



SPARA

Accounting
Insights
Advisory

JOB AID

The Power of Emotional Intelligence

A Working Job Aid for Business Owners

Manage yourself first — then your team, your customers, and everyone else.

Accounting | Insights | Advisory

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The Brain You Didn't Choose, and How to Run It

It's all about you. You can't change your employees, your partner, or your customers. You can influence them. The one thing you control is your own actions and reactions.

Mindset is a choice. Fixed sees a threat; growth sees data. The word "yet" turns a closed door into an open one — in a hiring decision, a missed quarter, or a hard pivot.

Frustration is a signal. It's the gateway to every bad decision you'll make as an owner — and the surest sign your mindset just slipped into fixed.

The Brain You Didn't Choose

It runs on two priorities — survival, then efficiency — and neither evolved for running a business. Unwatched, it reacts from stored assumptions, not the facts in front of you.

- 2% of your mass, 20% of your energy — so it takes shortcuts (heuristics) wherever it can.
- You don't see with your eyes — your brain fills in what it expects, including in a tense client email or a terse text from a partner.
- System 1 is fast and often right; System 2 is slow and deliberate. EI is catching System 1 before it commits you to a bad call (Kahneman).

The Amygdala Hijack — and How to Stop It

A trigger hits the amygdala in ~12 ms — fight / flight / freeze / fawn — long before your thinking brain catches up. It can't tell a real threat (a failing system) from a perceived one (a sharp email from an investor), and cortisol throttles your judgment. It clears in 20–60 minutes.

Notice the body — not the story
Name it to tame it
Six seconds before you speak
Box-breathe 4-4-4-4
Change your space — stand, move
Buy time — draft, don't send

Change the Belief, Not Just the Behavior

CBT in one line: you can white-knuckle a new behavior — a calmer response to a missed deadline, a more patient tone with staff — but if the belief underneath never moves, the old behavior comes back.

Catch Your Distortions

Negative self-talk runs on autopilot — about your business, your decisions, your team. Naming the thinking error takes most of its power away. Awareness alone is most of the cure.

All-or-nothing

Catastrophizing

Mind reading

Overgeneralizing

Personalizing

"Should" statements

The Numbers Worth Knowing

~75%

of the time, high-EQ beats high-IQ candidates for promotion

12 ms

the amygdala fires before the thinking brain catches up

2% / 20%

brain mass vs. the share of your energy it burns

EI is an appreciating asset. Your technical skill depreciates as the market moves — and as AI absorbs more of the routine work. The skill that doesn't commoditize is reading people, building trust, and managing yourself.

Frameworks: Goleman, Emotional Intelligence; Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow.

Build Them in Order, Then Use Them

Personal → Social, Awareness → Action. Build in order — you can't manage what you can't see, and you can't read your team or your customers until you can read yourself.

- 1 Self-Awareness** Read your own emotions and their impact — **name what you actually feel**
- 2 Self-Management** Control impulses; adapt; stay aligned to your standards — **pause before you react**
- 3 Social Awareness** Sense others & read the room — empathy, organizational awareness — **listen; read the cues**
- 4 Relationship Mgmt** Influence, develop your team, manage conflict — **adapt to the person**

Know Your Hot Buttons

The same words and the same people trigger you the same way, every time — a vendor who's late, an employee who pushes back, a customer who escalates. You can't erase hot buttons — but you can stop being surprised by them, and then choose your response.

THE TRIGGER

"Someone reworks my decision without telling me what was wrong with it."

THE BELIEF UNDERNEATH IT

"It means I'm not trusted — or not respected."

Self-Management Toolkit

Sleep. The amygdala is ~60% more reactive on 5 hours than on 8 — protect your sleep before any high-stakes day.

Move & meditate. Exercise and 10 minutes a day of mindfulness build the brake you need under pressure.

90-second rule. The chemistry of an emotion clears fast — if it lingers, you're feeding it with thought.

Manage your calendar. Not in the right state for a hard conversation? Move it. Self-management includes knowing when not to engage.

Responding to an Outburst in Someone Else

Their thinking brain is offline — logic won't land. Pick the mode for the moment, and soothe the state before you address the substance.

Avoidance

Step back from the moment, warmly. "Let's come back to this in 30."

Smoothing over

Lower the stakes, offer an off-ramp. Best for small stuff.

Confrontation

Address the behavior — calm, specific — after the chemistry clears.

Collaboration

Work the problem together once both of you can think. The slow, right path.

The Soothing Skill

Slow your own breathing first — their nervous system syncs to yours. Drop your volume. Acknowledge the feeling ("I can see why you're upset"). Use their name. Give them something to do — water, a walk.

State first. Substance later.

EI in an AI World

AI absorbs the routine cognitive work in your business — drafting, scheduling, first-pass analysis. What's left as the differentiator is the human stack, and it's the same list as the four dimensions above.

HUMANS

Judgment in novelty, emotional perception, trust, context.

MACHINES

Scale, structured data, tireless execution, consistency.

Your 30 / 60 / 90-Day Plan

1–30

See yourself

Daily retro · hot-button map
· hijack log · spot your distortions

31–60

Manage yourself

Mindfulness · six-second rule · restructure your thoughts · protect sleep

61–90

Turn outward

Be last to speak · steelman a disagreement · match your team's communication styles



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A SoftEd Power Skills Field Guide — adapted for business owners.

Frameworks: Goleman · Dweck · Edmondson · Keltner · Beck (CBT) · Linehan (DBT).

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