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### Blind determination

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[cairnsconvention.com.au](http://cairnsconvention.com.au)



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👉 [skyrail.com.au](http://skyrail.com.au)



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👉 [m-a-d.com.au](http://m-a-d.com.au)

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👉 [businessseventsportdouglas.com](http://businessseventsportdouglas.com)

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👉 [crocodileadventures.com](http://crocodileadventures.com)







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👉 [flamesoftheforest.com.au](http://flamesoftheforest.com.au)

### 📍 FITZROY ISLAND RESORT

Leave the world behind on one of the most beautiful island locations situated on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef – Fitzroy Island. Inspire through a visit to the Turtle Rehabilitation Centre, reward with a toes-in-the-sand beachside lunch, relax snorkelling from the beach, or recharge on a stunning bush walk.

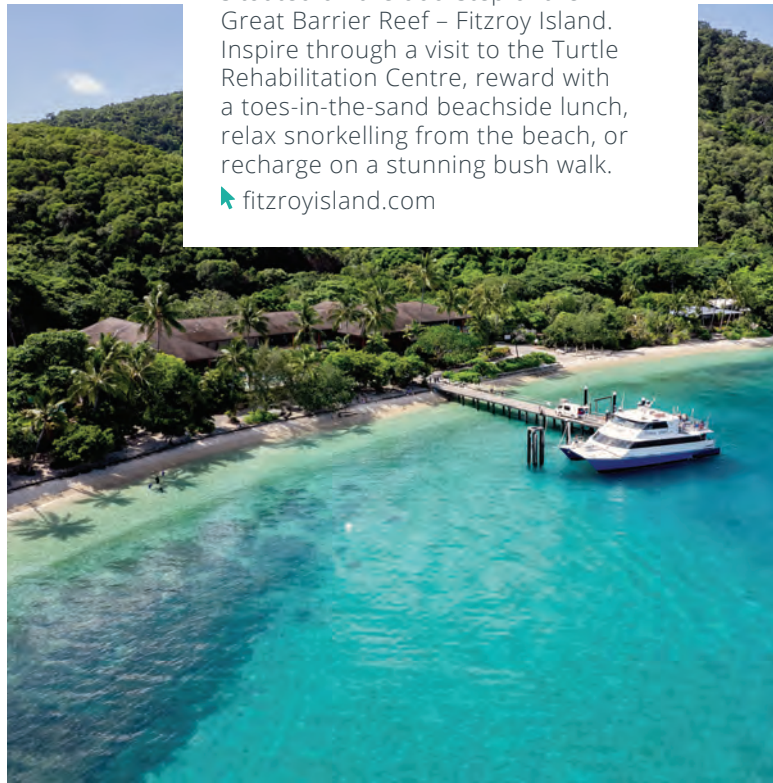
👉 [fitzroyisland.com](http://fitzroyisland.com)



### 📍 HOLIDAY INN CAIRNS HARBOURSIDE

Retreat from the bustle of Cairns City to experience outdoor events with postcard views over the Esplanade out to the Coral Sea or indoor event spaces featuring relaxing and rejuvenating natural light. Indulge in locally sourced produce coupled with premium, bio-dynamic, sustainable wines while benefitting from IHG business rewards.

👉 [holidayinn.com/cairns](http://holidayinn.com/cairns)



### 📍 REWARD WITH REFOREST

Motivate delegates to engage in the conservation and preservation of Cairns & Great Barrier Reef by partnering with destination carbon offset program facilitator, Reforest. Create a legacy for your incentive or corporate retreat by offsetting your event through the planting of trees in the local, endangered, Mabi Rainforest – home of Australia's gorgeous, yet threatened Tree Kangaroo.

👉 [reforest.com.au](http://reforest.com.au)



LEARN MORE AT  
[BUSINESSEVENTSCAIRNS.ORG.AU](http://BUSINESSEVENTSCAIRNS.ORG.AU)

CAIRNS &  
GREAT  
BARRIER  
REEF

BUSINESS  
EVENTS



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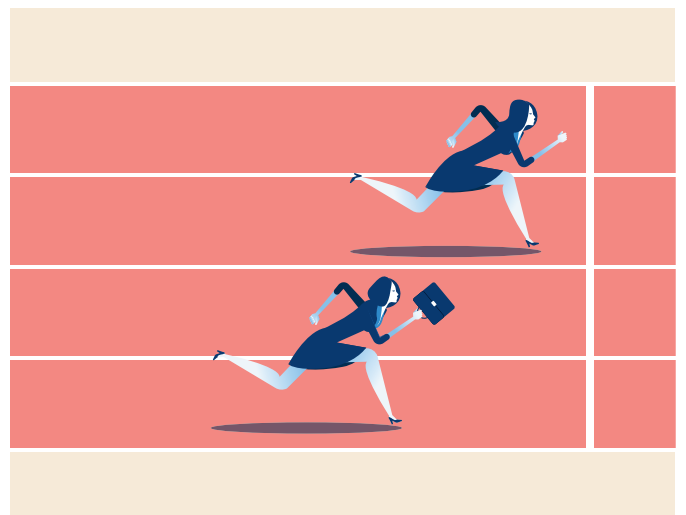


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# EDITOR'S LETTER

WINTER ISSUE 2023

**Welcome to** the second issue of Executive PA Magazine for 2023 – I'm so excited to share it with you!

As a new mother of twins, also balancing work life, home life and a characterful five-year-old, I must admit that some days, things get HARD. But talking to Karen McCarthy for our main editorial feature made me stop and think about how I can stay physically and psychologically healthy and capable of pursuing my priorities during these tricky times. Talking about her 'blind determination', Karen is a woman who lost her sight and has an incredible vision for a resilient future. Turn to page 18 to be inspired.

Talking of thought-provoking people, we profiled two talented EAs this issue. You'll find the story of Jo Jones (who you may recognise as our new career columnist) on page 22 whilst Sydney-based Brianna Matkovich talks about why teachers should suggest being an EA as a career option for high school students on page 50.

If you need to boost your professional development, turn to the back pages. You'll find expert commentary on everything from imposter syndrome and sustainable workloads to the one-month email rule and the science of focus. Looking for something lighter? Gastronomer's Guide heads to Kingfisher Bay Resort on in K'gari/ Fraser Island and gets all the juicy details of Sanjay Singh's signature dish.



**“Talking about her ‘blind determination’, Karen is a woman who lost her sight and has an incredible vision for a resilient future”**

Finally, don't miss Desired Destinations from page 33 to 39. This issue Brad Foster will enlighten you with a comprehensive update on what's new, hot and happening in Cairns and the surrounding areas – and highlight top contacts to assist you in the planning process.

See you next time.

P.S. Any suggestions for the magazine going forward or wish to contribute in any way? I'd love to hear from you! Just e-mail me at [editor@executivepa.com](mailto:editor@executivepa.com)

*Claire*

Claire Muir  
Editor  
Executive PA Magazine



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# EDITORIAL TEAM

## CONTRIBUTORS



**Dr Amantha Imber**

Dr Amantha Imber is the Founder of Inventium, Australia's leading behavioural science consultancy. She also hosts an insightful podcast about the habits and rituals of the world's most successful people, called *How I Work*.



**Dr Jenny Brockis**

Dr. Jenny Brockis is a medical practitioner specialising in brain health and mental performance in the workplace. She is also the author of *Future Brain: The 12 Keys To Creating Your Own High-Performance Brain*.



**Michelle Gibbings**

Michelle is a change, leadership and career expert and founder of Change Meridian. Michelle works with global leaders and teams to help them get fit for the future of work. She is the author of *Step Up: How to Build Your Influence at Work*.



**Nigel Collin**

Nigel is a change and leadership expert helping people and organisations make change happen through small, consistent steps. He is author of *Game of Inches*, an internationally recognised keynote speaker and executive coach.



**Dr Lynda Folan**

Lynda Folan is an organisational psychologist and a specialist in leadership and organisational development. As well as leading companies across the globe through transformational change, she has authored the book *Leader Resilience, The New Frontier of Leadership*.



**Curt Steinhorst**

ACurt is an author, speaker, business owner and entrepreneur. A distraction expert, he equips professionals across the world – from Fortune 100 companies and global leadership associations to Universities and not-for-profits – to work smarter and stronger.



**Donna McGeorge**

A global authority on productivity and a best-selling author, Donna's book series *It's About Time* covers meetings, structuring your day and doing more with less.



**Jo Jones**

Winner of Executive PA Media's PA of the Year award in 2017, Jo Jones is deputy chief of staff at the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries. She is responsible for making life easier for senior leaders and is instrumental in helping them getting the job done.



**Darren Fleming**

Darren, a behavioural scientist and peak performance specialist, is a speaker, trainer and mentor to senior leaders wanting to master their mindset. With a background in psychology, elite sport and entrepreneurialism he has authored seven books on the topics.



**Brad Foster**

Brad Foster has been a journalist covering the events sector for many years. He now works as a communications specialist with ICMSA, a writer, and just recently, a radio reporter.



**Tim Stackpool**

Tech expert Tim is the technology writer for Executive PA Media. He can be heard on talk radio in Australia and is a tech presenter who speaks at conferences and trade shows about technology's impact on work and lifestyle.



**Karen McCarthy**

Having lived experience of loss and disability, Karen is a keynote speaker on resilience, transition and charge. With a legal background, she inspires this profession in particular to leverage their blind determination to build resilience wellbeing.

## EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

**Anthony Carthew**

Anthony is our 2018 PA of the Year Australasia. He is EA to Sydney Opera House CEO, Louise Herron. Among his many responsibilities he is also Protocol Officer, a team leader and more.

**Jo Jones**

Winner of Executive PA Media's PA of the Year award in 2017, Jo Jones is deputy chief of staff at the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries. She is responsible for making life easier for senior leaders.

**Natalie Kennefick**

Natalie is EA to the CEO at Arriba Group, and winner of Up & Coming PA of the Year at the 2018 Executive PA Awards, and runner up for Best Organised Event in 2019.

**Nyssa Lambkin**

Nyssa was an advanced EA at Ernst & Young (EY) and our 2017 PA of the Year Australasia. Nyssa now works in Oceania Markets Operations at EY, with the backing of experience in the EA profession.

# EXECUTIVE PA — MEDIA —

Informing, empowering and inspiring EAs worldwide

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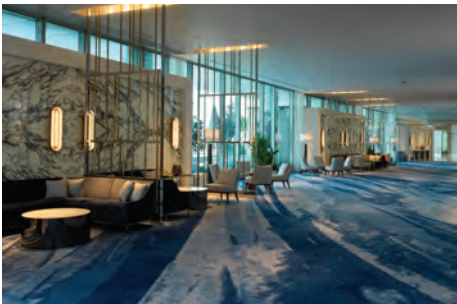
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Step inside our magnificent Pearl Ballroom for an unforgettable grand experience - exceptional cuisine and service.

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To enquire visit: [crownsydney.com.au/events](https://crownsydney.com.au/events)







# Spark this moment with Marriott Bonvoy Events Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands

Choose a destination and see what awaits with great rewards, group perks and more from Marriott Bonvoy Events

Sheraton Grand Mirage  
Resort Port Douglas

MARRIOTT BONVOY™  
EVENTS





Pier One Sydney Harbour



Sheraton Resort and Spa Tokoriki Island



Westin Perth



Melbourne Marriott Docklands

**It takes real** contact to strike a spark. In person events offer endlessly exciting ways to tell a story, create special moments and spark memories for life. With the opportunity to earn double Marriott Bonvoy points, group perks such as 5% off the rooms master bill and a complimentary treat.

Ignite the SPARK with Success, Passion, Appreciation, Relationships, and Kindness that can be found at Marriott Bonvoy Events.

#### **Success through engagement**

With countless ways to ignite engagement, Marriott Bonvoy sees success through guest speakers, presentations, and group activities. Host an event at Melbourne Marriott Docklands, where refreshed ideas can come alive in the adjoining terraces between conference rooms and al fresco space in case guests need to carry the conversation from the last meeting.

#### **Passion through Experiences**

Once in a lifetime opportunities and events always leave a lasting impression on any guest. With a range of destinations to choose from, picking an environment that can only inspire ideas and creativity is easy with

Marriott Bonvoy events. The Sheraton Resort and Spa, Tokoriki Island, boasts a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces amongst an exotic landscape.

#### **Appreciation through good food and good times**

Good food and good times allow guests to discover a new purpose and appreciation in working together.

Pier One Sydney Harbour guests will find their catering done by the awarded The Gantry restaurant presenting the best of local produce with views out on the waters of Sydney Harbour's Walsh Bay.

#### **Renewed relationship through connections**

Having guests gather for an occasion where they can share ideas, fostering a team environment is the best way to build connections and create lasting relationships. The Westin Perth's Grand Ballroom is the perfect space to host a guest speaker that can inspire and one small spark can lead to so much more.

#### **Spread kindness and care**

Marriott Bonvoy's events in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands all share the same goal to look after our environment. At Sheraton Grand Mirage

Port Douglas, the hotel's 'Make a Green Choice' sustainability program, whereby guests can choose to forego their daily housekeeping service in exchange for a \$10 food and beverage credit.

Book your meeting or event before September 30 2023 for stays before December 31 2023 and enjoy:

- Double Marriott Bonvoy points
- 5% off rooms master bill OR
- One complimentary room night (every 20 room nights) OR
- One free upgrade (every 20 room nights)
- A complimentary treat to surprise and delight

Not only are there incredible rewards and group perks, Spark This Moment with Marriott Bonvoy events gives guests full gratification that goes beyond the boardroom. For a memorable, occasion that truly strikes a spark, look no further than Marriott Bonvoy Events Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands. 🌟

For more information on Spark this Moment or to find the perfect hotel to host your next meeting or event head to: <https://go.marriott-promotions.com/spark-this-moment-anz>





# BRIEFING

Keep up to date with the latest news surrounding the role of the EA

## Back in the office: A refresher on the importance of ergonomics

**As more** Australians return to offices, increasing numbers are facing health issues due to non-supportive work setups, claims Jenny Folley, an expert in appraising office spaces and owner of @WORKSPACES. In addition, she says achieving the right work setup will keep staff coming back into the office instead of working from home.

“Ergonomics isn’t as simple as sitting on a comfortable chair. Most people associate the word with office furniture but the term refers to the study of people’s efficiency in their working environment. Ergonomics involves assessing a person’s work area to understand their work activities and movements then setting up a workspace that meets their needs.”

Research shows people who work in spaces that lack office ergonomics

can suffer from a variety of health complaints (lower back pain is one of the leading causes of workplace absence in Australia and ergonomic furniture helps with reducing back and neck pain) and providing a safe and comfortable workspace not only benefits workers, it also minimises the risks to business as well. “When staff are happy, comfortable and supported with the right tools and furniture, they feel better, are more productive and are likely to stay with the business,” says Folley.

Here are Jenny’s top tips for EAs who need a refresher on ergonomic furniture that provides better support for posture and repetitive movements:

- Ergonomic chairs are fully adjustable to align with your height

and workstation, so you can remain in the correct sitting posture at all times. Factor in two points: seat height should be adjustable, and seat width and depth should be sufficient to support you.

- Ergonomic desks are designed with comfort and productivity in mind. One of the best options is the sit-stand desk, so that you can take a break from sitting and stay a bit more active. Do check out the treadmill desk too!

- Besides these big items, other assets should feature ergonomic comfort – your keyboard, mouse and lighting, plus stress reducers like plants and air purifiers: “When talking about office ergonomics, it’s not just the individual items, but the big picture. All the different components come together to benefit the team.” ✖

## Job hopping is changing the landscape of employment – what does this mean for the EA?

**Recruitment agency** Hays says staff turnover increased for over half (58%) of employers during the last financial year, just after the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed 1.3 million Aussies moved jobs during that time. In addition, over half of Australians have been at their current workplace for less than five years while one in ten have been with the same company for over 20. Looking specifically at EAs and related roles, job mobility rose from 7% to 10.3%.

Mandy Oliver, HR and financial controller manager at Brooks Australia – a Sydney-based company that is bucking the trend with the average worker being employed for more than nine years – says: “It’s important for

HR professionals to understand the reasons behind this trend and take steps to retain their administrative workforce, including creating a positive work environment, and providing opportunities for career growth and development.”

Meanwhile, Chantelle Gauci, EA at Brooks Australia, says: “While some job hopping may occur in our industry, I believe that the majority of EAs are in it for the long run and are dedicated to building a successful and fulfilling career with their employer.”

Regardless, the statistics – and the associated costs of high turnover (businesses spend approximately 1.5 times their annual salary on

finding a replacement whilst being impacted by a loss of knowledge, skills and productivity, according to the Australian HR Institute) – suggest retention needs a renewed focus, something an EA could push up the agenda, perhaps?

Cathy Brand, CEO of Brooks Australia, says it begins with getting things right from the outset: “Stay connected, actively listen, engage with employees and understand their perspectives. Today’s workforce has developed new attitudes. There is a big emphasis on how work fits into their lives including family time, autonomy in their roles and flexibility in where they work.” ✖



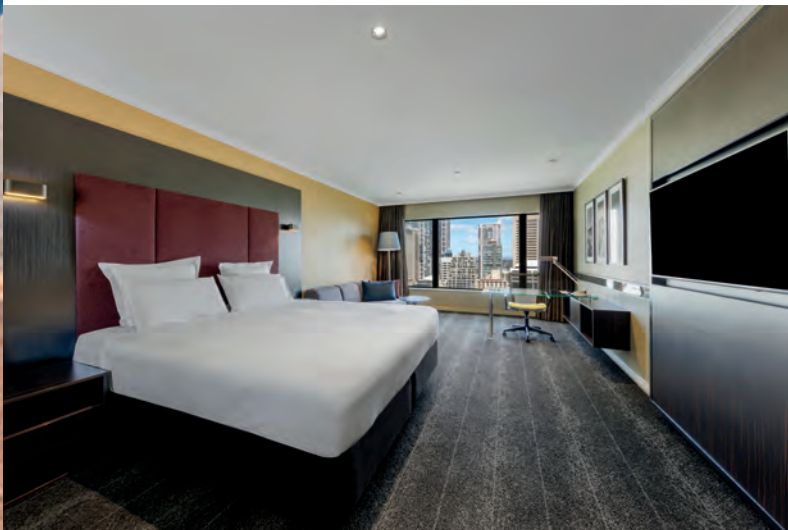


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Pullman & Mercure Melbourne Albert Park

Pullman Sydney Hyde Park

Novotel Sydney Central

Novotel Sydney Parramatta

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# MEMBER EVENTS



20 JUNE 2023

## Silks Crown Sydney

**You are invited** to an afternoon at Silks Crown Sydney when the refined elegance of authentic Cantonese dining awaits.

