

# **A LITTLE BOOK TO SAVE HUMANITY**

Dana C. Ackley, PhD



## Praise for *A Little Book to Save Humanity*

Read this book. Better yet, give it to all your friends. Even better, follow the simple but powerful evidence-based prescriptions that Dana Ackley offers to help us all regulate our emotional brains and get better at finding common ground ...

Larry Richard, JD, PhD

As a brain surgeon, I love this book ... In this treasure trove of a little book, Dana Ackley reminds us that the human brain is a gift and offers a guide to how we can best use it. He shines a bright light on how our brains work and how they are structured. He gives us the instruments to successfully navigate our emotions ... and this just might be a key to save humanity.

Reid C. Thompson, MD Chair, Neurosurgery

We are surrounded by conflict and those who feed off it, but a life dominated by anger and anxiety isn't a happy one. This timely book explains how we got here — how our emotions often control us instead of the other way around ... Don't just read it for yourself or those you love — do it for all of us.

Wally Howe, PhD Psychology

This is a must-read book. It's also a must-have book ... Invaluable.

Richard A. Shearer, Retired Executive Vice President

As an academic physician and lifelong student of leadership and emotional intelligence, I am impressed by how much wisdom is packed into this little book. With clarity, authenticity, humor, it is a warm invitation to gather insight through self-reflection ... [Ackley's] recommendations would go a long way toward constructive dialogue and relational healing in the public square."

Lee A. Learman, MD, PhD Medical School Dean

In a world where the extremes seem to drive our cultural narratives, I am excited to read how the solid and large middle can dial down the rhetoric and dial up civility ... I know his words will be inspirational to his readers and, perhaps, become the gospel on how to save humanity.

John Owens, Chief Revenue Officer

In this short but important book, Dr. Ackley distills the important ways one can develop and build emotional intelligence ... based upon the author's 50 years of experience in helping people deal with relationships. Ackley uses a catchy come-on about saving the world to draw us to a better understanding of how conflict occurs, how developing emotional awareness can help us recognize challenging situations, and how to be most prepared to deal with these conflicts at home, in the workplace, and in the current divisive political environment. It's a must read for all of us trying to help resolve conflict.

**Sean P. Donahue, MD, PhD, Professor of Ophthalmology and Visual Science, Neurology, and Pediatrics**

In *A Little Book to Save Humanity*, esteemed psychologist Dr. Dana C. Ackley, distills years of groundbreaking work into practical strategies for personal and societal change. From healing family rifts to navigating political tensions, his book provides a clear, science-backed path to understanding and harnessing our emotions for a better life and a kinder world. It is a must-read for anyone seeking real, impactful solutions to the conflicts and noise we face in our daily lives.

**Chris Morrill, Executive Director & CEO**

Dana Ackley has been a leading thinker and practitioner for years ... With *A Little Book to Save Humanity*, he illustrates how absolute mastery of a subject — emotional intelligence — can be made clear and so easily helpful for every reader. Given the unprecedented turmoil of our society in the 2020s, the book's timing is perfect. Dr. Ackley's motive is admirable. Not seeking more acclaim, he's eager to "pay it forward" to meaningfully benefit future generations.

**John Reed, PhD, MBA, MCC**

It may feel like half the country (or world) is hopelessly divided from the other half, but the reality is that most of us are much closer to one another than the merchants of conflict would have us believe. Dana's book, grounded in the science of our common humanity, cuts through the noise to show how we truly can find common ground.

**Robert B. Kaiser, Consultation Company President**

Existential threats of climate change, population decline, and AI provide the latest fodder for conflict entrepreneurs to manipulate our emotions. Dr. Ackley provides us with the ideal antidote that begins with changing ourselves and promises to profoundly change our world as a result.

**Jay Foster, Founder & CEO**

This may be a "little book" in length but it's a big book in importance. At a time when we're screaming at each other in all caps on social media, this book is a much-needed reminder of how to reclaim our humanity.

**Dwayne Yancey, Founding Editor**

Dana Ackley's *A Little Book to Save Humanity* brings a warm and personal element into teaching us how daily distractions from the outside world are designed to manipulate our emotions and therefore our behavior. With his unassuming and natural style, Ackley takes us beyond emotional intelligence and self-improvement to the neuroscience and psychology of why and how we respond to the many stressors that define life in the digital age. This book draws back the curtain on how the brain's evolution and the pace of the modern world influence human behavior and offers a straightforward course toward greater awareness and control over our own reactions.

