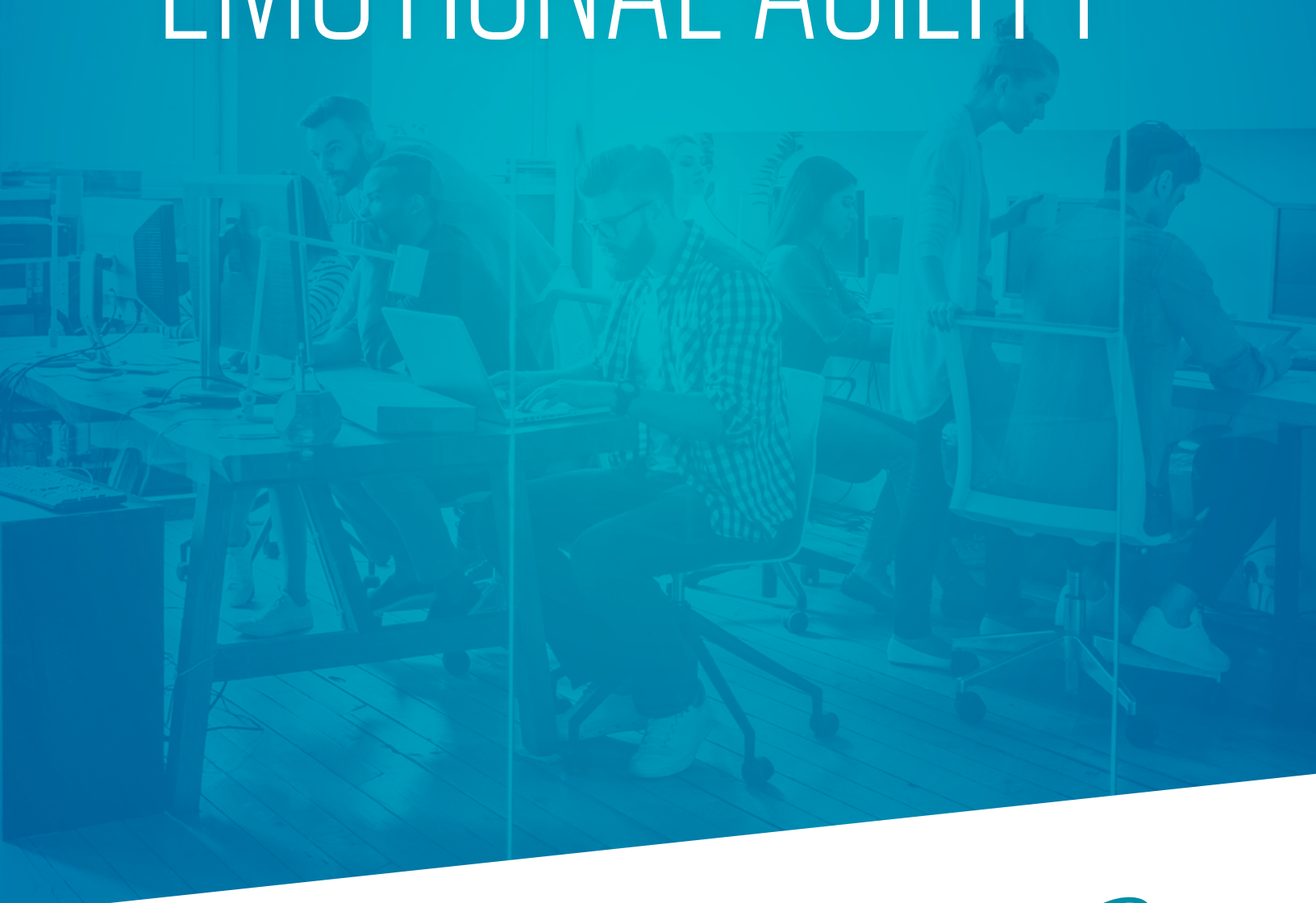


UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL AGILITY



MEET OUR EXPERT



DR. SUSAN DAVID

Dr. Susan David is one of the world's leading management thinkers, an award-winning Harvard Medical School Psychologist, and a member of the Virgin Pulse Institute Science Advisory Board. She is a frequent contributor to the Harvard Business Review, New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and guest on national radio and television.