The experience is served in an opulent dining room where rich history meets contemporary influence, and meticulously crafted dishes effortlessly complement the lavish surroundings.

This is the perfect destination to host events, cultivate meaningful business connections, or enjoy a full hand-crafted Yum Cha or à la carte menu in a polished space.

[crownsydney.com.au/indulge/silks](http://crownsydney.com.au/indulge/silks)

### HOW TO APPLY

Executive PA Media members are invited to Silks Crown Sydney on Tuesday 20 June 2023 between 12.30pm and 2pm. The event is free to qualified applicants – to apply to attend please register online at [executivepa.com](http://executivepa.com)



22 AUGUST 2023

## Woodcut Crown Sydney

**Sydney dining's** award-winning couple, chef Ross Lusted and Sunny Lusted, have opened their latest restaurant, Woodcut at Crown Sydney. Woodcut provides Sydneysiders a unique dining experience celebrating Australian produce and cooking with wood, charcoal and steam. The concept, inspired by Ross and Sunny's travels, evokes memories of meals cooked in a slow wood-burning oven or over an open fire; and the earthy flavours this creates.

Executive PA Media members are invited to an exclusive dining experience hosted by Woodcut at Crown Sydney.

[crownsydney.com.au/indulge/woodcut](http://crownsydney.com.au/indulge/woodcut)

### HOW TO APPLY

Executive PA Media members are invited to Woodcut at Crown Sydney on Tuesday 22 August 2023. The event is free to qualified applicants – to apply to attend please register online at [executivepa.com](http://executivepa.com)





# PLANNING AN EVENT THIS WINTER?



## Meet At The Award Winning Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley

Located at the base of the iconic Blue Mountains just 1 hour drive from Sydney, Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley is the perfect destination to host your event this chilly season.

During the Winter months, the hotel provides a range of experiences for groups to enjoy including: bonfires by lakeside, local gin tastings, mulled wine with cheese & s'mores platters, courtyard dining by the fire and much more.

Named Tourism Accommodation Australia's highly commended Superior Regional Hotel of The Year in 2022, imagine sitting by the fire with mulled wine & s'mores, dining in the hotel's signature Harvest Restaurant or relaxing with a treatment at Australia's only Villa Thalgo Day Spa.

Set on 8-hectares of manicured gardens, Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley offers 105 newly refurbished accommodation rooms, 10 indoor meeting spaces, 5 outdoor event venues, an indoor heated pool, gymnasium, tennis courts plus delicious seasonal event menus and all-day dining options at Gazebo Restaurant, Barracks Bar & Harvest Restaurant.

## Special Offer

Book a minimum of 30 rooms per night for a 2 night stay and receive:

- A complimentary gin tasting experience
- 2 x complimentary suite upgrades
- 2 x welcome amenity for VIPs
- \$200 AV credit
- Choice of post dinner fire pit experience or welcome drinks on arrival
- 2x IHG Business Rewards points

\*Valid for bookings made prior to 30th December 2023. For stays until 30th June 2024. T's & C's apply.







# Blind determination

A woman who lost her sight shares her vision for a resilient future



Everyone wants to stay physically and psychologically healthy and capable of pursuing what's important to them, even when things get hard. *Claire Muir* talks with resilience expert and keynote speaker *Karen McCarthy* about what you can prioritise to improve your chances of doing just that

**Did you know that**, although many companies offer resilience training, you don't necessarily need time away from your regular duties to enhance your capacity to deal with change and adversity? Karen McCarthy says that what's needed is to leverage the determination that got you to where you are now: "It won't take long for you to get strong but it will take persistence," she advises.

"In her 2016 book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Angela Duckworth says that talent (our natural abilities, which include the genetic contributors to resilience) counts once while effort counts twice. What you need to put effort into is getting centered, spacious, strong, smart and supported."

#### And so it began...

A barrister, Karen was in her fifteenth year of legal practice in 2016 when, in the course of surgery to remove a tumour from her pituitary, she suffered a traumatic brain injury and became critically ill. As doctors fought heroically to keep her alive, they warned her husband she would probably die or that, if she did survive, she would be severely disabled. They also said that the vision loss Karen was experiencing might resolve with time. But they were wrong on all counts.

What followed was weeks in intensive care, a ward placement and a transfer to the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit at Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital. Karen never did recover her sight but surprised everyone when, two months later (exactly six months after sustaining the initial injury) she was well enough to be discharged home using a wheelchair.



## Four resilience myths: Debunked by Karen for EAs everywhere

### I'm just not that resilient

"While there are genetic factors and childhood experiences that can set you up with more tools in your resilience toolkit, anyone can take steps to improve their capacity to maintain wellbeing through hard times, including people who are already coping with a mental health diagnosis. Even small steps can take you on a big journey."

### If I'm more resilient, my boss will load me up with more stress

"People with lower levels of resilience are likely to be responding to the demands of their work with less regard for their wellbeing, meaning they experience more symptoms of stress than their more resilient counterparts. The more stressed you are, the less able you are to draw clear boundaries and communicate your limits effectively to others. When you increase your resilience, however, not only will your limits increase, you will also have the wherewithal to communicate what you're experiencing and seek support before you approach a dysregulated emotional state."

### The organisation should focus on the causes of my stress rather than my capacity to deal with it

"If all the potential causes of stress were within the control of your organisation, this might be a valid argument. But they're not. Pandemics, poor economic outlooks, tech-driven change and a whole host of other challenges are outside the control of anyone and we each need to be ready to cope if tomorrow is, in fact, the worst day of our lives. Besides, it's not a case of individuals proactively building their resilience or the organisation tackling the causes of employee stress. Both can, and should, happen simultaneously."

### I don't have time

"Top-level assistants are busy people who are relied on to be at their best whenever their boss or bosses need them. So, it is a wise investment of your time to preserve and enhance your resilience. It will help you avoid the absence and under-performance that are likely to result when you are overwhelmed and on the edge of burn-out."

### Conquering every obstacle

"The first time I was discharged for the weekend to visit home was my daughter Mary's 8th birthday," says Karen. "Mark hadn't told her and her sister, Ruby, I would be there so when I arrived with the other guests, they were beside themselves. Ruby described to me all the gifts Mary was given as she opened them. It still chokes me up when I think about what my little girls went through that year and how very brave they were for each other."



## The power of resilience

In her keynote, Karen tells the story of learning to walk to Mary's school blind because it illustrates perfectly all the aspects of her resilience methodology:

- **She had to be centred.** All the strands of her attention were gathered up to focus because feeling scattered could have meant being hit by a car or getting impossibly lost.
- **She was spacious.** She couldn't be distracted by self-pity or resentment that, after almost 20 years of working to become a senior lawyer, she was back learning how to cross a road.
- **She had to prioritise getting strong.** Less than six months earlier, Karen had been working with an occupational therapist just to get out of a chair and to stand and walk steadily.
- **She had to get smart.** "So many of the skills that had allowed me to operate before my injury were completely redundant," says Karen. "I couldn't read with my eyes so had to learn how to operate voiceover technology blind. I used to drive and now I had to walk paths I couldn't see clearly. In all sorts of scenarios, I found that just because you can't do things the same, doesn't mean you can't do them".



- ➊ Karen says being there for her daughters provided the purpose and drive she needed to confront the difficulties that stood in her way back to a life she recognised: "When I got home, I was sleeping 16 hours a day and making my way around inside very tentatively. But once I was able to do the basics of caring for myself, I got serious about conquering every one of the obstacles in my path. Mark backed me every step of the way."

Suffering significant muscle wastage after six months of laying flat or being wheeled, she persisted with extensive physical therapy to regain her strength and balance, and learned to walk with a long white cane that gave her feedback on the surface ahead of her and warned of any obstacles in her path. Karen learned how to navigate public places – how and where to cross roads, and how to manage staircases and escalators – with training from Vision Australia.

She adds: "One of the most interesting things I learned during orientation and mobility training was that I'm completely blind in my right eye. My instructor would have me look out for landmarks as I walked around and I'd always miss those on my right. With only a 30-degree field of very low-quality greyscale vision in my left eye, and none at all from my right, it was a real issue."

### A new mantra

In the early days, Karen found the more she clung to the old way of doing things, the less she was able to do and the more frustrated she felt. So, she came up with a new mantra: 'Rigidity ruins resiliency. Loosen your grip. Tighten your connections.'

Not only that, she began to recruit a team to provide support she'd never needed before – specialists and general practitioners, psychologists, occupational therapists, home modification experts, orientation and mobility instructors, adaptive technology trainers, a braille teacher, and others with vision loss and acquired brain injury.

"I gained momentum when I got support," she remembers. "I sought out support groups for people with disability and was struck by how widely people's responses to their challenges varied. Some people languished without pursuing the knowledge and skills for the life they could have been living, while others clearly had a growth mindset and were thriving."

Karen met people whose courage and adaptive capacity blew her away and inspired her to travel interstate with a tour group and then alone, to return to work as a lawyer, and to cook, climb mountains and fly in hot air balloons.

"I owe a great debt of gratitude to a woman with a severe vision impairment who I call 'crash helmet Connie' in my keynote. Connie would crack her head on the rotary clothesline every time she ventured into her own backyard – hence the crash helmet. But she flew on her own from Sydney to New York, arriving in the middle of the night and catching a taxi to her friend's apartment."