**David J. Calkins, PhD, Neuroscientist**

*A Little Book to Save Humanity* resonated with me deeply ... Dr. Ackley rightly emphasizes that each of us holds a moral responsibility to contribute toward unifying humanity rather than contributing to its division.

**Tony Nelson, CEO**

Pastors, have you grown weary of conflict management in the church? Would you prefer to help your congregants understand the *why* of conflict and thereby reducing its frequency? Dr. Dana Ackley offers good news to church leaders and invaluable tools to reduce the frequency of church conflict and hurt in *A Little Book to Save Humanity*.

**Rev. Dr. William L. Lee, Pastor**

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Books are usually dedicated to people who are special to the author.  
You will find those individuals mentioned in the *Acknowledgements* at  
the end of this book.

This book is dedicated to the better parts of humanity within each of us.  
We can learn to grow them and use them, making a better world for all of us.

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# **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A TOOL KIT FOR BRAIN MASTERY**

When we were children, adults would ask: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” That question rests on the premise that at some point people “turn out” to be one thing or another. I beg to differ. If we as individuals, and collectively as humans, are to master the complex problems that exist in modern life, we’ve all got a lot of learning to do, enough to last all of our lives. So, the first tool we need is a belief in lifelong learning. (As you will see, a commitment to lifelong learning is an EQ skill called Self-Actualization.)

Maturation is not something to achieve. It is something to practice. We are all incomplete. Do yourself the favor of accepting that fact rather than holding yourself to impossible standards. Recognize that each stage of life has its own challenges. Mastery of one stage doesn’t guarantee mastery of the next.

Here’s a little evidence:

I’ve worked as a practicing psychologist since 1973. As a result, I’ve had the privilege of participating in the ongoing growth of thousands of people. For 25 years, I was a clinical psychologist, doing what people usually think of psychologists doing. Folks came to talk with me when problems got beyond their ability to manage. My job was to help them build new skills, ones that they had not yet had the chance to learn, to deal with those problems. Previously they may not have had the chance to learn how to manage anxiety or sadness or relationships or a myriad of other things.

Truthfully, some of those people who came to see me in those years were born unlucky. Their ability to learn, intellectually and often emotionally, was limited, through no fault of their own. Their lives would always be ones of real struggle. But they did learn and made things better for themselves. Others were born luckier and perhaps into luckier circumstances. Their lives were easier, but still with significant problems that we worked together to solve.

Then, for the past 25 years, I’ve worked as an executive coach with senior leaders in organizations large and small. These are people responsible for the well-being of many people who work for them, and for the well-being of the organizations that give those people jobs. By all the usual measures, these are successful people. What problems could they have? You might think they’ve got it figured out. Not true. I’ve worked with many such people, often for years, getting to know them very well. They’ve got a lot to learn too. Those who recognize that fact choose to advance their outstanding careers and development by constantly maturing. Those who can’t face

their flaws and ignorance, sooner or later, tend to crash and burn or at least become stuck — a sad waste of potential.

The bottom line is that we are all incomplete. But that’s not all. Our social cultures are incomplete too. We depend a lot on our culture — its beliefs, its customs, its attitudes — to prepare us for life. We most often train our children, and adults, as our cultures dictate. We inculcate the culture’s assumptions about how to have a good, successful life. Much of what is taught is helpful.

But if cultures were complete, if cultures could prepare us for whatever may come, our world would not face many of the widespread problems it faces today. It is not surprising that cultures are incomplete since they are created by incomplete people.

That we are just discovering the importance of EQ is a prime example of how cultures can be incomplete. Formal education in Western society focuses largely on cognitive skills, that is, those that lie within the cortex, our brain’s logic center. Schools pay little if any attention to helping us learn how to build emotional skills.

I’ve conducted dozens of workshops to introduce the concepts of EQ to executives I will later coach. In those workshops, I ask:

“When you were in school, did you take math?”

Hands go up.

“When you were in school, did you take English?”

Hands go up.

“When you were in school, did you take science?”

Hands go up.

“When you were in school, did you take empathy?”

**No** hands go up.

This imbalance reflects the fears people have had about emotions; fears driven by cultural ignorance about emotions. Today, we no longer have to live in such ignorance or fear.