A #1 Wall Street Journal best seller and Harvard "Management Idea of the Year" winner, David's book [Emotional Agility](#) describes the psychological skills that are critical to thriving in today's world of complexity and change. Her popular and deeply inspiring [TED Talk](#) on the topic received more than a million views in its first week of release.

Meet Susan David: [Link](#)

This text is based on a webinar exclusively developed with Virgin Pulse in collaboration with Susan David. You can watch the webinar here: [Link](#)





STRESS LURKS IN THE BACKGROUND OF OUR LIVES

When we think of stress, it's usually after the fact, when we're already experiencing stress. "Stress is here! I need to manage it!" We can become stressed about being stressed.

THIS CYCLE ISN'T WORKING FOR US

We have this narrative because we often perceive stress to be an inevitable fallout of growth or change, negative events, or today's complex world. Stress occurs, we respond after the fact and often, ineffectively. Rinse and repeat.

WE CAN CHANGE THIS PATTERN AND BE OUR BEST SELVES

We've teamed up with industry-leader and Harvard Medical School Psychologist Susan David, Ph.D., to:

- Decipher the differences between "good" stress and "bad stress"
- Touch on the ramifications of when stress is treated as an afterthought
- Define emotional agility and how it helps us cope with complexity and change
- Map the emotional agility process from beginning to end
- Change the world! (okay, we added that)

Let's get started!

PHYSICAL DOWNSIDES OF STRESS

While stress is often thought of as the outcome of a specific event (a new commute, a death in your family, or suffering an injury), the most common type of stress – and also the most insidious, is what’s known as allostatic stress.

Not to be confused with event-based stress, allostatic stress is the chronic experience of stress over time – the day to day worries, the conference call line that isn’t working just when you need to speak to an important client, or the back-to-back meetings that make it impossible to get ahead on deliverables. This type of allostatic stress has been found to have a negative physical impact on the body.

ALLOSTATIC STRESS HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH:

When we task employees to comprehend and navigate new complexities, here is what we are really asking them to consider:

- Accelerated aging (around 10 years)
- Wear and tear on brain and body
- Compromised immune system
- Increased rates of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes

PLUS, YOUR BRAIN ISN'T SO GREAT WHEN STRESSED.

Even if you're able to "muscle" through a stressful time, show up to work, and continue to fulfill the requirements of your role, you will not be able to run on all cylinders with a stressed brain.

STRESS AFFECTS HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS, SPECIFICALLY:

- An increased tendency towards black and white thinking, which limits creativity and the ability to consider important variables within the organization (e.g. how a change your team makes may impact on others.)
- The illusion of multi-tasking – we might feel that we're rising to the occasion when it comes to expert multi-tasking, but usually this is an illusion; most individuals will jump from task to task with difficulty focusing and decreased productivity
- Difficulty staying organized
- Development of transactional relationships – this stems from a feeling of "I have to just get through the day, I don't have time to build deep relationships"
- Emotional strain, panic, and guilt – basically beating yourself up for not performing how you usually do

BUT IS ALL STRESS BAD?

SURPRISINGLY, NO.

Stress can be a sign that we are doing things of value and a lack of stress can be a sign of boredom, atrophy, and disengagement. It is often during the times of greatest growth and learning that we experience stress, and many of life's joys are also stressful. As Susan David says, "you don't get to grow in your career, raise a family, or leave the world a better place than you found it without some stress and discomfort. Discomfort is the price of admission to a meaningful life."

HOW CAN WE TELL "GOOD STRESS" FROM "BAD STRESS"?