It was only after Karen heard about Connie's travel feat that she summoned up the courage to do Mary's walk to school [above] that she'd been rehearsing with her instructor for weeks. This inspires her final piece of wisdom: "Courage is contagious. Catch it. Spread it." ➋

karenmccarthy.au



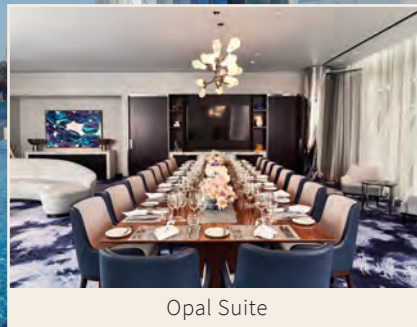
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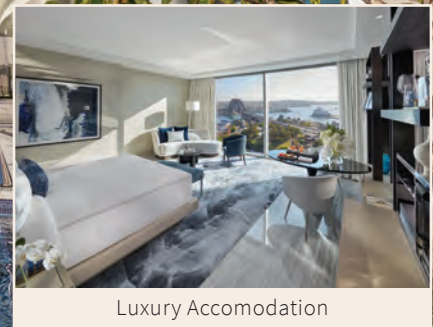
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# The parachute of the organisation

*Jo Jones*, deputy chief of staff at the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (a Royal chartered professional membership body dedicated to educating, developing and regulating actuaries internationally), isn't just our new career columnist – she's an Executive PA Media award winner, too. And it's time to get to know her a little better...

## **How did you know an EA was the career for you?**

I have, slowly and steadily, worked my way up, experiencing different organisations and industries and I think I knew that I wanted to make a difference. Just doing a 9-5 and switching off didn't cut it for me. My motivation is knowing that I'm adding value to the greater good and I've always wanted to be doing this – I just didn't know what this was called back then. Without really knowing it, I was working towards a career in senior administration.

## **What has been your career highlight so far?**

I was fortunate enough to be recognised as the UK's number one EA in 2017 through Executive PA Media and that moment will forever be the highlight of my career. I think I mentioned in my speech that all the long days and late nights were guiding me to that moment, and being awarded meant I got to meet some extraordinary EAs and PAs too.

## **Did you implement any changes or feel a new zest for work life as a result of your award?**

I felt that the award went a long way in putting professional administration on the map, certainly in my own organisation at the time. From then on, it has given me the additional confidence to speak up on behalf of my peers, helping them recognise that being a professional administrator is a really rewarding career path. We are pinnacle in ensuring our organisations are successful and let's face it, there's a reason why leadership is rolled out 'polished', right? That doesn't just happen – it's what we do behind the scenes and I recognise that without doubt now.

## **What are your main responsibilities in your current role?**

My main responsibility, in a nutshell, is stakeholder management – ensuring that my colleagues, our members and the senior volunteers that I work closest with have a positive experience interacting with IFoA. I'm often referred to as a parachute as I'm frequently 'dropped' into an area of the business to either kickstart a project that has stalled or explore why initiatives are not progressing as they should.

## **How does your organisation show appreciation for staff?**

In lots of ways. We have a great benefits package, additional days off, celebration of success vouchers, an annual in-person away day with dinner and entertainment in the summer and, more recently, a financial award (to all colleagues except the executive leadership) to help address the cost-of-living crisis. The latter was particularly appreciated and welcomed by all.

## **What is the working environment like?**

We're hybrid and are trusted to make our own decisions about where we work. So, we have the choice to work from home, go into the hubs (we no longer say office) or we can do a mixture of both. I choose to join colleagues in the London hub as often as I can – being very much a people person, I need regular human interaction!

## **Can you tell us more about your 'hubs'?**

Post-pandemic when we were looking at our colleagues' wellbeing against the future property strategy, the priority was connectivity. And, following UK government guidelines of course, we had to limit the colleagues returning to a physical space on a daily basis. Thinking about the space we needed to come back together and reconnect, the term 'hub' felt more appropriate – 'office' didn't seem right for so many different reasons. When I think about the word 'hub', it means the 'heart of' and it works so well for me and for so many of us.

## **What's your office Christmas party like?**

It no longer exists in my organisation – we take the opportunity to use the summer annual get together for real celebration and connection. The end of the year is marked with a virtual get-together with a bit of business and some organised fun – we had chocolate-making one year and a taskmaster game show last year!

## **Do you do anything different to the norm when a new employee joins?**

The onboarding of a new colleague is tighter and more





**“I’m often referred to as a parachute as I’m frequently ‘dropped’ into an area of the business to either kickstart a project that has stalled or explore why initiatives are not progressing as they should.”**

targeted than it used to be as we’re all hybrid working these days. I started my current role in lockdown and felt that my induction programme was super intense. But the flip side is that I was up and running a lot quicker, I feel, than if I’d been in a physical space. Because of the remote element, I had to work a lot harder and swifter in building those relationships I needed to make me successful.

**Do you use any interesting technology to improve the work environment, safety or wellbeing of employees in some way?**

We’re working hard towards being known as a ‘digital first’ organisation for both our members and colleagues. My team have a weekly virtual ‘huddle’ then in-person meetings with dinner and drinks once a quarter. Everyone makes a special effort to attend. Outside of these I know I can call on any one of my team members for support – just yesterday, I was feeling the pinch of a heavy week and put a call out asking if anyone fancied a ‘virtual coffee’ as I needed to be with humans. Out of the team of ten, six showed up in an instant. I feel very lucky to be in the position I find myself in!

**Tell us about your direct report(s).**

I’m blessed to manage our CEO team administrator, Jemma. When my boss asked me to undertake this piece of recruitment she said: “Jo, what we really need is another ‘you’”. And I think we should be careful what we wish for because Jemma is a mini-me and I had no idea how much so until we started working together... Watch this space!

**How does she support you?**

Jemma just naturally takes away the day-to-day from me so I can focus on the future and visionary piece of my organisation with my boss. She’s quite simply, and very quickly, made my life easier.

**And how do you support her?**

I try to be there for Jemma whenever she needs me. It’s a real pleasure offering support, advice and guidance, and I have an overwhelming desire to set her up for success. I just know she is going to make a huge difference to, not only the team, but our organisation overall.

**What would Jemma say about you?**

She may say that I push her to be her best at all times, and that I possibly churn out her work at a rate, pace and volume that she’s not quite used to yet! But I do know she’s enjoying her role so far. Just last week she messaged me, out of the blue, saying she was having a lovely day and was excited to be working with me. I can’t ask for more than that really.

**And finally, what are your top tips for senior level PAs looking to create a great culture in their organisation?**

Always be the bigger person in the room, and hold a professional, warm, friendly style and tone. Role model desirable behaviours at all times, regardless of whatever and whoever you are faced with. ✖

For more information on Executive PA Awards visit <https://executivepa.com/awards>





# OFFICE ESSENTIALS

This issue, Sydney-based *Bri Matkovich*, an EA at 1835i, shares the apps and Google Chrome extensions that make her life easier...

## CHROME EXTENSION: PRODUCTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY



### Readme

Available on all devices when used with Chrome

“Readme is text-to-speech technology that works within your Chrome browser. I use it to listen to (instead of read) articles, blog posts, and other written content but I know EAs who use it to listen to their drafts aloud for proofreading purposes.

It has now integrated a summary function using ChatGPT so you can get a quick summary of any webpage. I find this helpful when compiling company information or research for my exec before a meeting. It’s also brilliant from an accessibility perspective.

It supports multiple languages, you can choose a male/or female voice and you can adjust the speed at which they speak. Just like a podcast, you can pause, skip ahead or go back to replay any section.”

## CHROME EXTENSION: PRODUCTIVITY



### Boomerang

Available on all devices for Gmail and Outlook

“Boomerang isn’t new but it’s fab! It offers a variety of productivity tools but I use the ‘follow up reminder’ function the most.

I’m a big fan of ‘inbox zero’ but never want to forget about anything important. Boomerang will archive emails, removing them from your inbox until you actually need them. You simply choose a date and time for the email to ‘boomerang’ back to your inbox; marked unread or at the top.

For example, I may reply to an email that requires follow up the following week. I then click ‘boomerang’ so it disappears from my inbox. It then returns to my inbox the next week as a reminder for me to follow up.”

## APP: COLLABORATION AND CHAT



### Slack

Available on all devices

“Thank goodness for Slack! Internally, we don’t email each other – we opt for Slack’s more informal chat environment.

It is really easy to use, it can integrate with your calendar and it has a search function. I find Slack more user friendly in terms of user face and group chats, when compared to Google Chat or Teams.”

## APP: SPELLING AND GRAMMAR



### Grammarly

Available on all devices for Google, Microsoft and social media

“Again, Grammarly is an oldie but a goodie. For EAs who spend a lot of time writing newsletters, reports or emails, this is one of the best apps to quickly check your grammar and spelling. It also assists with style and tone.

It’s available for email (Gmail, Outlook and Apple Mail), as well documents (Google Docs and Word) and even Notion (a productivity and note-taking web-based app). You can also use it within LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.



