

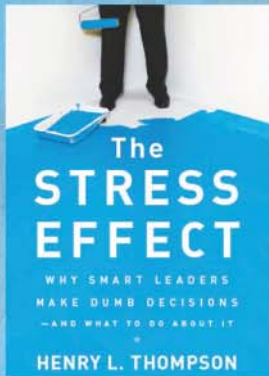
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## Chapter 7: Developing Cognitive Resilience

1. What is human resilience?
2. Conduct an honest self-appraisal of your level of commitment to activities in which you participate, your belief that you can influence stressful events and your attitude toward challenges, especially those that require you to deal with change.
3. How good are you at maintaining your cognitive functions when you are under pressure or feeling stressed?
4. What are the implications for our organization of how stress affects Cognitive Ability?
5. What can you or our organization do to develop, enhance and maintain cognitive resilience?
6. What performance aids are you currently using? Which do you plan to try?
7. How could you and our organization prepare for periods of intense stress to prevent drops in performance?

**Activity:** Create a Cognitive Functioning Dashboard.

**Development Plan:** Create at least one performance aid to help you or your department function well when under stress.

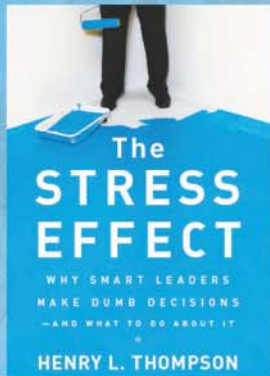
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## Chapter 8: Building Stress Resilient Emotional Intelligence

1. What is Stress Resilient Emotional Intelligence™ (SREI™)?
2. How does the PAMA™ Model (Chapter 1) help explain resilience?
3. What are some emotional areas (personal or organizational) so strongly marked with negative outcomes that you cannot seem to reprogram them?
4. What are the implications of SREI™ for you or our organization?
5. Give examples of your response hierarchy. How does it impact your decisions?
6. What kind of training would help you or our organization build greater SREI™?
7. What other “tools” from this chapter could you or our organization implement to build greater SREI™?

**Activity:** Create an Emotional Functioning Dashboard.

**Development Plan:** Plan at least one training activity to help you or your organization understand EI and build greater stress resilience in this area (SREI™).

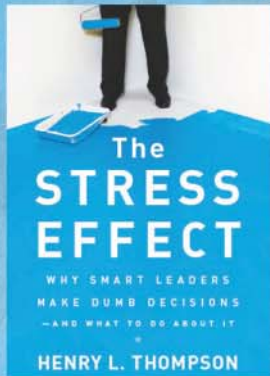
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## Chapter 9: The Seven Best Practices to Prevent Stress

1. What is ARSENAL™?
2. What stood out in the discussions about the seven best practice areas of ARSENAL™?
3. What was your personal response to the discussion about the importance of Awareness?
4. What are the implications of ARSENAL™ for you or our organization?
5. What impact could becoming a Stress Resilient Organization have on the people in our organization?
6. What impact could becoming a Stress Resilient Organization have on the performance of our organization?
7. How can our organization apply the steps outlined in this chapter to keep stress from affecting performance?

**Activity:** Take the short version of the ARSENAL™ assessment in *The Stress Effect* or take the longer version online ([www.thestresseffect.com](http://www.thestresseffect.com)).

**Development Plan:** Fill in any areas that are currently blank so that you have a developmental plan that assesses your stress level and lists specific activities that address all seven practice areas for ARSENAL™. Then implement your plan.

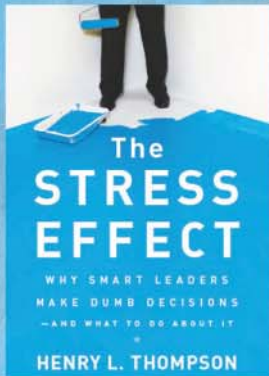
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## Conclusion

1. What do you think about the author's assertion that "Leaders of the future will be required to be *masters of decision making under stress*"? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Should you extend the information presented in *The Stress Effect* to include your teams? Why or why not? What are some things you can begin to do now to help manage your team members' stress?
3. If employees continue to be required to do more work in the same amount of time, as the author suggests, how could you address the stress this causes?
4. What is our organization currently doing to help leaders and employees reduce stress? Identify some things we should do to improve in this area.

*Notes:*

## Resources

Catastrophic Leadership Failure Article: <http://bit.ly/21Dgzd>

Fitness Programs: 5 Steps To Getting Started : <http://bit.ly/wooHP>

<http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/>

<http://www.hpsys.com>