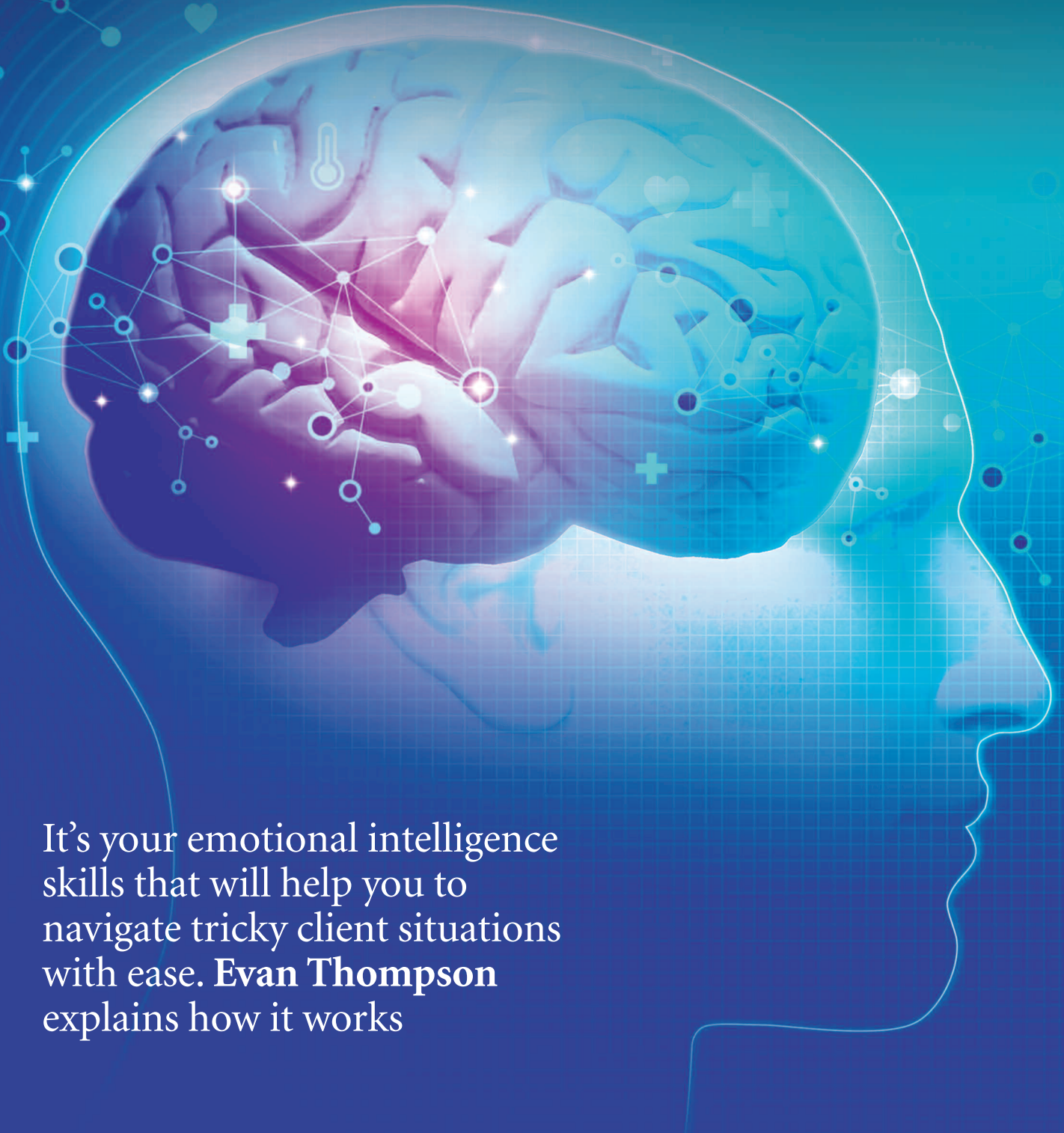


# EI POWER



It's your emotional intelligence skills that will help you to navigate tricky client situations with ease. **Evan Thompson** explains how it works

**Y**ou're not even through the first month of a new year and your PITA client is being difficult — again. This time, he is bombarding you with emails with suggestions on how to better manage his portfolio. Responding to his emails is time consuming, and since you recently had a positive portfolio review with him, you are losing patience.

