

IoNTELLIGENCE Brief | Newsletter 7 | October 2017



Key Points

- **October's theme is "Intelligence"**
- **Have a high-stakes Decision? Use the CIA's analytical method**
- **Read *Red Sparrow* and Watch "A Good American"**
- **What a French philosopher and Bruce Lee have in common**
- **I have a secret to share with you ...**

The challenge today is not getting *information*; it's turning it into *intelligence*. Philip Mudd, former CIA analyst, adds: "Intelligence is not secrets; it's knowledge. It's information that helps you solve the problem." The theme I'm tackling this month revolves around this concept of intelligence, and I've curated everything from the CIA's way of analyzing a problem to THE best spy novel I've ever devoured. *Read on ...*

Acceleration

Slow is Smooth; Smooth is Fast

This is the mantra of everyone from Navy SEALs to CIA snipers, and for good reason; it's a wonderfully compact way to deliver a surprisingly complex piece of advice. My interpretation, for what it's worth: doing it slowly means doing it right; doing it right means doing it once; doing it once means doing it fast.

This epigram has so much power because it runs perpendicular to the dominant idea of our modern hyper-connected world, namely that speed is everything. James Gleick wrote a good book describing this ethos - [FSTR, or “Faster: The Acceleration of Nearly Everything”](#)) while Carl Honore wrote its counter-argument, “In Praise of Slowness”. Now it may seem ironic that my acceleration tip of the month is to “go slow”, but when actions require skill and concentration slow is the *only* way to go.

Pair this with legendary UCLA basketball coach [John Wooden](#)'s famous dictum to “be quick but don't hurry.” He won ten NCAA national championships in a 12-year period, including a record seven in a row, so he knows a thing or two about excellence.

Conclusion: You may not be a special operator, but chances are you're constantly performing actions more quickly than you'd like because you're in a hurry - and end up doing them badly or having to do them again. Next time, remember these 6 words.

Thinking Tool

Analyze Problems like the CIA

The aforementioned [Philip Mudd](#) spent over 25 years as an analyst for two of the biggest “alphabet agencies” (FBI and CIA) where his role was to provide what he calls “decision advantage” to the principals he served (like [POTUS](#)). Along the way, he developed a 5 step process about how best to analyze a problem. While he used it to figure out if terror threats were credible, we can apply the same approach to less life-and-death issues:

1. **Find the Real Question:** We typically over-invest our time in analyzing problems by jumping right to the data and the conclusions, while under-investing in thinking about exactly what it is we want to know. So start with what you're trying to accomplish and work your way back.

2. Identify the Drivers: Break down complex questions into "drivers." This approach gives you a way to manage information when it flows in. When Mudd was working on the Al Qaeda threat, he would organize new intel into information baskets that included money, recruits, leadership, communications, and training. He recommends limiting your drivers to 10 to best control the information flow.
3. Decide on your metrics: Identify what metrics you'll use to measure how the problem and solution are evolving over time. Metrics provide a "mind mirror"—a system for coming back to the decision at regular intervals.
4. Collect the Data: Only once you've built the framework do you gather the data. Use your baskets or drivers to plugging data into their appropriate categories. This next point is key: once you have your data sorted, give yourself a grade that represents your level of confidence in assessing your question.
5. Ask yourself: what are you missing? Assume your process has flaws and be on the lookout for knowledge gaps, hidden biases or errors.

Conclusion: If you're still attacking decisions with two columns of "pros" and "cons", it's time to raise your game. **Develop a methodology that you use each time you analyze an issue.** Especially now, when information is plentiful but true "intelligence" is elusive, you need a system to organize the data you will collect in the run-up to making that choice. [Go Deeper ...](#)

Binge-Worthy

Red Sparrow by Jason Matthews

I'll be honest: I don't read enough fiction. Out of every 10 books I polish off, I'm lucky if one is a novel. But if there is one thriller that I'd recommend you all put down those business or pop science tomes for, it's this one. Jason Matthews' debut novel is more than just a well-plotted, compulsively readable spy story; it's an x ray into the tradecraft and gamesmanship between the American CIA and the Russian SVR (*Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki*, successor to the KGB). That's **because Matthews is a 30 year veteran of the Agency**, having served in "denied access areas" (unfriendly locales where the CIA couldn't operate freely, like Athens, Beijing and Moscow) where he became an expert in running agents. The book is filled with interesting portraits of those who spy and the others who hunt them, along with fascinating details on everything from how to shake surveillance (with [SDRs](#)) to the what really goes on at "dead drops" (delivering packages to agents without arousing suspicion). If you love thrillers but can't stand when they're either poorly written or just plain incredible, this book will hook you. But snap it up

quickly - it's being turned into a movie with the inestimable Jennifer Lawrence in the lead role (and everyone knows that the book is always better than the flick ...)

Pair this with [“A Good American”](#) documentary (iTunes and Netflix): This is a slow-burn docu-thriller in the mold of “Citizenfour” or a previous binge-worthy recommendation, “Zero Days.” It’s the story behind “Thinthread” (not to be confused with “Treadstone”!), a nearly omniscient surveillance program that a programming savant developed between the first signs of trouble from Al Qaeda in the nineties to just before 9/11. The tantalizing premise of the documentary is that Thinthread could have prevented that tragedy but for a combination of bureaucratic malfeasance and plain old greed. This film will open your eyes to the chilling power of technology as well as the sad reality that even national security can be compromised by avaricious middle managers.

Conclusion: You might want to put your mobile phone in the freezer now.

Philosophical Espresso Shot (a double!):

"Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers." (Voltaire)

"A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer." (Bruce Lee)

Not so Top Secret (but not Fake News):

In the spirit of this month's theme, here's a little intel: my good friend [Mike Ross](#) (not the one from Pearson Specter Litt!) have **started a podcast**. We named it after an expression in management consulting circles for over-analyzing an issue. In **“Boiling the Ocean”**, we apply the management consultant's toolkit to everyday problems - those we face in our jobs but just as many from real life. We'll talk in an irreverent way about how to apply consulting models to everything from parenting to playing beer league hockey. Think “Freakonomics but with Management Consultants”. We have episodes already recorded and will launch the podcast on November 1; stay tuned ...

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