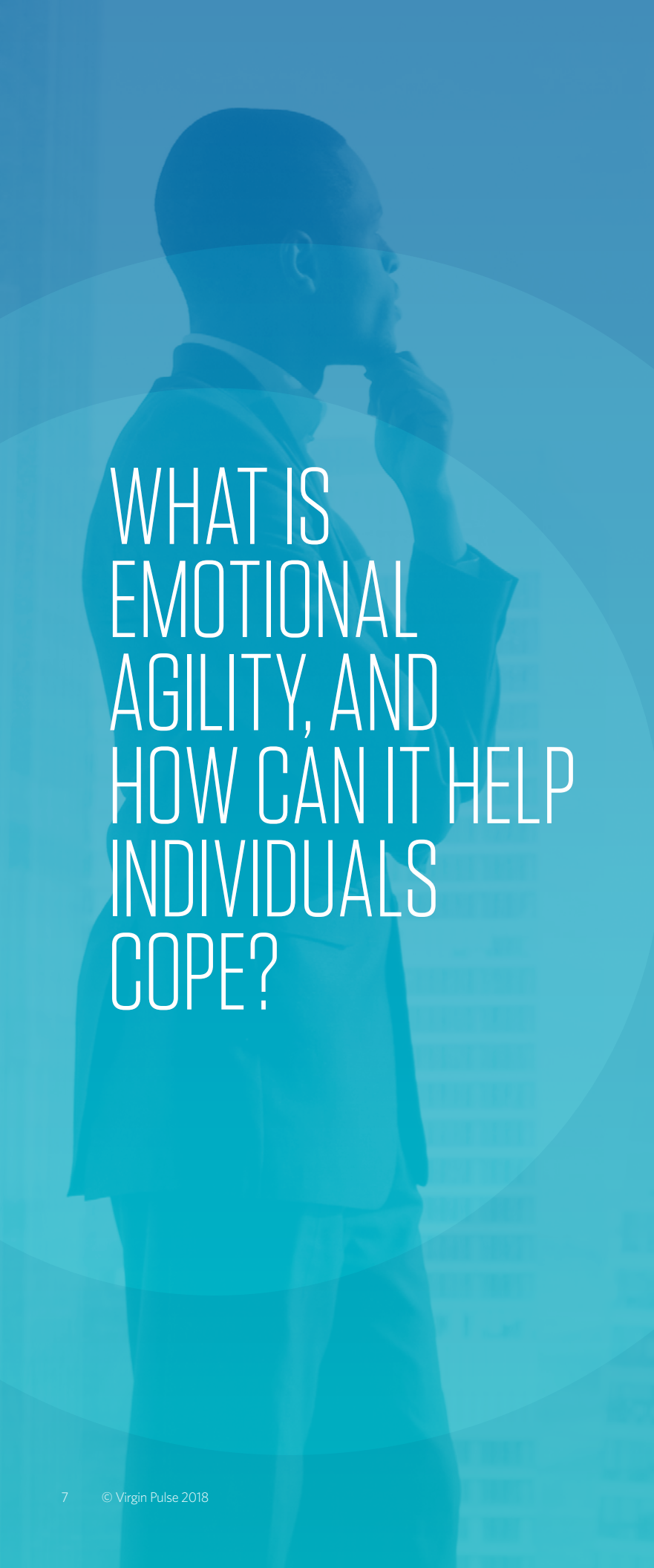
So when does stress go from good to bad? The answer comes down to coping...

Bad Stress = stressors that are beyond an individual's PERSONAL coping resources.

You guessed it, bad stress is different for everyone. Just like what overwhelms one person may be a walk in the park for another.

This is where emotional agility comes into play.

"Discomfort is the price of admission to a meaningful life"



WHAT IS EMOTIONAL AGILITY, AND HOW CAN IT HELP INDIVIDUALS COPE?

Emotional agility = an individual's ability to experience their thoughts and emotions and events in a way that doesn't drive them in negative ways, but instead encourages them to reveal the best of themselves.

Viktor E. Frankl, a neurologist, psychologist, and Holocaust survivor spoke to this important idea: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

What Frankl is referring to is, in essence, a tool towards emotional agility. Our ability to recognize our emotions before reacting, and decide how we'd like to respond, and respond in a way that aligns with our values, and in our best interest.

We know that emotionally agile individuals can cope effectively with change and bring their best selves to stressful situations. And we know that they are able to make choices between what they are experiencing and how they choose to respond.

But what's the process of an emotionally agile individual from beginning to end when they encounter complexity or struggle? How can we bring this process into our own lives?



THE TOP-TO-BOTTOM EMOTIONALLY AGILE JOURNEY

1. SHOWING UP.

The first step is having the space to show up for emotions and stresses –not to dwell on them, but to learn from them. What am I feeling right now? What does this say about my values?

An emotionally agile person is able to recognize his or her feelings with self-compassion and understanding.