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Brisbane	21 March 2024
Melbourne	23 May 2024

NEW  
DATES





# New Zealand's MEETINGS event to break records in 2023

If part of your role is sourcing destinations for corporate meetings and retreats, mark New Zealand's largest trade show for event planning in your diary, urges *Brad Foster*







## Fast facts

- MEETINGS is Aotearoa New Zealand's only national trade show for the business events industry.
- For the first time, New Zealand's capital, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, is host city for the 2023 event.
- MEETINGS is working towards Toitū net carbonzero certification as a certified event operation.
- More than 90 hosted and semi-hosted buyers from Australia, plus 130 hosted buyers from New Zealand and 10 from international markets (including North America and Singapore) will attend. Up to 300 buyers from Wellington and around New Zealand are also expected to be there for one day.
- Exhibitors will include venues, production and event design companies, hotels, regional convention bureaux, caterers, attractions and activities.
- MEETINGS 2022 generated a record-breaking \$107.5 million of signed business during the event.
- Last year, 97% of hosted buyers said MEETINGS met or exceeded their expectations.

**MEETINGS**, New Zealand's annual trade show for the event, meeting and incentive travel sector, will be making its 27th appearance between 20th and 22nd June 2023. An anticipated 230 business event planners from Australia, North America, Singapore and New Zealand have been confirmed as fully hosted buyers at the event, which will be held for the first time in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, at the new Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Organised by Business Events Industry Aotearoa (BEIA), the two-day trade exhibition, educational and networking event, will feature 224 stands from 19 regions across New Zealand, filling two levels at the venue.

BEIA's chief executive Lisa Hopkins, says the response to this year's program has been nothing short of phenomenal: "Now more than ever, it is important to bring buyers to New Zealand to educate them on our destination and show them our country is back open and ready for their business. BEIA has been working with Tourism New Zealand, Business Events Wellington, and Air New Zealand to target key decision-makers."

### Who will be there?

MEETINGS has broadened its source markets in 2023, with attendees also expected from North America for the first time: "MEETINGS will demonstrate our ability to deliver well-designed and seamlessly executed five-star incentive programs that meet the world-class expectations of our North American buyers. They will be able to experience first-hand New Zealand's luxury accommodation, high-end transfer options, function venues, dining experiences and the unique, wow factor activities on offer here," adds Lisa.

At last count, 100 hosted or semi-hosted buyers were anticipated to fly in from Australia – 86 of these are new to MEETINGS or have not been hosted at the event since 2018.

There are also an anticipated 130 hosted buyers from across New Zealand, with 47% of these being first-timers.

Fully hosted buyers have both their air travel (Air New Zealand has again partnered with MEETINGS) and four nights' accommodation included at 26 Wellington hotels – a true collaboration of industry, according to Lisa.

### Can I get involved?

New Zealand based EAs can still register to attend as day buyers. This is free, and ideal for anyone responsible for organising meetings and events who would like to attend without pre-scheduled appointments.

Lisa advises that attending for even just half a day is well worth it to make new business connections: "At no other time can you meet such a diverse range of destinations, venues, products and services under one roof. We're keen to welcome not only Wellington locals for the day but also event planners from around the country. They can pack a lot in during their visit – be among the first to experience the new Tākina venue and meet with their choice of 19 different regions and all of the country's leading business event suppliers. Exhibitors range from new convention venues, hotels and luxury lodges to activity providers, caterers, speakers, designer, and production experts."

Day buyers will enjoy lunch and refreshments throughout the day, as well as an educational program at the Tourism New Zealand Knowledge and Destination Hub, highlighting valuable updates on what's new across the country, and insightful knowledge sessions.

### Not attending this year?

Stay tuned to Executive PA to be the first to hear when registration opens for the 2024 event. ✖

[meetings.co.nz](https://meetings.co.nz)





# From hero to zero

The New Zealand tourism sector's dedication to maintaining its pristine environment is being supported by industry with news that MEETINGS is working towards net zero carbon certification

**MEETINGS 2023** will be the greenest on record with a strategy by the event owner, Business Events Industry Aotearoa (BEIA), to reduce the event's greenhouse gas emission footprint. The exhibition team is working towards Toitū net carbonzero certification as a certified event operation for its first event in New Zealand's capital city, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington.

Chief executive at BEIA, Lisa Hopkins, is excited to start the Toitū net carbon zero certification programme and promises further sustainability goals for MEETINGS 2023: "As the business events industry's peak body, it is our role to lead the way in sustainability practices and make them core to everything we do," she said.

"Working with Toitū to achieve this certification means all emissions associated with the planning and operations of MEETINGS 2023 will be measured, audited in alignment with strict world-leading criteria and offset via quality assessed carbon credits.

"We expect our exhibitors and buyers are also committed to reducing environmental impact, which will give us the platform to work towards continual reduction of carbon emissions for MEETINGS year-on-year."

Fittingly, the host venue for MEETINGS 2023, the Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre, holds a 5-Star Green Design certification from the New Zealand Green Building Council. It boasts high performance double glazing, automatically controlled LED lighting, heat pumps that reduce fossil fuels, ventilation and water efficient fittings and rainwater harvesting, energy efficiency signage options and

environmentally-friendly materials sourced from sustainable forestry. Other initiatives for MEETINGS include:

- Carbon-offsetting hosted buyers' air travel with Air New Zealand's FlyNeutral program
- Reducing printed material
- Eliminating satchels
- Partnering with local charities, Kibosh Food Rescue, Gillies McIndoe Research and Wellington Zoo, to make donations on behalf of every hosted buyer.

Exhibitors are also being encouraged to support the environmentally responsible initiatives by:

- Offsetting carbon emissions from travel and freight to Wellington where possible
- Using sustainable packaging
- Reducing waste from one-time items by creating reusable generic signage or digital signage
- Bringing reusable coffee cups and water bottles
- Providing sustainable, eco-friendly and biodegradable giveaway items
- Arranging for plants used on stands to be donated or re-planted.

Hosted buyers and visitors can also make a difference. Consider bringing reusable coffee cups or water bottles, taking your own carry bag and using the MEETINGS app. Staying near the host venue? Try to walk to the exhibition. ✖





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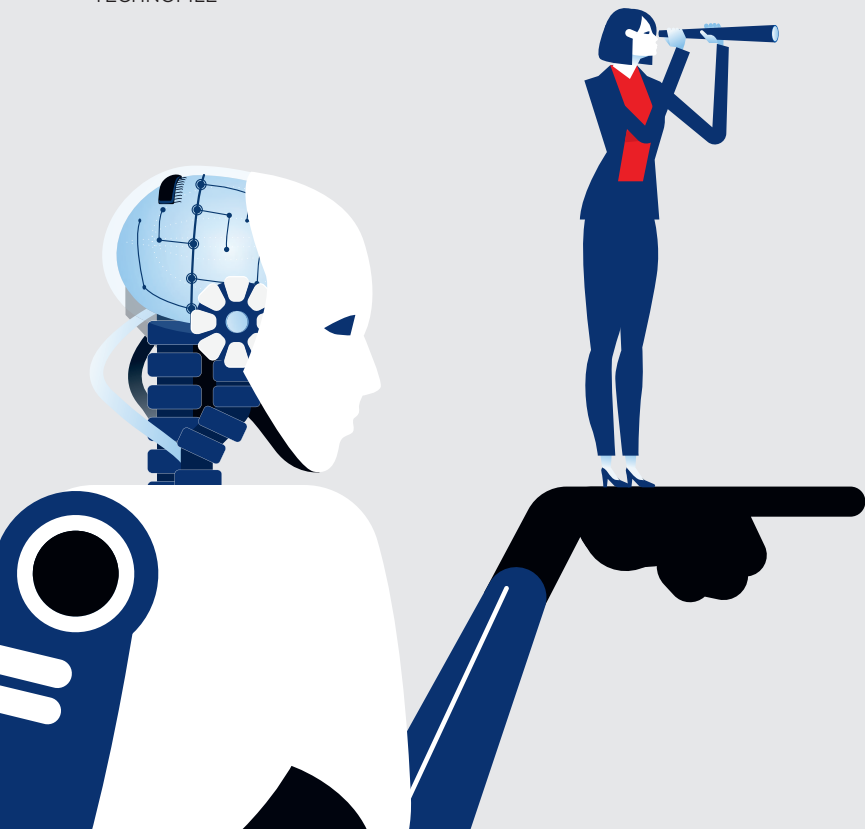
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## AI for the EA

Tomorrow's successful high-level assistant will exploit the AI opportunity rather than avoid it says *Tim Stackpool*



### THE EXPERT

Tech expert Tim is the technology writer for Executive PA Media. He can be heard on talk radio in Australia and is a tech presenter who speaks at conferences and trade shows about technology's impact on work and lifestyle.

**It's impossible** to have any discussion today regarding technology without confronting the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). Irrespective of industry, there's talk of how daily advances in AI can enhance business processes, communications, customer service and overall efficiency.

It's been with us for some time, albeit in rudimentary form. Remember that annoying and forgettable animated Microsoft Paperclip that arrived with Office 97 (and has now thankfully departed)? That's an example of early AI.

Fundamentally, true AI needs to pass the Turing Test. First coined in 1950, passing it means a human can't tell whether they are conversing with an AI or not. We're not yet at that point but, as with all technology, it improves with time and practice. And that's why 'sub-Turing' AI is being made available now – for practice. AI systems can only improve by learning, and human interaction is required for that. As you will note if using ChatGPT or Google's Bard, each comes with a disclaimer that the results might be incorrect, biased or offensive.

