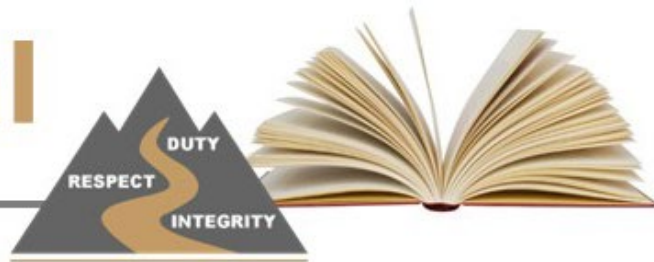


# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## *The Stress Effect* by Henry L. Thompson

**Best Wildland Fire Leadership Level to read this book:**

- Level 3, Leader of People
- Level 4, Leader of Leaders
- Could be a good read for level 1 and level 2 leaders who want to take a deeper dive

### Why Read *The Stress Effect*?

*“Leadership isn’t just about the right credentials: having worked at the best companies, getting promoted into bigger and bigger jobs, taking home larger paychecks each passing year. Leadership, pure and simple, is about being able to make good decisions during bad times.”*

*The Stress Effect* is a great book that examines the effects of stress on decision making. Leaders in the wildland fire service are required to make important decisions quickly and while under stress. It’s critical to understand how a leader’s cognitive and emotional intelligence are affected by stress, and what you can do to mitigate the effects of stress on your ability to lead others and make good decisions. This book contains information that’s valuable for anyone who wants to better understand and manage stress in their lives.

There are several videos related to the book and featuring the author available online. Find two of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **Jocko Podcast 206 w/ Dick Thompson - The Stress Effect. Why Good Leaders Make Dumb Decisions (3 hour podcast):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5ajc6gds3c>
- **Beat Stress and Avoid Burnout: Build Your ARSENAL (3 minute clip):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8FG1jash28>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

**Blog:** <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

**Professional Reading Program:** <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

**Main WFLDP page:** <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp>

## *The Stress Effect Discussion Questions*

### **Chapter One: How Leaders Make Decisions**

Have you seen “smart” leaders make “dumb” decisions? Have you ever been in circumstances where you made decisions that in hindsight were “dumb?” What kind of decision strategies do you use to help make decisions in stressful situations?

### **Chapter Two: How Cognitive Intelligence Influences Decision Making**

After reading this chapter, what do you think about cognitive intelligence and leadership? How might these ideas show up in your work environment? What are some ways that you can make sure you’re operating at the top of your cognitive intelligence “game” in decision making in the wildland fire setting?

### **Chapter Three: Emotional Intelligence and Decision Making**

Why might emotional intelligence be important for fire leaders? Have you worked with any leaders that showed good emotional intelligence “skills?” What do you think of the example of the Hardwood Group CEO that closes out the chapter? How does this demonstration of leading by example compare to what you see in your team or organization? How might emotional intelligence help you lead by example in your situation?

### **Chapter Four: Stress and Decision Making**

What symptoms of stress do you see in your life? Why might chronic stress and its effects be something to understand and watch for in a wildland fire organization? Have you ever seen stress reactions lead to bad decisions? What do you think of the idea that control, or perceived control, contributes to stress? Why should you manage stress instead of “powering through?”

### **Chapter Five: How Stress Leads to Poor Decision Making**

How often do you, as a fire leader, make decisions under stress? How can stress change your perceptions of a situation, and influence the decisions you make while under stress? How does stress contribute to “confirmation traps” in decision making, and why is that important to know and understand?

### **Chapter Six: Increasing Stress Management Capacity**

Where are you at in the stress level/time curve shown in this chapter? What are some ways that you can build your capacity for stress management? How about for your team? Could stress relief techniques like mindfulness meditation be a tool used to build stress management capacity in the wildland fire setting?

## **Chapter Seven: Developing Cognitive Resilience**

How can you be an optimist while at the same time being realistic about the facts of your current reality? Where are your levels of cognitive functioning right now? How about toward the end of a busy fire season? Why is sleep so important for cognitive resilience? Are there any of the tools listed in this chapter that you use, or will consider using?

## **Chapter Eight: Building Stress Resilient Emotional Intelligence**

How does a stressful environment affect emotional intelligence? How are the tools to build stress resilient emotional intelligence similar to (or different from) those for building cognitive resilience? What are some ways you can (or maybe are) put these into practice?

## **Chapter Nine: The Seven Best Practices to Prevent Stress**

How can you integrate the ARSENAL concept into your stress management practice? For your team? What are some areas where you have strong stress prevention skills/traits? What are some where you could improve?