

# The Weekend Australian

---

Emotional intelligence helps you understand clients and staff

ANNA-LUCIA MACKAY  
THE AUSTRALIAN  
FEBRUARY 20, 2016

Emotional intelligence is a concept popularised in the 1990s that helps redefine the way people manage, lead, sell, serve and conduct business in the 21st century.

Today it is widely believed to be the key skill that distinguishes high performers from the average and is responsible for delivering increased performance, productivity and profits. It is the crucial skill required to engage with clients and employees, increasing your competitive edge.

What differentiates outstanding businesses from their competition is understanding what makes people tick. These days clients and employees are far more complex than previous generations. So an organisation that understands the wants, needs, motivations and behaviours of staff and customers will be able to predict and anticipate more accurately how people think, what they need and how they will act — and deliver products and services to match.

While sometimes dismissed as being too touchy-feely, emotional intelligence is definitely not for “softies”. Emotionally intelligent people chase hard-core results. Their understanding of people is the foundation of the decision-making and problem-solving skills they use to innovate and create products, services and cultures that drive client and employee actions and performance.

This comes from self-awareness and self-management. Each is dependent on the other and both are critical to attaining a deeper understanding of customers and employees.

Self-awareness must always be the starting point. In the words of Socrates, “know thyself”. Only once a person understands what signals, cues, impressions and perceptions they project will they become more attuned to the reasons behind behaviours, reactions and responses in others. The more attuned a person becomes to their own behaviour, the more effective they will be at analysing, trend spotting and pattern identification of these in others.

Proficiency demonstrated by someone in this area is often mistaken for “gut-based intuition” rather than what it is: effective rational and logical observation of trends, pattern and behaviours.

Self-management provides a person with a more accurate perspective. Self-managers are great at predicting and anticipating situations, particularly tricky ones, which in turn lets them plan a suitable solution ahead of time. They are caught unawares less often and are not frustrated or stressed, or make ego-based, knee-jerk reactions.

Numerous studies have shown it is impossible to sustain high levels of performance without people being able to self-manage effectively. There are those who would argue that adrenalin-fuelled bursts of high-pressure performance can drive results. But this approach, while potentially successful, is rarely sustainable.

A closer look at people running on adrenalin usually will reveal a workplace with a toxic environment and high staff turnover.

Self-management is contagious. If the influential people in your organisation are not skilled at it, you can be sure their teams will follow suit. Self-management requires mental strength and the ability to override personal emotions and reactions that could interfere with getting the job done and building relationships.

Having proved its worth in corporate and academic sectors, emotional intelligence is here to stay. It is not a fad. It's a mindset that delivers results.

Anna-Lucia Mackay is the author of *The Four Mindsets: How to Influence, Motivate and Lead a High Performance*.