If you're a PA in a service business with a high number of consumer interactions, current

AI engines that thrive on 'question and answer' models are very well placed for deployment as customer service chatbots. Regular enquiries can be quickly triaged, oftentimes answered, or transferred to a human agent for deeper resolution.

Larger companies that operate internal help desks can also use AI chatbots to source intelligence or documents that might be buried deep within the company data server, rather than having to manually pore over complicated and unintuitive intranet folder and file structures. Beyond just using search terms, the AI can thoughtfully extract results from a prompt such as "...find me files relevant to Smith vs Jones, subsequent legislative amendments and taxation implications". How handy for busy EAs!

On the factory floor, AI-powered predictive maintenance tools can monitor equipment and identify potential faults before they cause downtime. This not only saves obvious costs but increases productivity and reduces the risk of accidents. Similarly, AI can optimise supply chain management, undertaking analysis to reduce inventory levels and improve delivery times.

In the office, you'll find AI can often process data more quickly and accurately than humans, and help to improve security or detect fraud.

At the same time as AI becomes more sophisticated, however, it's likely to automate more and more tasks. Given this, PAs must adapt their skills, learning where AI can take the load and redirecting energies on human skills outside the scope of any AI. Either way, expect AI to have a significant impact on your role, given fundamental duties such as scheduling appointments, managing email and preparing presentations can be automated.

Here's how it might look – and what you can do to remain relevant:

- Ultimately, you'll be freed up for more strategic and creative work.
- PAs will continue to provide the human touch that AI cannot replicate.
- You're experts in time management, organisation, and communication – human skills that remain in high demand in the workplace. So, leverage those skills to remain well-positioned for success in the future.
- Focus on developing skills in areas that AI is not yet able to automate – strategic planning, creative thinking and advanced communication?
- Embrace AI and use it to be more efficient and effective in your work.
- Stay up-to-date on the latest developments. This will help you to understand how AI is changing the workplace and how you can adapt your skills to meet the demands of the future. ✖



# Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley: A world away in under an hour

Who needs to hop on a plane or drive for days when you can be in one of Sydney's most luxurious country retreats in under an hour from the city?

**The Crowne Plaza** Hawkesbury Valley, just 45 minutes from the Sydney CBD, has an enviable reputation as one of the greatest boutique venues in the country. This is true for the simple fact of its repeat client list. They come, they meet, they relax, they leave, and they return to do it again.

Set on eight hectares of manicured gardens, the Crowne Plaza is nestled between the historic villages of Windsor and Richmond in the lush Hawkesbury region of Sydney.

The property underwent a multi-million dollar refurbishment of its 105 rooms and suites in 2021, providing guests with the latest in styling, technology and comfort, all with environmental considerations in mind through the use of low consumption LED lighting. The fully renovated bathrooms feature frameless glass walk in showers, free standing soaker baths, premium Kohler tap wear, and elegant stone and timber floating vanities with illuminating mirrors.

There are eight room types ranging from queen configurations to king bed Executive Suites with balcony views to the Blue Mountains. The most lavish option is the three-bedroom Bilpin Suite complete with two bathrooms, a kitchen and a separate dining and lounge.

Beyond the accommodation rooms are three dining outlets, a welcoming reception area, 10 light-filled meeting and event spaces, an indoor heated pool and the Villa Thalgo Day Spa.

The property's signature restaurant is Harvest, often rated the best in Windsor, which is committed to sourcing and partnering with local suppliers. Menus are seasonal and include delicacies like Windsor Duck and Pistachio Ravioli.

Like Harvest, Barracks Bar is a popular venue for locals and guests, providing a relaxed ambience with a touch of country hospitality, complete with an open fireplace. Barracks Bar has an extensive range of wines, spirits,



beers and cocktails and features home-grown award-winning ciders from Hillbilly Cider based in nearby Bilpin, and gin from local Karu Distillery.

## Meetings, Events & More

When it comes to meetings and events, the Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley has all bases covered. There are 10 event spaces in total, the largest of which can accommodate up to 250 people theatre-style.

And the beauty of this property is that the expansive grounds surrounding the resort means that indoor meetings can spill into the outdoors where morning and afternoon tea breaks, lunches and even evening events can be held. A number of meeting rooms have direct access to the gardens.

Those staying for two or more days are encouraged to shake off the cobwebs together in one of the many activities available within the region. These include the Tree Tops Adventure Park, the iFly Indoor Skydiving centre, Indy 800 Go-Karting, the Wild Cats Conservation Centre and the Tobruk Sheep Station.

Nature lovers can pick apples in nearby Bilpin or sample cider. The Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley has an exclusive arrangement with Bilpin Hillbilly Cider where master cider

makers come to the resort to treat guests to a cider tasting masterclass. The same is possible with the local award-winning gin makers Karu Distillery, with a tasting right on-site.

## Value For Money

Sydney-based EAs are no doubt aware of the high prices currently being quoted for Sydney CBD venues. Not to mention the challenges many are having with finding experienced staff.

There are no such issues at the Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley. As expected accommodation and meeting room hire rates are more conducive to those found in regional areas, and the property has a strong team of local employees, many of who have been working at the venue for many years.

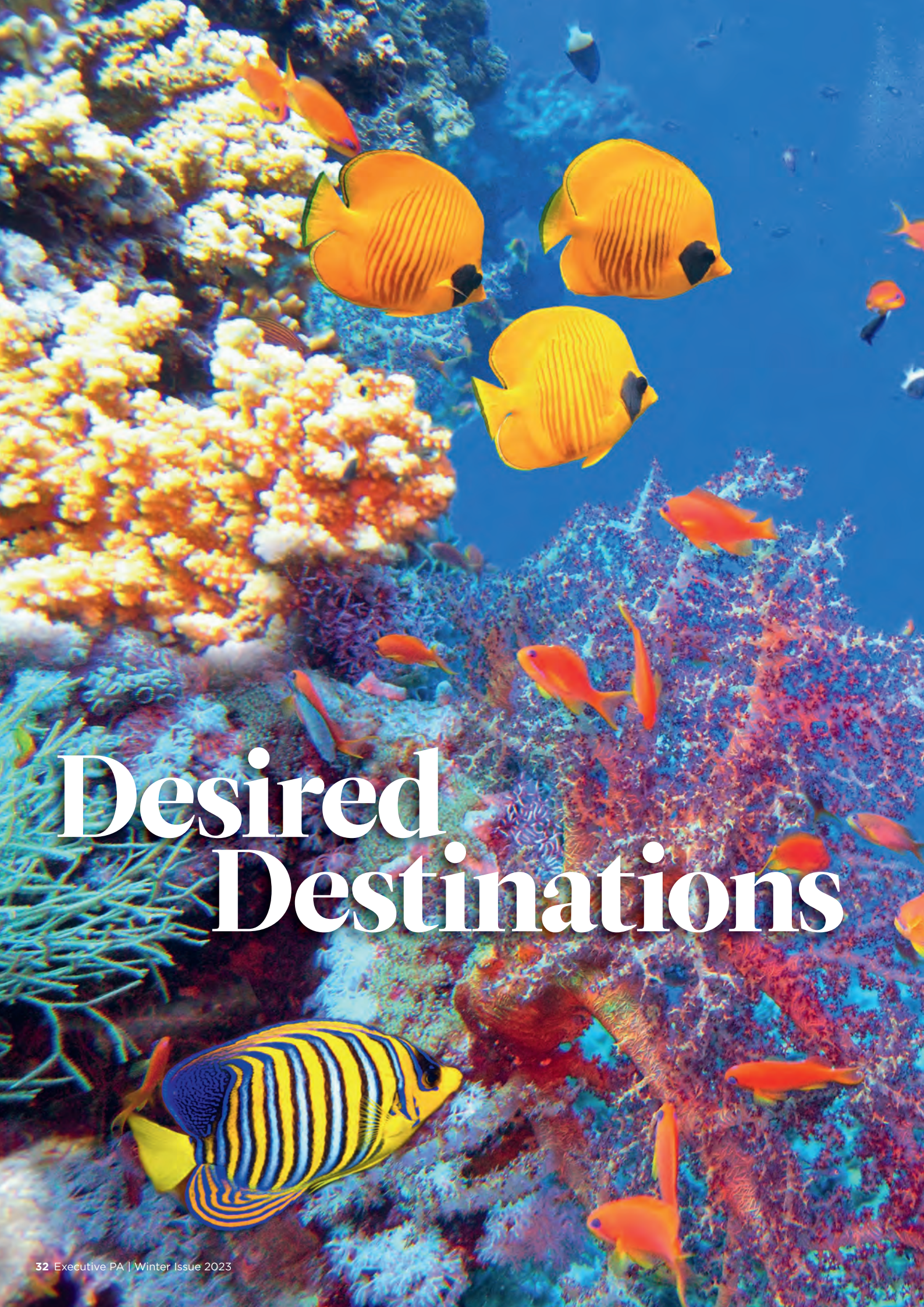
Having played host to everything from product launches to board meetings to corporate retreats and sales conferences, and not to mention weddings, the Crowne Plaza Hawkesbury Valley should be your destination of choice for at least one of your upcoming event programs.

So what are you waiting for? Visit [www.cphawkesburyvalley.com.au](http://www.cphawkesburyvalley.com.au), jump in your car and do a site inspection yourself. It won't disappoint. ✖

[www.cphawkesburyvalley.com.au](http://www.cphawkesburyvalley.com.au)







# Desired Destinations



## A visit to tropical North Queensland is a breathtaking experience

A highlight of any trip to this region will surely be a visit to the Great Barrier Reef. You'll find crystal-clear waters, colourful coral and an abundance of marine life – all stunning and perfect for executives looking for an unforgettable experience.