Emotions and thoughts constantly interact, impacting each other. Our lack of attention to the emotional side of the equation results in failing to truly teach people how to think fully. As a result, people are not systematically trained in many of the skills required to be successful. A lot of potential gets wasted. As a reader of this little book,

you are in the vanguard of those who can help bring these skills into widespread usage. This is where you get the chance to start saving humanity, by developing yourself. As you will see, developing yourself will send positive ripples among all of the people you know.

There are huge benefits to building and improving emotional skills. Most basically, everyone becomes safer from out-of-control fear and anger. Learning to better manage fear and anger sets the stage for learning to manage more nuanced emotions that can bring the best out of us, both at work and at home.

Harnessing the positive power of emotions rests on integrating how we think and how we feel. Emotions don't happen in a vacuum. Neither do thoughts. The better we get at managing that interaction, the more success we have — individually, in our families, at work, with our neighbors, throughout our communities, across our nation, and around the world. It really is just that simple. This is what EQ is all about. And it is why I am audacious enough to claim that this little book really can help save humanity. This claim is based on not just my 50 years of experience. That experience, as you will see, stands on the shoulders of thousands of scientists seeking to understand the brain and the human experience. It also stands on the shoulders of the greatest leaders history has known. This little book simply organizes what others have learned into an understandable and useable form.

Are there outside forces that matter? Absolutely. From socio-economic systems to racial histories, from oppressive government regimes to abusive interpersonal dynamics, there are powerfully real and difficult circumstances shaping our lives and world. And it is with that knowledge that I unequivocally believe that more carefully developed and more consistently applied EQ skills can help inform and alleviate the pain and suffering of humanity. That really is how powerful these skills can be. Why? Because they help create our humanity one person at a time.

As you continue to read this book, please give yourself permission to be ignorant and curious. Both of those attitudes will fuel the kind of learning that will contribute to your mastery of your brain, which is the goal. It will also, unavoidably, contribute to the ongoing maturation and safety of our species. Reading this little book is your first act of contributing to the work of saving humanity.

...

## The Science Behind EQ

Having been a psychologist all of my adult life, I've been exposed to many theories about human behavior. Some are excellent, in that they help explain why we do what we do. Others sound good on the surface but don't stand up when tested. The difference between useful theories and bad ones has to do with what happens when science tests them.

For those who have not lived in the scientists' world, science can seem a bit mysterious. But, at its core, science is really simple. Science is nothing more than making organized and systematic observations of whatever is being studied. The methods by which such observations are made can get complicated, which is why people have to get trained in it to do it right. That is true of most jobs.

Science helps us avoid rationalization. Something can *sound* good, like buying that beautiful red car. A lot of psychology sounds good but doesn't turn out to be useful. We can only know whether it actually is good by subjecting it to organized and systematic observations, testing what we want to believe against reality. The good news is that there is a lot of science behind the kind of EQ you will read about in the pages that follow.

I've already mentioned Daniel Goleman's book on EQ. Another EQ pioneer is Reuven Bar-On. Like Goleman, Bar-On is a psychologist. He's dedicated his professional life to research. In 1980, he was on the faculty at the medical school of the University of Texas, Galveston. One day, walking across campus, he had a "eureka" moment. He asked himself a question that changed his professional life and has made an enormous contribution to my professional life and the lives of many others.

He asked himself: "Everyone on faculty at this medical school is exceptionally intelligent. But only some of them are truly successful. What do people need, beyond IQ, to be successful?" That led to a 17-year research project designed to answer his question. He identified what are now 16 emotional skills that, when combined with intellect, make people successful. In other words, he began the development of a map for how to train and use the prefrontal cortex to its full potential.

But it wasn't all Bar-On or Daniel Goleman. There were other pioneering scientists, including Peter Salovey, Jack Mayer, David Caruso, and Richard Boyatzis. And following in their footsteps have come many others who built on their foundations. Today, literally thousands of studies have been done over the past three decades testing and validating the arguments that those EQ pioneers have made. Emotions, and how we manage them, are an essential part of the human experience and of human



success. These studies have shown that Emotional Intelligence is — *wait for it!* — the intelligent use of emotions.

Among all the brilliant research done to establish EQ as scientifically valid, the approach that speaks best to both the scientist and the coach in me is the one developed by Bar-On. The 16 skills he identified are the key tools we can use to tame the amygdala so that it can do its job without creating unnecessary problems. These same tools help us integrate logic and emotion so that we can operate at the top of our game.

