

This Read2Lead was graciously provided to the Center for Junior Officers by Dr. Dan Dworkis, Author of The Emergency Mind: Wiring your Brain for Performance Under Pressure.

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Dr. Dworkis has offered this guide to help assist Junior Officers improve their team's performance under pressure, and has give expressed consent for your use of the guide in it's entirety as an aid to that end.

- The CJO Team



**THE
EMERGENCY MIND
PROJECT**

TEAM STUDY GUIDES

BASED ON THE BOOK:

**THE EMERGENCY MIND: WIRING YOUR BRAIN
FOR PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE**

DAN DWORKIS, MD PHD

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30-50 pages per session

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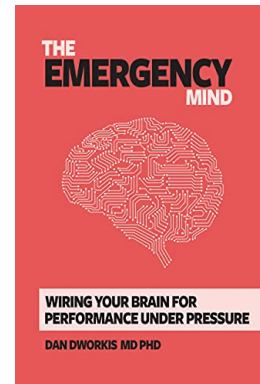
10-25 pages per session

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1-Session Team Study Guide

The Emergency Mind: Wiring Your Brain for Performance Under Pressure

Dan Dworkis, MD PhD



Book Summary:

Emergency doctors or not, we all face emergencies in our lives—times when we must make critical decisions in high-stakes, uncertain, pressure-filled environments. Even with the best possible training, bringing our knowledge to bear in the stress and pressure of these moments can feel overwhelming, if not impossible.

In *The Emergency Mind: Wiring Your Brain for Performance Under Pressure*, Dan Dworkis, MD PhD takes you into the minds of the doctors who run resuscitation rooms and treat the ill and injured to teach you how to perform when the pressure is on. Leveraging the mental models and lessons from his own practice of emergency medicine—as well as from experts from the worlds of business, elite athletics, and the military—Dr. Dworkis shows you how to train mentally to perform at your best when you're needed the most.

If you're an emergency medicine physician, medical student, military medic, nurse, EMT, entrepreneur, athlete—or anyone else who performs under pressure—*The Emergency Mind* will teach you simple, concrete steps to wire your brain for the best possible performance and build your own emergency mind.

Study Guide Logistics:

This study guide offers a set of discussion questions to facilitate a single-session conversation or book club meeting around the ideas and mental models in *The Emergency Mind* book. Expanded versions, including a five-session and a ten-session study guide—are also available.

Use the questions below as jumping-off points to start your team's conversation, but don't hesitate to follow the flow, add your own questions or examples, or head out in a different direction altogether based on what stuck with you from the book.

Discussion Questions for *The Emergency Mind: Wiring Your Brain for Performance Under Pressure*

1. How does defining an emergency improve your ability to handle it?
2. What experiments are you currently running on yourself? What experiment do you plan on running next?
3. Thinking about Leschak's quote about uncertainty on page 76. What does "savoring uncertainty" mean to you?
4. As a team member, what are some of your personal strengths and weaknesses regarding how you currently communicate complex information under pressure? Discuss how you currently communicate in high-pressure situations both to your team leader and to the other members of your group.
5. During the last week, what is the best question you asked your team and what did you learn from it? How could you change the way you ask questions this coming week that would help make your team at least 1% better?
6. Consider the concepts of equipoise and "free rolling" on pages 120-121. What is one decision you make routinely in which you could apply these concepts? What might happen if you decided to not make that decision?
7. What small change could you make on your next off day to make you more effective and whole for your next on day?
8. What are the two to three most important principles that guide your work? Can you think of a time when any of them appeared to conflict with each other? How did you resolve it?
9. When you're faced with a new problem, do you typically default to action or to analysis? Algorithmic or creative thinking? How do you personally balance the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches? How could a great leader help their team make these tradeoffs intelligently and skillfully under pressure?
10. Looking back at the twenty-five mental models described in this book, which models resonate the strongest with you? Which do you like the least? Which model do you plan to use next in your work and why?

Next Steps:

The Emergency Mind Project trains individuals, teams, and organizations to thrive during emergencies and apply knowledge under pressure.

Bringing together lessons from the world of emergency medicine and beyond, we leverage advanced scientific theory and deep practical experience in crisis to develop tools we apply to complex, high-impact problem sets.

Dan Dworkis, MD PhD, is the founder of The Emergency Mind Project, the Chief Medical Officer of the Mission Critical Team Institute, a board-certified emergency physician, and an Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC where he works at LAC+USC. He performed his emergency medicine residency with Harvard Medical School at the Harvard Affiliated Emergency Medicine Residency at Massachusetts General Hospital / Brigham Health, and holds an MD and PhD in Molecular Medicine from the Boston University School of Medicine.