Accommodation in tropical North Queensland is top-notch, as are the facilities. The region boasts a variety of indoor and outdoor venues, from modern conference centres to unique and historic locations.

**PAGE 34** Cairns Convention Centre

**PAGE 36** Tropical North Queensland

**PAGE 39** Shangri-La The Marina Cairns



If you are often tasked with sourcing destinations for corporate meetings, as well as experiences your attendees can do between conference sessions, Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef could be just what you're looking for. Cairns and tropical north Queensland is a match made in heaven for meetings, events and incentive travel rewards of all shapes and sizes. Over the following pages, *Brad Foster* will enlighten you with a comprehensive update on what's new, hot and happening in Cairns and the surrounding areas – and highlight top contacts to assist you in the planning process.

**Warm days, balmy nights,  
exceptional venues, and a  
plethora of things to see and  
do 'beyond the ballroom'**





# Expanded venue will inspire and delight

Already one of Australia's most popular dedicated event spaces, Cairns Convention Centre will definitely be top of mind when its expansion completes

**Cairns Convention Centre's** \$176 million expansion will be revealed this year... And it is going to be spectacular! Now is the time to plan your event in Cairns to experience the tropical north and host your program using the incredible new facilities in the convention centre.

The centre will be more flexible than ever for its clients with the option to comfortably accommodate an extra 2500 delegates (an extra 500 compared to before). There are also now 23 meeting and event rooms on-site and a new exhibition space capable of holding up to 30 standard-size exhibition booths. This space leads to a flat floor plenary area that can seat up to 410 theatre-style but you'll find it is divisible by two if needed – perfect for a more intimate event. Also on this level are three new meeting rooms that can each seat 118 people in a theatre-style configuration. Fancy using it as one large space? You'll fit 370 delegates in there!

If you're keen to impress your exec's clients with the best outlook in Cairns, head for the aptly-named Trinity Room – and, in particular, the outdoor Trinity Terrace – to swoon over the Trinity inlet. Inside, you can comfortably seat up to 500 people and the tropical outdoor terrace can accommodate just the same. What a place to enjoy cocktails on a tropical evening before strolling inside for your gala dinner or awards night!

The Cairns Convention Centre's long-term clients are excited about the expansion, and so are the team. General manager Janet Hamilton can't wait to reveal the new-look venue: "Now is an ideal time for event organisers to rediscover Cairns as we open our new centre," she said.

"The city has a broad range of accommodation options with the premium Crystalbrook Collection opening and other hotels completing refurbishments in recent years. There are also a number of new attractions, like the Experience Co Great Barrier Reef Pontoon, the incredible

food trails in the Atherton Tablelands, and the new dining precinct along the Esplanade."

The new venue has more than 35 conferences confirmed for 2023 and new business enquiries continue to arrive on a daily basis. 🍷

## New and improved AV for EAs

To maintain its lead status in convention centre management and ensure its clients have the latest and greatest technical capabilities at their events, Cairns Convention Centre has invested heavily in audio visual equipment:

- PTZ cameras, complete with pan tilt zoom control features that can be operated remotely, have been fitted across all meeting spaces – the perfect solution to meeting any hybrid event space requirements.
- Digital lecterns will give presenters a higher level of comfort with their upfront display and touch panel controls. This means the user can control AV features within the room when and if required. The lecterns also have a built-in preview monitor, giving users easy reference to their presentation notes.
- Centre-wide, there are high resolution laser projectors in every room, providing a bright, crisp image enabling the finest details within presentations.
- Larger meeting spaces have 15-metre screen options which use a three-projector blend. This screen and projector combination provides a massive content surface and enables multi content to be simultaneously displayed.
- Large format LED walls can be configured at the event planner's request.





# Inspire, reward and connect in Queensland's tropical north

High international flight costs are seeing many groups looking closer to home, and Cairns and Queensland's tropical north is one destination that is ticking all the boxes for EAs planning meetings and incentives. *Brad Foster* explains why...

**Picture this:** your annual corporate retreat is less than six months away and your CEO was considering an offshore destination. In your multi-faceted role, you gathered some quotes on the flights and those alone blew the event budget. This is where your experience and strong negotiation skills will have to come to the fore. But first, you need an alternative.

Thankfully, Australia and New Zealand are blessed with some drop-dead gorgeous destinations that won't break the bank or the budget – and Cairns in tropical north Queensland is definitely one of those.

What's even better is that during the pandemic period the region's leading venue operators improved, revitalised, primed and preened their products to beyond world-class standards... You just know that will sit comfortably with the high-end desires of your corporate group, don't you?

And, in this region, you'll be visiting a naturally pristine

playground (sandwiched between the Great Barrier Reef and the wet tropical rainforest) that'll fit perfectly with your company's growing focus on sustainability and good environmental management.

Five-star hotels and resorts line the waterfront of Cairns, Palm Cove, Port Douglas, and its islands and here you'll find genuine connections to nature are encouraged, as well as genuine connections to each other. Visitors can create memorable moments in the oldest rainforest, choose their own adventure on the largest coral reef and learn from two local Indigenous cultures.

## Let's meet in Port Douglas

Just one hour by road from Cairns (or a lot faster if your exec's budget extends to a helicopter transfer!) Port Douglas is a relaxed seaside village with some of the best resort-style





## Connect Great, Leave Greater

Business Events Cairns, which provides fee-free advice on organising meetings, incentives and events in the region, has created some new branding that perfectly combines the region – Connect Great, Leave Greater.



hotels in the country.

It has a beautiful main thoroughfare full of stylish restaurants, bars and boutique shops, and includes a marina that allows you to quickly hop onto a vessel of your choosing and head out to the reef.

One of the most stunning resorts in the area is Silky Oaks Lodge, which underwent a \$20 million refurbishment in 2022. This retreat is enveloped within the rainforest and offers river drift snorkelling on the Mossman River, barefoot lunches (dipping your toes in the pristine water is pure joy) and cocktail parties on the spectacular outdoor Daintree Pavilion.

The Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort Port Douglas is the grand dame of this destination. It's big, beautiful and – thanks to a multi-million renovation a few years ago – the envy of all its neighbours. It fronts the sea and offers dozens of meeting and event spaces of all sizes and configurations – not to mention the pool, which provides plenty of space for stunning evening cocktail parties or gala dinners with a true tropical feel.

Another popular property is Thala Beach Nature Reserve. Here, you'll feel like you are suspended in the treetops, with utmost privacy for all guests. A short walk from the main lodge will have you barefoot on the sand of a private beach where cocktails and dinner can be enjoyed under the stars with lanterns adorning swaying palm trees.

### A little R&R

If recharging and connection with colleagues is a must then Port Douglas is just perfect. Visitors can take a guided Dreamtime walk with an Indigenous guide through the

Mossman Gorge with a welcome smoking ceremony included. You can also view ancient rock art, learn more about traditional rainforest medicine, experience a private art session with an Indigenous artist and, if time permits, cool off in the stunning Mossman River.

A special experience for groups to Port Douglas is the award-winning Flames of the Forest dinner right in the heart of the rainforest. Guests will be enthralled as they travel into the wilderness before arriving at a clearing lit by candles and attentive staff. This venue can be hired exclusively and is sure to be a highlight of your clients' Port Douglas visit.

Back in town, one of the most spectacular venues for sunset cocktails is the heritage-listed Sugar Wharf, which juts out over the Coral Sea. Be sure to check out other unique experiences, too. How does a traditional dinner under the stars on a working cane farm sound? Or breakfast on a deserted island before diving into the crystal clear waters of the Great Barrier Reef to view the colourful coral and fish life?

### Cairns captures more than the imagination

Many visitors to Cairns hardly venture beyond its city limits and when you're there it's not hard to understand why. It's a city that's tailor-made for relaxing, refreshing and reconnecting. Unwinding before or after a meeting is easy, with many resorts including exclusive lounges – check out the waterside Shangri-La Horizon Club and the Hilton Executive Club.

The Crystalbrook Collection and its three centrally-located hotels have helped raise the bar of quality accommodation





## Sustainability at the top of tropical QLDs list

Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef now offers more than 180 eco-certified tours allowing delegates to discover the natural wonders of the region in a way that conserves and preserves the environment.

The Skyrail Rainforest Cableway is one of 10 businesses to hold EarthCheck's Master Certification, while Port Douglas was the first destination in the world to be awarded ECO Destination Certification.

The Coral Nurture Program – a partnership between researchers and five local Great Barrier Reef tour operators – has planted over 76,000 corals using the locally designed Coralclip.

Additionally, the Quicksilver Group, which takes visitors out to the Great Barrier Reef each day, has been eco-certified since 1997!

Wildlife champions Hartley's Crocodile Adventures created the North Queensland Wildlife Trust in 2004, and the Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre has been rescuing turtles for over 20 years!

Visitors are encouraged to partner with Reforest, the destination's carbon offset partner that helps visitors offset their event carbon emissions, either partially or wholly through the planting of native trees in the endangered Mabi Rainforest (home to the threatened Tree Kangaroo).

Rosie Douglas, general manager at Business Events Cairns & Great Barrier Reef says the new partnership also allows delegates the opportunity to contribute throughout the event: "The partnership is an easy option for event organisers looking to enter into an offsetting carbon program of any capacity."