And, good news, you don't have to be born "lucky." Each of these skills can be learned and improved. In fact, the online resources that go with this little book ([www.theEQpress.com](http://www.theEQpress.com)) offer nearly 200 different exercises you can use to build your EQ, just as you may use physical exercise to build your muscles. These exercises are organized into 16 sets, one for each of the 16 skills. Each section has around a dozen exercises, so that each person can pick the ones that are best suited for them.

It is important to know: These exercises have been "field tested." They come from the *EQ Leader Program*, which I wrote. It was first published in 2006 by MHS, a leading publisher in psychology, and has been used by executive coaches around the world. It was designed to build EQ skills in executives. In other words, I and many other coaches who have used my program, have demonstrated that these exercises work. For our purposes, the exercises have been adapted to be useful to people in all walks of life.

## The 16 Learnable Skills

Let's say that you are thinking, "Dana, you've convinced me. I want better EQ. How do I get started?"

The first step is to learn about the skills that comprise EQ. Doing so will take it from a fuzzy concept to a concrete, practical set of ideas you will find easy to understand. The second step will be for you to do a self-assessment of your current skill level. The self-assessment is at the end of this little book, and it will prepare you to get the most from the online resources you choose to use as an essential part of your growth.

Don't feel that you have to memorize the names of 16 skills. That would be tedious. But spend a minute or two looking over the following terms and definitions. The goal is just to get a feel for the terms. And you can use it as a reference as you read about various EQ skills later on.

# Emotional Intelligence

## Sixteen Learnable Skills

### 1 Self-Regard

the ability to respect and accept yourself as basically good

### 2 Self-Actualization

the ability to develop your potential capacities

### 3 Emotional Self Awareness

the ability to recognize your feelings accurately

### 4 Emotional Expression

the ability to express your feelings openly, both verbally and non-verbally

### 5 Assertiveness

the ability to express your feelings, beliefs, and thoughts, and to defend your rights in a nondestructive manner

### 6 Independence

the ability to make your own decisions and be free of emotional dependency

### 7 Empathy

the ability to be aware of, to understand, and to appreciate the feelings of others

### 8 Interpersonal Relationship

the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships that are characterized by intimacy and by giving and receiving affection

### 9 Social Responsibility

the ability to demonstrate yourself as a cooperative, contributing, and constructive member of your social group

### 10 Problem Solving

the ability to keep emotions from derailing effectively problem solving

### 11 Reality Testing

the ability to check our initial impressions by getting more information

### 12 Flexibility

the ability to adjust your emotions, thoughts, and behavior to changing situations and conditions

### 13 Stress Tolerance

the ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without "falling apart," by actively and positively coping with stress

### 14 Impulse Control

the ability to resist or delay an impulse, drive, or temptation to act

### 15 Happiness

the ability to feel satisfied with your life, to enjoy yourself and others, and to have fun

### 16 Optimism

to be resilient when things go wrong



You hold in your hands a little book written to have a big impact: to save humanity from seemingly intractable challenges. In a calm and lucid response to the powerful “conflict entrepreneurs” who seek to shape our times and keep people divided, the widely respected Dana C. Ackley, PhD offers a practical, effective, and humane path forward. With *A Little Book to Save Humanity*, Dr. Ackley makes accessible to the everyday reader the fascinating scientific research behind Emotional Intelligence (EQ), highlighting proven methods to apply its lessons for profound personal and real-world results. Drawing on more than 50 years of innovative work — with families, corporate leaders, and government officials alike — Dr. Ackley considers issues ranging from personal and social conflicts to race relations and political impasses. Intended to encourage resolution and the growth of human capacity, *A Little Book to Save Humanity* shows how the human brain can get any of us into deep trouble — and how the thoughtful use of emotions can save us from ourselves. Focused on much-needed solutions, the book is accompanied by a broad collection of online exercises to help turn its insights into impact.

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Dana C. Ackley earned a PhD in clinical psychology from Florida State University in 1973. For the next 25 years, he worked with families to help them overcome deep divides and significant challenges. Since the late 1990s, he has served as an executive coach and consultant to organizations, helping leaders bring the best of themselves to nearly impossible jobs. Dana has twice been named

a Fellow of the American Psychological Association for innovative thinking in using psychological knowledge to solve vexing problems. He is an internationally recognized expert in Emotional Intelligence, based on his groundbreaking *EQ Leader Program*, the first comprehensive program for EQ development for leaders. The father of three adult children, he lives in Virginia with his wife Peg.

