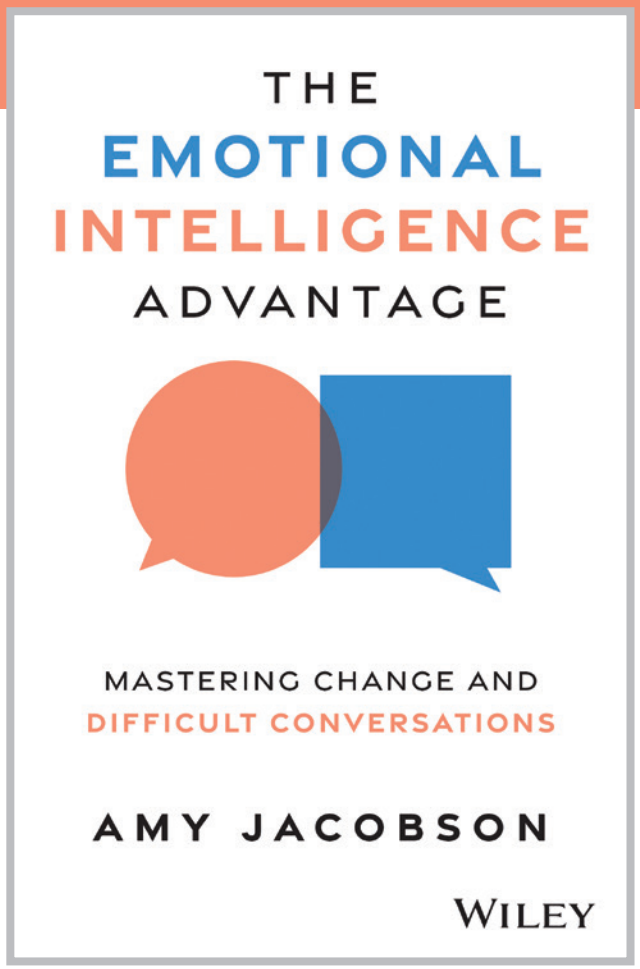
Helping profession strong driver of EI dilemmas



The medical profession is one of the toughest when it comes to emotional intelligence (EI). Most people are in this profession because they have a strong personal and emotional attachment to 'helping people' or 'making a difference'. This means their emotional brain has a clear path linked to their professional purpose, and emotions are likely to surface faster and easier.

Patients are quite often in an emotional hijack, driven by their emotional brain. This could be fear of their health, fear of the unknown, fear of death, or fear of judgement – displayed as panic, aggression, upset, or really any intense emotion.

EI is always in play in every interaction and in every profession. But when we have people with their emotional brains driving their communication and actions working in a fast-paced, intense environment like the medical profession, EI becomes the absolute key to a successful outcome.

In this exclusive extract from her new book, *The Emotional Intelligence Advantage*, Amy Jacobson offers five practical steps to boost your own EI skills.

5 steps to boost your emotional intelligence

Edited extract from *The Emotional Intelligence Advantage* by Amy Jacobson (Wiley $29.95)

The five key concepts of EI are not standalone concepts. They are an ever-moving fluent process, from step 1 through to step 5, evident in every part of our lives. Everyone in your workplace is also going through it at their own speed – each at different steps and dealing with the steps in different ways.

Regardless of who you are, every human being goes through this process regularly. It is our effectiveness throughout the EI process that influences performance, relationships, and our results in any workplace or situation.

Let's take a closer look at the five steps.

1 Own It

This is our self-awareness, and acceptance of the reality of the situation. It's taking responsibility for who we are and why we do what we do, as well as understanding the way in which we are wired. EI is not necessarily about changing who we are: it's understanding the wirings within our brain and working with them rather than against them. Yes, there is always the opportunity to grow and develop, but you also need to be true to yourself and remain authentic based on your values and beliefs. To 'Own It' – stay who you are, accept reality, and become a better version of you!

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2 Face It

Our amygdala is our 'emotional brain' – a small part of our brain that processes emotions. Our neo cortex is our 'logical brain' – a large part of our brain where most of the analysis related to reasoning, perception, cognition and movement occurs. The standard process is that the logical brain receives information first, and acts based on its analysis of the information before the emotional brain kicks in.

Sometimes, an emotional hijack occurs where information goes to our emotional brain first and we respond emotionally before our logical brain has been engaged. It is overwritten with emotion and very little logic. As much as we like to pass the buck and make it someone else's fault that we feel a certain way, it really isn't the case. How we choose to feel and respond in every situation is one of the only things we have control over in life.

3 Feel It

Feel It is where we get out of our own head and feel the impact we have on the people around us, and the impact life is having on them. It's no longer about us. Our greatest leadership skills come as we learn to understand what makes each of the people around us tick, and empathise with them. It's about noticing the differences between other people and what makes them different from us. Importantly, understanding that 'different' is a good thing and is required to achieve balance within any team.

'Feel It' is the ability to:

- read the energy of a room and the unspoken signs from other people's body language;
- be empathetic and recognise the emotion other people are feeling;
- understand what makes other people tick, what their drivers are, and how to empower them; and
- know that it's not always about us. Sometimes the change is a massive improvement for other people.

4 Ask It

This is all about the way we communicate. The emotional brain is known to fire questions at us during step 2, but by the time we reach step 4 we are in control of our emotions. We understand and have engaged the people around us, and we are ready to bring logic into play.

'Ask It' is about asking the right questions but, more importantly, answering the questions other people are potentially asking us. We start to ask the when, how, who and what questions. We want to know exactly what needs to happen to achieve the outcome: who needs to be involved; how each person will be involved and how they will do it; and when each step is happening. 'Ask It' is driven by the logical brain. It can't be one-sided; it must be open and effective. It must consist of genuine questions asking for an answer. If we ask for feedback, it's actually meaning it, listening, and responding to the feedback provided.

5 Drive It

This is when the rubber hits the road – the action and progress step. Sounds like the simplest part of the process, but we are not always great at implementation. We work with the chemicals (serotonin, dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin and cortisol) in our head to create motivation and achieve the desired outcome. It's about working smarter, not harder, and leveraging the natural ways our brain works. Doing what we say we are going to do and being efficient while doing it.

Emotions can resurface here, and we might be so excited that we want everything to happen immediately. Or hesitation and fear could hold us back from this final step, and even drag us back to step 2 to face the emotions again.

Understanding the process for ourselves provides opportunities for our own personal EI growth and progress. Understanding the process for others creates the ability to individually identify how each team member is coping, and how to help them move forward. This is a fantastic leadership skill evident in an emotionally intelligent workplace. ■