Your success in managing this situation depends on the strength of your emotional intelligence (EI). Simply put, EI is about managing your own emotions, as well as understanding what others are feeling and what drives them.

Most experts see EI as a greater predictor of professional and personal success than intelligence quotient, which measures academic ability. In fact, studies show EI accounts for as much as 75 per cent of your ability to succeed. Like the adage goes, "Your IQ got you through school, but your EI will get you through life."

A lack of EI can affect your performance in ways that may surprise you. If you struggle with turning more prospects into clients, the problem may not be your selling skills. You may have your technical skills down cold, but if you are stuck when it comes to establishing an emotional connection with your prospect, you will come across as insincere and robotic.

Some advisors with weak EI will overload prospects with information to try and impress them with their financial knowledge. They may not realize that the ability to be authentic and communicate in layman's terms is just as important as professional certainty is to earning trust.


EI is driven by personal awareness — you can't motivate others if you don't know what motivates you. So decide exactly what you are trying to accomplish. Take the time to think things through. If your perception of how you work, look, and interact with others does not square with reality, you need to reflect on what initially drew you to the investment industry before you took your first exam.

EI also involves a range of skills that not everyone is born with. Active listening, empathy, and assertiveness, to name a few, are always

used. While you may not have all of these skills, you can work on learning them. A professional interpersonal communications coach can offer objective tips to help you polish your listening, body language, empathy, self-image, and other skills. It's like learning to be punctual — all it takes is some effort and practice, and the benefits will quickly follow.

Assertiveness is another high-EI attribute, and it comes in handy when an advisor wants to ask a client for more of her business, for instance. Many advisors wish to manage all of their clients' assets, not just a percentage. Convincing a client to consolidate all their assets under one firm is a daunting task, coupled with the fact that competitors have the same goal. If the advisor delays asking the assertive question, there's the chance of losing those hidden assets to a competitor. But an advisor with a high EI is likely to not only ask the question, but also speak in depth about the advantages of consolidating their assets.

Having the ability to delay self-gratification is important. Pressure to meet business targets is always present, and you may feel disgruntled about the time and energy you expended on a prospect that isn't going to work as quickly as you would like. Understanding that your timetable does not always align with your client's or prospect's can be disappointing, but is essential to your long-term success.

So, back to the PITA client. The EI strategy would be to put yourself in the client's position before responding. His business future may be uncertain, he may be having problems at home, or is simply having a bad week. Instead of dismissing him, draw on your EI and consider something like this. "I appreciate your concerns about your portfolio. It's an uncertain time for all investors and I am here to help. May I suggest that we schedule another portfolio review next month? Keep track of your concerns and we can review your concerns then. As your advisor, I believe it is beneficial to your portfolio to let a little time pass before we make any adjustments to our investment strategy that could be premature." 

---

*EVAN THOMPSON is a business relationship and personal branding expert, writer, and head of Toronto-based Evan Thompson and Associates.*

## SHOWCASING YOUR EI

### Listen before you act — or react

Advisors with a high degree of EI are effective communicators who are attentive — and sensitive — to what others might be feeling at a given moment. When a client comes to you in a state of panic, you need to be prepared to offer an appropriate response. If, for example, a client informs you she has made a risky investment against your advice, don't immediately launch into crisis-management mode or demand an explanation. Express empathy and let your client relate her story without fear of judgment. If you really listen actively, and make mental notes of everything being said, you will be better able to offer useful advice.

### Don't make assumptions

Those who are emotionally intelligent don't bring their views or assumptions into the conversation. Instead, they try to understand the situation from the other person's perspective. The best way to relate to people whose life experiences are different from yours is to give them respect. Consider the example of an advisor holding a family meeting that includes various generations. If you want to make an effort to connect with Millennials, avoid trying to connect with them about such things as pop culture. You're there to discuss the family's financial future, so treat them like the adults they are. Focus the conversation on the issues at hand, and be as inclusive as possible by addressing your comments to everyone.

### Pay attention to body language

Assess the way your client is engaging with you. An ability to pick up on non-verbal cues can help you bridge gaps in communication.

If a client is sitting upright, with legs and arms crossed in a defensive gesture, he is probably not buying what you are suggesting. — *E.T.*