The opposite of showing up? Most people either do one of two things in a stressful situation; bottle up their emotions and push them aside, or brood and dwell on them. While these two behaviors may appear quite different externally, they are similar in result, and both consume significant mental energy that detracts from productivity. Furthermore, both bottling and brooding are associated with lower levels of wellbeing and higher levels of anxiety and depression.

2. STEPPING OUT.

Stepping out means specifically labeling the problem.

For example, “I feel stressed” might mean many things – it might mean an individual is disappointed in a situation, it might mean he or she doesn’t feel right about an obligation, or it might mean that they are not being heard, perhaps in meetings or at home. Once a stressful situation is diagnosed specifically, it’s much easier to create an action plan to move forward.

The opposite of stepping out? Using a broad brushstroke label of “stress” rather than labelling the emotion more specifically (disappointed, sad) and failing to dig deeper into the situation to find the root of the problem.

3. WALKING YOUR WHY.

Walking your why involves self-identifying values. Even in times where we are right and others are wrong, we still have the capacity to make choices that are values-aligned.

It is important for individuals to reflect, “Even in the context of all this change, who do I want to be? Is it important for me to be a contributor? A collaborator? An innovator?”

When we move towards our values and are able to make choices that align us with who we want to be, that is incredibly empowering, and provides a newfound sense of autonomy in difficult situations.

The opposite of walking your why? Default, gut-reaction behavior. Disengaging and having a negative attitude even when deep-down it is a value of the individual to have a positive attitude. When human beings step away from their values (which are usually very good), they become malcontent and disengaged without even realizing it, and ultimately suffer.

4. MOVING ON.

Once you’ve unpacked what you’re feeling, why you’re feeling that way, and aligned your next steps with who you want to be in the situation, it’s time to move on and take action. Emotionally agile individuals handle situations as they come up, feel them fully, make a plan, and don’t delay.

The opposite of moving on? Staying stuck in the cycle. Second-guessing your feelings, your values or your approach and delaying in a way that limits your own growth. It can be easy to get stuck in a busy office environment, which is why being confident in closing the chapter on a stressor or complex situation is an important final step.

Want to transform your organization into an emotionally agile environment?

Watch our free webinar, [*Building Emotional Agility For Resilience To Stress*](#)

EMOTIONAL AGILITY IS BOTH A PRACTICAL SET OF TOOLS AND A MEANS OF BUILDING RESILIENCE.



It's a pathway where individuals can stop ignoring or being beaten by their stress and learn to become more comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

Whether it's in the workplace or in personal situations, emotional agility provides the framework for people to think about who they want to be in difficult situations, and then become that person.

Use emotional agility, and practice the emotional agility journey, to overcome stressful situations, increase your productivity, and cope with situations as they happen. This will allow you to bring your best self to every situation, and encourage that same behavior in others around you.

With a little creative problem-solving and the fostering of emotional agility in the workplace, you'll be able to build a dynamic organization that will tackle problems, inspire growth, and effectively manage stress along the way.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Listen to the full Susan David Emotional Webinar: Building Emotional Agility for Resistance to Stress:

<http://community.virginpulse.com/webinar-replay-2017-susan-david-stress>

Watch Susan David's TED Talk on emotional agility:

https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_david_the_gift_and_power_of_emotional_courage

Learn more about Susan David and how she came to study emotional agility as a life skill useful for coping with obstacles:

http://community.virginpulse.com/wr_sab_david_emo

Understand more about the Business Benefits of Healthy Employees with our 2017 Survey Results:

http://community.virginpulse.com/wbn_biz_of_ees

ABOUT VIRGIN PULSE

Virgin Pulse, part of Sir Richard Branson's famed Virgin Group, helps employers create workforces that are happier, healthier and ultimately more productive in all aspects of their personal and professional lives.

The company's modern, mobile-first platform delivers a personalized user experience that utilizes gamification to engage users in building habits that inspire meaningful and measurable change across individuals and the business.

By helping employees thrive at work and in all aspects of life, Virgin Pulse is helping change lives and businesses for good.

Unlike narrowly focused employee health solutions, Virgin Pulse's solutions span the full wellbeing spectrum - from traditional wellness to strategic wellbeing - providing organizations with solutions that are appropriate for them today and tomorrow.

More than 2,500 organizations representing many of the Fortune 500 and Best Places to Work have selected Virgin Pulse's solutions to engage their workforces and drive their businesses forward.

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