

Emotional Agility:

A Superpower We Can All Cultivate

Experiencing a wide range of human emotions is what makes each of us unique. All emotions play a vital role in our overall well-being. Positive emotions such as joy and love enhance our happiness and strengthen our relationships. However, even the more challenging emotions like sadness and anger provide valuable insights into our needs and boundaries. Embracing a full spectrum of emotions helps us navigate life's obstacles, build resilience, and develop empathy for others. It's important to understand that emotions should never be labeled as either good or bad. In reality, all emotions are healthy and serve a purpose, even if they're not always comfortable.

When we can identify, acknowledge, and understand our emotions, we're better at managing stress, making informed decisions, and leading more balanced, fulfilling lives. This self-awareness is linked to our Emotional Intelligence (EI). In addition to identifying and understanding our emotions, it's also important to effectively utilize them. Making good use of challenging emotions is known as emotional agility, or emotional flexibility.

Emotional Agility Explained

With emotional agility, our emotions act as a guide, helping us make decisions that align with our values. This concept has been popularized by psychologist Susan David in her book "*Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life*." The goal of emotional agility isn't to increase pleasant emotions or eliminate challenging ones, but to accept all feelings and make constructive use of them. For example, feeling anger might indicate that someone has crossed your boundaries, prompting you to address the issue and assert your needs.



Building and Practicing Emotional Agility: Four Important Steps

Practicing emotional agility means viewing our feelings as data or information. We aim not to be overwhelmed by their impact or try to push them away completely. By acknowledging emotions without being consumed by them, we can make clearer decisions.

In her book, Susan David outlines four steps to practice emotional agility:

- 1. Showing up:** Acknowledge your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors without judgment. There's no right or wrong in what you're experiencing. Showing up centers on mindfulness as a key tool.
- 2. Stepping out:** Differentiate your thoughts and feelings from your identity. Consider your emotions as experiences, rather than defining who you are. For example, experiencing sadness doesn't make you a sad person.
- 3. Walking your why:** Utilize insights from your emotions to take actions aligned with your values and goals. For instance, feeling anger in a relationship might indicate the need for stronger boundaries.
- 4. Moving on:** Make small changes that align with your values. This might involve changing a problematic habit or viewing a situation from a new perspective to get closer to your goals.

Remember

Emotional agility is about accepting your emotions and using them as information rather than trying to change them. Emotional agility requires us to lean into the discomfort that emotions can sometimes elicit, but the payoff can be substantial. By stepping back, recognizing your feelings, and considering your values and goals, you can make decisions that reflect what's most important to you. The instinct might be to avoid, or become wrapped up in our emotions, but with intentional practice, emotional agility is a valuable tool within our reach.

Looking for ways to build emotional agility? Talk to a Ulliance counselor or coach to explore how to incorporate this practice into your life.

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