



## FEW PLACES STILL AVAILABLE:

Last month, we announced that the Defence Thinking Skills Programme will be running **a one-day course on Thinking Skills** on two dates in 2015: 22<sup>nd</sup> April and 7<sup>th</sup> July. We had a good response and can confirm both courses will run but there are a few places left for each date. Further details are in last month's newsletter and the VLE. It is an applied course for Military and Civil Service Defence personnel at all levels. If you wish to reserve a place, please contact **defac-tsp-admin@defenceacademy.mod.uk**

## STRESS: HOW HARMFUL TO THINKING IS IT?

Everyone except the most carefree of people has experienced stress at various points of their lives. Sometimes, a small amount of stress can kick start something within you that can motivate you to get things done. At other times it can be demotivating and impair performance. But what are the effects of stress on the way we think, particularly if we have long term stress? To understand this, we must compare acute and chronic stress. Acute stress may arise in response to a sudden unpredictable event and can be a spur to action. When these types of stressors appear, we have a quick rush of adrenaline and a feeling of being pumped up to deal with the stressor, such as swerving to avoid something while driving. Acute stress as a result of sudden overload can be overwhelming and cause a deterioration in performance. Usually this takes the form of an automatic narrowing of attention, filtering out information so that it is reduced to a manageable level. As this is automatic, and happens without conscious control, it is rarely optimal for the task, and so important factors can inadvertently get ignored.

Chronic stress is the more destructive form of stress as it can build up over time through repeated exposure to stressors and this can take its toll on both physical and mental well-being. In chronic stress, the production of the hormone cortisol has a more damaging impact than in acute stress. When your brain recognises a threat or a problem it releases cortisol which in effect puts the body into "survival mode", in which functions that are non-vital in the moment, such as growth and digestion, are temporarily shut down. However, as a person continues to be stressed the cortisol continues to suppress the important continuous functions like the immune system. This contributes to the run-down feeling that people get when they find themselves stressed over



a long period of time and why people they may find themselves unwell exactly when they need to be more focused on their problems. In turn, these physiological compromises lead to a decrease in cognitive abilities and the ability to think becomes impaired. In particular, memory, the ability to learn, critical thinking and creativity are damaged. In addition, the part of the brain that helps you to cope with emotions may shrink, leaving you less able to deal with stressful situations.

But are there ways to combat this? Well, we don't want to suppress cortisol entirely as we need it in certain 'fight or flight' situations. However, there are ways to help reduce the

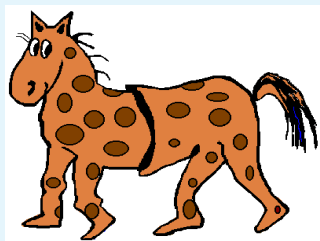
level of cortisol that our brains produce. Caffeine has been shown to increase cortisol levels for up to 18 hours after consumption so although perhaps people feel more alert after their morning coffee perhaps it is doing more harm than good throughout the day. Also, simple lifestyle changes such as getting more sleep, exercising regularly and engaging in relaxing and meditative techniques can allow you to reduce cortisol levels and in turn reduce your stress levels and allow you to maximise your thinking abilities. Evidence shows that when you stop the chronic stress, the brain can recover quite well within weeks.

For further information and future courses on stress resilience, please contact JSARC at [KAnderson.cmt@defenceacademy.mod.uk](mailto:KAnderson.cmt@defenceacademy.mod.uk)

Also, more information can be found here. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201402/chronic-stress-can-damage-brain-structure-and-connectivity>

### THE TEASER SECTION:

Last month, we asked you whether it was Tom or Toby who played the part of the donkey in the nativity play. When the teaser was set, the answer we had in mind was that it was Toby. This is because with the other parts, the last letter of the person's name is also the last letter of the part they played. However, as a good example of how people think differently when solving problems, many people suggested



**both** Tom and Toby played the donkey in the style of a two-man pantomime horse. This is good lateral thinking and an example of how there is not always one solution to every problem.

### DECEMBER'S TEASER:

This month, the teaser we have is a little longer than normal and may require a little more time and effort. Key to solving the puzzle is to pay attention and remain patient. It is as follows:

There are 5 houses in 5 different colours. In each house lives a person with a different nationality. The 5 owners drink a certain type of beverage, smoke a certain brand of cigar, and keep a certain pet. No owners have the same pet, smoke the same brand of cigar, or drink the same beverage.

**The question is: Who owns the fish?**

Hints:

- The Brit lives in the red house.
- The Swede keeps dogs as pets.
- The Dane drinks tea.
- The green house is on the left of the white house.
- The green homeowner drinks coffee.
- The person who smokes Pall Mall rears birds.
- The owner of the yellow house smokes Dunhill.
- The man living in the centre house drinks milk.
- The Norwegian lives in the first house.
- The man who smokes Blend lives next to the one who keeps cats.
- The man who keeps the horse lives next to the man who smokes Dunhill.
- The owner who smokes Bluemaster drinks beer.
- The German smokes prince.
- The Norwegian lives next to the blue house.
- The man who smokes Blend has a neighbour who drinks water.

As always, the solution will be posted in next month's newsletter. Good luck.

### CONTACT US:

If you've enjoyed reading this and wish to be added to the monthly mailing list or have any general feedback, please feel free to contact us.

Aaron Vick: [avick.cu@defenceacademy.mod.uk](mailto:avick.cu@defenceacademy.mod.uk)