

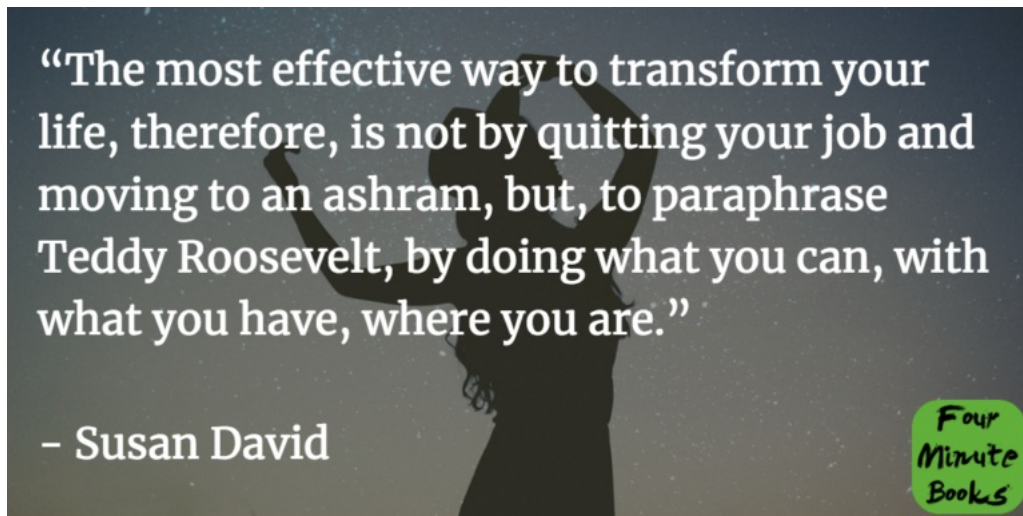
Emotional Agility Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Emotional Agility provides a new, science-backed approach to navigating life's many trials and detours on your path to fulfillment, with which you'll face your emotions head on, observe them objectively, make choices based on your values and slowly tweak your mindset, motivation and habits.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



The character trait that I'm most proud of, and probably also most lucky to have, is that I'm incredibly mentally stable. Life can throw a hell of a lot of adversity at me, and I still won't lose perspective. Susan David found not just a name for this capacity, but also a way to deliberately form it: *Emotional Agility*. It is the ability to observe and adapt your emotions to what the situation requires.

David is a PhD, Harvard psychologist and long-term researcher of what helps people achieve happiness and fulfillment. In 2016, she condensed years of research, coaching, speaking and consulting experience into a book. She crafted a 4-step process that helps us let our emotions support our outcomes, not dictate them.

Here are the first 3 so you can embrace life's distaste for our plans, not resent it:

1. Face your real feelings, don't ignore the uncomfortable ones.
2. Detach from emotions to see your true options.
3. Use your core values to set goals that reflect the real you.

Nothing in life ever works out the way we want it. But what if that wasn't a big deal? What if that was...fun? Let's find out by studying emotional agility!

Lesson 1: Show up to your emotions, even the bad ones.

If you're an optimistic person like me, chances are you tend to swallow bad feelings, downplay them as minor issues, and smile through the pain. While that's a better approach than being a total drama queen, it's still not perfect. Forced optimism can't be sustained, which means it's only a temporary solution to a permanent problem.

Susan cites the Mills longitudinal study as an example. Researchers studied the class photographs of a women's foundation, determining who smiled genuinely and who faked it by analyzing facial expressions. They then tracked the women's lives for decades after graduation. The result? Real smilers had better relationships, more control over their emotions and a higher level of life satisfaction.

That's because **even negative emotions can have positive consequences, as long as you face them directly and draw the right conclusions**. So don't smile when you don't feel like it. Just because you have a grim look on your face as you sort out a tough issue at work does not mean life's not good in that moment.

Lesson 2: Step out of your feelings to create distance and perspective.

Recognizing your emotions as they happen is a necessary precursor to consciously deciding how you'll deal with them. However, it's not easy. It's a habit that takes practice. The practical part, the ability you'll need to regularly exercise, is mindfulness. While being too mindful can be a problem, noticing your emotions allows you to step out and get some space.

Whether it's an emotion, a physical sensation, a friend's remark or an outside event, **whatever you can attentively observe without judging it helps you act in a more refined way**. When a Harvard study tracked 16 people before and after an eight-week meditation course in 2011, they saw positive, physical changes in the brain regions related to memory, stress management, empathy and identity. Other ways of developing mindfulness include journaling, exercise and personality tests.

If you want to see the power of identified emotions, select an object around your house the next time you're angry and throw that anger at it. Yell at your pillow, TV remote or living room chair. Besides reducing the anger itself, it'll show you a new, more playful perspective on your feelings.

Lesson 3: Walk your why by setting want-to goals, not have-to ones.

Our brains are powerful distortion machines. Compelled to force our life's story into a functioning narrative at all times, they tweak fact to fiction in order to make sense of the world and keep us from going insane. However, this comes at a cost: we only partially act in reality.

One of our biggest mental errors is the result of a phenomenon called behavioral contagion. The ultimate social influence, it's what causes us to pursue certain behaviors merely because we're close to someone doing the same. This can be physical proximity or psychological relatedness through the media, for example.

There's a lot of talk about goal-setting, but all of it assumes the goals we're choosing reflect what we really want. Susan says because of behavioral contagion, that might not be the case. In a talk, she distinguished want-to and have-to goals.

Have-to goals are goals set for you by others in the form of pressure, for example your doctor telling you you must lose weight. Want-to goals are those you set out of conviction and after careful reflection of your true values. One exercise she suggests to get clarity on your want-to goals is to write a letter to your future self. Tell the person you want to be in 5, 10 or 15 years who you are now and a path will emerge.

An alternative exercise I recently found helpful is the epitaph test Tim Ferriss learned from blogger Tim Urban:

"When I find myself with an opportunity, I ask myself whether I'd be happy if my epitaph had something to do with this project. If the answer is a clear no, it probably means it's not actually very important to me. Thinking about your epitaph, as morbid as it is, is a nice way to cut through all the noise and force yourself to look at your work from a super zoomed-out perspective, where you can see what really matters to you."

Just like showing up and stepping out help you adapt emotionally to ever-changing circumstances, clarifying your want-to goals and contrasting them with your actions helps you steer the course in spite of life's uncertainty – and that's what *Emotional Agility* is all about.

Emotional Agility Review

I see why this book has received so many accolades. It delivers a well-researched, simple to remember and easy to execute framework for a very intangible problem: emotional instability. The future is less certain than it's ever been, which causes us imaginary problems, but problems nonetheless. Problems, which must be addressed. If you want to learn more, Susan's 5-minute quiz is a good start.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What you can learn from Hollywood movies about your own psychology

- Which character trait helps you both deal with divorce and succeed in job interviews
- What our three responses to emotional bonding are and why they matter
- How to live at the edge of your potential and what that means
- Why we can use emotional agility to free ourselves whenever we're stuck

Who would I recommend the Emotional Agility summary to?

The 21 year old first time professional, who feels lost with the overwhelming responsibilities of adult life, the 38 year old young mom, who can't afford to let emotions run her day, and anyone who achieved their goals, but realized they were the wrong ones to begin with.