

# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## Emotional Agility by Susan David

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

- All leadership levels

### Why Read *Emotional Agility*?

*“As we travel through our lives, we humans have few ways of knowing which course to take or what lies ahead. We don’t have lighthouses to keep us away from rocky relationships. We don’t have lookouts on the bow or radar on the tower, watching for submerged threats that could sink our career plans. Instead, we have our emotions – sensations like fear, anxiety, joy, and exhilaration – a neurochemical system that evolved to help us navigate life’s complex currents.”*

*“Emotionally agile people are dynamic. They demonstrate flexibility in dealing with our fast-changing, complex world. They are able to tolerate high levels of stress and to endure setbacks, while remaining engaged, open, and receptive. They understand that life isn’t always easy, but they continue to act according to their most cherished values and their big, long-term goals.”*

*Emotional Agility* is a great book that provides tools to help work with emotions, and to leverage those biological and mental responses to be better leaders in high-stress environments. Everyone experiences emotions of varying types, and being able to understand how and why emotion can influence decision-making and actions is critical for fire leaders. This book can help leaders to understand their own emotions and the influences those emotions have, and better understand the emotions and actions of others. Leadership at its core is about working with those around you, and “soft skills” like emotional agility are incredibly valuable for leaders and followers at all levels.

A video about the topic can be found at the links below:

- **How to Build Your Emotional Agility (4 minutes):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOo5qE8oOPg>

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.fireleadership.gov>

## *Emotional Agility Discussion Questions*

### **Chapter One: Rigidity to Agility**

What do you think of the concept of emotional agility? Are there any reasons why a fire leader might want to be emotionally agile? Have you ever had experiences, or witnessed events, where emotion played a large role in what happened (in decision-making, for example)?

### **Chapter Two: Hooked**

After reading this chapter, what kinds of stories/narratives have you created? Are they all true? How many of those “stories” have been created consciously? Unconsciously? What are some of the “hooks” you see in your internal narrative? Why are these important to think about as a leader or a follower?

### **Chapter Three: Trying to Unhook**

Are you a “bottler” or a “brooder” as defined by the author? What do you think about the differences between “happy” and “negative” emotions, and how those influence thinking styles? What are some of the downsides of being in a “good” mood, and what are some of the upsides of being in a “bad” mood when it comes to leadership?

### **Chapter Four: Showing Up**

What do you think about “showing up” in this context? What about the idea that the way we deal with experiences matters more than what we experience? How can practicing self-compassion make you a better person and leader? Why is it important to be aware of, and label, emotions as a leader?

### **Chapter Five: Stepping Out**

What do you think of the idea of learning from your mistakes? How about the concept of being mindful? Is mindfulness something that is valuable for leaders? Why or why not? Did any of the “stepping out” techniques strike you as being of more use than others?

### **Chapter Six: Walking Your Why**

What is your “why” in the context of this chapter? Have you really evaluated how and why you make decisions? Are they aligned with your values? What kinds of conflicts between values are there in your life? How do you navigate those choices?

### **Chapter Seven: Moving On: The Tiny Tweaks Principle**

What kinds of little things mean a lot to you? At work? At home? How can you change “have to” to “want to” in your life? At work? Are there any small tweaks that you have, or will, make to establish better habits, at home or at work? What might you tweak in your leadership or followership skills and practices.

## **Chapter Eight: Moving On: The Teeter-totter Principle**

Where are you at on the spectrum between “over competent” and “over challenged?” Have you ever thought about that idea before? How can you choose courage over comfort in your life, at home or at work? Why is it important to keep practicing and growing as we gain skills and knowledge, especially in both technical and “soft” leadership skills?

## **Chapter Nine: Emotional Agility at Work**

Why is it important to be emotionally agile at in your personal and professional lives? What are some workplace “hooks” that you’ve experienced? Is your “why” at work or as a leader different than your “why” at home? While work in the fire environment is often fairly rigid, there can be opportunities for “job crafting” – what are some things that really engage you at work? What tweaks can you make to make the work more meaningful to you as a follower? How about as a leader?

## **Chapter Ten: Raising Emotionally Agile Children**

What lessons from this chapter could also apply in the workplace? Can the skills used in parent also be used in leadership?

## **Chapter Eleven: Conclusion: Becoming Real**

What tiny steps are you going to take to be emotionally agile and “real” in your leadership or followership as defined in this chapter?