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Additional resources:

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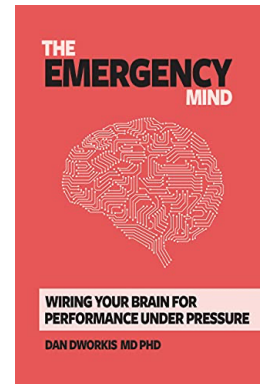
[MCTI Teamcast x The Emergency Mind](#)

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5-Session Team Study Guide

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If you're an emergency medicine physician, medical student, military medic, nurse, EMT, entrepreneur, athlete—or anyone else who performs under pressure—*The Emergency Mind* will teach you simple, concrete steps to wire your brain for the best possible performance and build your own emergency mind.

Study Guide Logistics:

This study guide offers a set of discussion questions for your team to facilitate conversations around the ideas and mental models in *The Emergency Mind* book. It is divided into five sessions, with reading assignments ranging from 30-50 pages per session. A slower, ten-session study guide, and a one-session book club guide are also available.

Use the questions below as jumping-off points to start your team's conversation, but don't hesitate to follow the flow, add your own questions or examples, or head out in a different direction altogether based on what stuck with you from the book.

Session 1 – Introduction through Applying Knowledge Under Pressure (50 pages)

11. How does defining an emergency improve your ability to handle it?
12. What experiments are you currently running on yourself? What experiment do you plan to run next?
13. How could you take the concept of applying graduated pressure and bring it to bear on your current work?
14. Are there challenging situations you will likely face in the near future that you could design low-pressure practice for?
15. What are some of your personal “tired moves?” Which “tired moves” are most important for your team to develop?

Session 2 – Handling Uncertainty and Imperfection (30 pages)

1. Where could you personally apply the concept of *wabi-sabi* in your life and work that would make the most difference? Where could it most help your team?
2. Thinking about Leschak’s quote about uncertainty on page 76, what does “savoring uncertainty” mean to you?
3. As the leader of a team, what could you personally do differently to better harness the wisdom of your room?
4. As a team member, what are some strengths and weaknesses of how you currently communicate complex information under pressure both to your team leader and to the other members of your group?

Session 3 – Supporting Critical Decisions (33 pages)

1. During the previous week, what is the most powerful question you asked your team and what did you learn from it? How could you easily change the way you ask questions this coming week that would make them at least 1% better?
2. Consider the concepts of equipoise and “free rolling” on pages 120-121. What is one decision that you routinely make where these concepts could apply? What might happen if you decided to not make that decision?
3. When did you last encounter an unnecessary opportunity for failure, and what did you do about it? How could your team begin to proactively look for and address these potential traps?

Session 4 – Building From Core Values (33 pages)

- Looking back at a challenge you faced or a mistake that happened recently, what did you change or how did you improve as a result?
- What simple thing could you or your team do to capture 1% more learning from every problem set you work with?
- What single small change could you make on your next off day to help yourself become more effective and whole for your next on day?
- What are the 2-3 most important principles that guide your work? Can you think of a time when any of those might have seemed to conflict with each other? How did you resolve it?
- What can teams do to successfully pivot from one priority to another when the reality around them changes? What can individuals on these teams do to facilitate the pivot?

Session 5 – Balancing Competing Forces (30 pages)

- When you need to switch between a tight focus and a broad focus to handle a problem set, how do you best do it? What about switching from broad to tight? How do you communicate to your team where your focus is at any point in time?
- When you're faced with a new problem, do you typically default to action or to analysis? Algorithmic or creative thinking? How do you personally balance the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches?
- How could a great leader help their team make these tradeoffs intelligently and skillfully under pressure?
- Looking back at the 25 mental models described in this book, which models resonate with you the most? Which do you like the least? Which model do you plan to use next in your work and why?

Next Steps:

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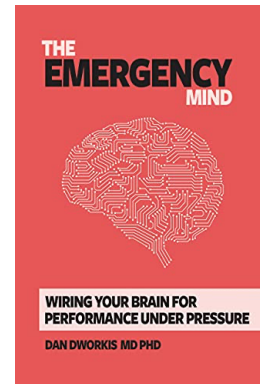
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Study Guide Logistics:

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In each session, use the questions below as jumping-off points to start your team's conversation, but don't hesitate to follow the flow, add your own questions or examples, or head out in a different direction altogether based on what stuck with you from the book.

Session 1 – What is an Emergency, Emergency Mental Models, and Model 1 (25 pages)

16. How does defining an emergency improve your ability to handle it?
17. What mental models do you typically use when things are going well at work? What about when things are going poorly? When you're performing at your absolute best? Are these models the same or different? Why?
18. Looking ahead at your coming week, think about an emergency you might face. Is there a moment in that crisis that might be the "calm in the storm?" If so, how could you find it? If not, how could you make one?

Session 2 – Models 2-5 (24 pages)

5. When things go wrong during a crisis, how do you typically respond? What one thing do you wish you could change about your typical reaction?
6. How could you take the concept of applying graduated pressure and bring it to bear on your current work? Are there challenging situations you will likely face in the near future that you could design low-pressure practice for?
7. What are some of your personal "tired moves?" Which "tired moves" are most important for your team to develop?

Session 3 – Models 6-8 (19 pages)

4. Where could you personally apply the concept of *wabi-sabi* in your life and work that would make the most difference? Where could it most help your team?
5. What is a cognitive bias you might encounter or are vulnerable to during your work, and what you could you do to help mitigate its effects?
6. Thinking about Leschak's quote about uncertainty on page 76, what does "savoring uncertainty" mean to you?

Session 4 – Models 9 & 10 (10 pages)

- As the leader of a team, what could you personally do differently to better harness the wisdom of your room?
- As a team member, what are some strengths and weaknesses of how you currently communicate complex information under pressure both to your team leader and to the other members of your group?

- What would it take to make developing high quality “Plan B’s” part of your normal planning process? If you do this already, what would it take to incorporate training these alternative plans into your existing preparation cycle?

Session 5 – Models 11-13 (20 pages)

- In your line of work, what strict or functional dependencies do you rely on to help make better decisions? Can you think of an example when breaking that dependency might be the right thing to do?
- During the last week, what is the best question that you asked your team and what did you learn from it?
- How could you change the way you ask questions this coming week that would make them 1% better?
- When did you last encounter an unnecessary opportunity for failure, and what did you do about it? How could your team change to proactively look for and address these potential traps?

Session 6 – Models 14 & 15 (11 pages)

- Consider the concepts of equipoise and “free rolling” on pages 120-121. What is one decision that you routinely make where these concepts could apply? What might happen if you didn’t make that decision?
- Are you routinely aware of the energy and time cost of the decisions that you make? Do they all seem to cost the same, or are there a small set of decisions that take the most work to make? If so, are there any you could eliminate?
- If you could wave a magic wand and immediately eliminate one rate-limiting step that you face now in your work, what would it be and why?

Session 7 – Models 16-18 (19 pages)

- Looking back at a challenge you faced or a mistake that happened recently, what did you change or get better at as a result? How did you choose to focus on that?
- What simple thing could you or your team do to capture 1% more learning from every problem set you work with?
- How do the choices you make on your days off impact the work you personally can do on your days on? What small change could you make on your next off day to make you more effective for your next on day?

- What are the 2-3 most important principles that guide your work? Can you think of a time when some of them might have seemed to conflict with each other? How did you resolve it?

Session 8 – Models 19 & 20 (13 pages)

- What is one basic skill that you perform differently now than how you were taught to do it? Why did you make that change?
- How does your team communicate to new team members the real-life details of how you do your work? How could you make that communication better?
- What can teams do to successfully pivot from one priority to another when the reality around them changes? What can individuals on these teams do to facilitate the pivot?

Session 9 – Models 21-23 (17 pages)

- When you need to switch between a tight focus and a broad focus to handle a problem set, how do you best do it? What about switching from broad to tight? How do you communicate to your team where your focus is at any one moment in time?
- Think ahead to a challenging problem set you are likely to face in the coming week. What parts of the situation do you control? What parts do you not control? How do you plan to act from within your locus of control when dealing with the problem set?
- What types of competing priorities like individuals and fields do you routinely encounter during your work? How could a great leader help their team balance these priorities when they seem at odds?

Session 10 – Models 24 & 25 (12 pages)

- When you're faced with a new problem, do you typically default to action or to analysis? How do you personally balance the two approaches?
- Do you feel more comfortable using algorithmic or creative thinking? Considering the problem sets your team is likely to face in the coming week, how do you plan on leveraging both algorithmic and creative thinking?
- Looking back at the 25 mental models described in this book, which models resonate with you the most? Which do you like the least? Which model do you plan to use next in your work and why?

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