Earlier this year Business Events Cairns & Great Barrier Reef launched an online Sustainable Travel Hub to help visitors and event groups travel with a greater purpose to the region. Rosie adds: "Showcasing interactive conservation projects, immersive cultural experiences and eco-certified operators, the hub helps event planners and delegates to understand the value our region places on the environment and our community."

in the region since opening in the past few years, and the Pullman Reef View Hotel continues to maintain its high-end status. One look at its stunning rooftop pool deck overlooking the city is hands-down James Bond-style luxe.

Experiencing Cairns beyond the resort walls, especially in an evening, is oh-so-easy, with options including dinner in the oceanarium, dining from the decks on freshly caught seafood onboard the Prawn Star vessel and taking over a hidden laneway bar for a pre-dinner gin masterclass with a local distiller.

Further afield, a visit to Hartley's Crocodile Adventures for lunch or dinner is a great option, as is dinner within the walls of an old World War Two oil storage tank. It has been repurposed and caters to corporate meeting and incentive travel reward groups.





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when it's time to talk business

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#### Dates

**Sydney** 27 July 2023

**Auckland** 18 September 2023

**Brisbane** 21 March 2024

**Melbourne** 23 May 2024





# Good, beautiful, and honest: The story behind Kalinya Estate

Kalinya is an Aboriginal word meaning good, beautiful, and honest and the meaning remains the driving force behind the ethos of the Estate

It was nearly 20 years ago that Chris and Mandy Barnes fell in love with the heart and soul of the rural property at the gateway to the Southern Highlands.

When they bought the property, it had wonderful historic bones, but needed a lot of love to restore the buildings and gardens to their original grandeur. Out came the drawing pads, carpentry and gardening tools, paint brushes and gumboots for some hard work.

Chris and Mandy both love sport and music, so it was obvious that the Estate should have plenty to do, without the need to rely on technology for entertainment. “We love that there is plenty to do for anyone, no matter the age or ability... and that people are able to escape from the busy, technology-filled lives and spend good, quality time together just having fun.”

Chris and his crazy visions combined with Mandy’s eye for design, led to the property getting its own music lounge, squash court, gym, tennis court, 17m heated pool and pool house, hot tub, sauna, ice bath,

billiards table, foosball, air hockey and vintage arcade games. The couple do agree, though, that it was 100% Chris’s obsessions with film and golf that led to building the tiered theatre and golf simulator, complete with the best and latest tech.

Quite a few years ago, after requests from the public to open the Estate to guests, and after the restorations were completed, the couple decided that the property should be reopened for bookings once more; that it was wasted keeping the property away from the world. To transform Kalinya into the perfect space for large groups to gather and enjoy themselves seemed the most natural transition.

The Estate already had a history of being used as a bed and breakfast and for weddings, so the way was paved to invite guests to experience staying at the Estate. Unlike a hotel, the accommodation provides beautiful, boutique homes where everyone within a group can enjoy quality time together in a private and exclusive setting. Mandy is a clinical

psychologist, so creating spaces that aimed to build relationships through unique experiences and entertainment was a conscious intention.

The Estate is now used for exclusive, large group, multi-generational gatherings, corporate retreats, health retreats, family holidays; and significant celebrations, such as weddings and birthdays.

The reopening of the Estate has not been without its challenges. Just after the Estate reopened for business, bushfires ravaged through the Wollondilly and Southern Highlands regions, followed by widespread floods. Despite the impact of natural disasters to the regional area, Chris and Mandy have used the Estate to help the community fight back; to rebuild and encourage tourism back to the region. Bookings at the Estate bring local jobs and opportunities to those who need it most and aid in establishing and maintaining other local businesses.

The arrival of Covid and consequent loss of income caused by imposed



lockdowns, forced the couple to pivot their business direction; as they endeavoured to continue to improve the offerings of the Estate for when they were able to reopen. Given the environmental damages of the fire and flood events, the couple used the lockdowns to passionately work to increase the biodiversity and sustainability of the property; installing a huge solar system, EV chargers and natural pond ecosystems.

You may recognise the Estate from three years of watching the Retreat on *Married at First Sight*. After losing all their bookings due to Covid lockdowns, the couple made the most of the closures by accepting filming opportunities (as these had exemptions to film). Even though Mandy, being a clinical psychologist, was nervous about hosting reality TV, they agreed to the partnership with Endemolshine. Mandy figured it would be good for a laugh considering they were forced to be closed anyway, but given the huge following of the show, that it would ultimately help get the word out about

the fabulous offerings in the beautiful, regional area for when people could travel again. As a result of the television partnership, Kalinya has become well known both in Australia, NZ, and many countries overseas, particularly in the UK. This has provided the much-needed increase in tourism that is so vital for struggling regional communities.

#### **Corporate offerings**

Chris and Mandy have spent their professional lives in the corporate world and knew that the huge number of facilities and high-end group accommodation would make Kalinya the perfect location for corporate retreats. The Estate offers the perfect blend of a rural, away-from-the-office destination, combined with the convenient location for delegates to access (45-minutes from Sydney Airport; 1 hour from the Sydney CBD).

Kalinya is about building relationships; so instead of simply hosting meetings and getting work done, the facilities and opportunities

afforded to guests at the Estate allows teams to grow in cohesiveness and strength going forward.

The couple have worked to design and set up multiple meeting and events spaces; each vastly different in terms of architecture, feel and size. Keep it intimate for 20 or 30 in the cosy and luxurious Terrace room, Music Lounge or Gold Class Theatre, or address over 200 guests in the spectacular Carriage House (designed to open entirely onto the gardens to assist in hosting the most stylish of garden parties, training days and launches).

“We wanted to design the estate and spaces to offer something entirely different. We were sick of white conference rooms with fluoro lights and a bowl of mints. We knew we could offer spaces that helped people to be productive, that were conducive to relationships, that were entirely fun and motivating. We wanted people to leave feeling restored and revitalised, ready to go back to their workplace with a new sense of passion and connectedness with their teams.” 🍷





# VENUE MENU

Read up on the latest venues to unveil a new look or throw open its doors

## Excitement builds for W Sydney opening

If you or your exec have been attending meetings and events at the ICC Sydney and want to indulge in five-star accommodation nearby, you've probably been challenged for choice as a travel-planning EA, finding just a handful of venues available (The Sofitel Darling Harbour, The Star Casino and – about 10 minutes' walk away – the Hyatt Sydney). But come October, you will have another option when the W Sydney opens its doors.

For the past two years, visitors to Darling Harbour have been watching with excitement at the construction of the stylishly designed property, which sits right in the centre of the precinct, just a stone's throw from the convention centre. Described as “a beacon of bold, sophisticated design”, the W Sydney is set to dazzle



the harbour city and guests with luxe accommodation and a cutting edge restaurant, plus bars and event space.

It's not just the exterior that will be turning heads, though. The inside of the new building (masterminded by award-winning interior design specialist, Bowler James Brindley) is said to illuminate a sense of curiosity, originality and responsiveness to the environment, evident in the expressive concrete and street art touches of the restaurant. And did we mention the dramatic colours and patterns of the infinity pool and two-storey rooftop bar? It reflects the energy and motifs of the city and its surrounds,

and would be a great spot for a soiree.

If you or your boss' top clients are staying over, W Sydney's 585 rooms, suites and ultra-luxe suites are the place to be. Again, design is flawless, echoing the curves and lines of the exterior. No two rooms will be exactly the same, embracing their asymmetry with sleek, modern décor.

As if the above isn't enough, rest assured that general manager, Craig Seaward, has promised future guests that W Sydney, which will be a member of the Marriott Bonvoy™ travel rewards program, will be worth the wait when it opens its doors later this year. ✪



## Dorsett Melbourne is open for business

Following the success of its Gold Coast property, which was launched early last year, the 316-room Dorsett Melbourne has opened its doors at the southern end of the CBD.

Event-planning EAs will be pleased to hear the new venue offers five meeting rooms, a club lounge, a bar and restaurant and – should there be time out of hours for a little relaxation – an indoor heated pool, complete with a day bed area, spa, sauna, steam room, wellness room and gymnasium.

Dorsett Melbourne's general manager, Natalie Bussenschutt adds: “At Dorsett Melbourne, our guests will enjoy our intuitively designed social spaces, the Club Lounge, and beautifully appointed guest rooms and suites, including pet friendly and family rooms. Our caring and vibrant team look forward to welcoming you and sharing our local knowledge for an authentic Melbourne experience, complimented by a memorable hotel stay.” ✪





# VENUE MENU

Read up on the latest venues to unveil a new look or throw open its doors



## Winter executive retreat

**Conveniently located** only 15 minutes from Melbourne Airport and 35 minutes from Melbourne's CBD, discover a new kind of corporate retreat located on our 1200 acre working farm and vineyard.

Our exclusive two-day Winter Executive Retreat is the ideal package to collaborate and connect with your team in a natural setting whilst enjoying a myriad of premium inclusions.

The Winter Executive Retreat package includes a full day delegate package (minimum 10 delegates) based in our Clarke Room, access to the amenities in our popular Homestead, overnight accommodation in our Studio Room Luxury Cabin, bespoke dinner in our Private Dining Room, group wine tasting in our newly launched Cellar Door and more from \$695pp.

Located in our restored 1840s Homestead, The Clarke Room offers a dynamic space perfect for high-level executive meetings and power hours.

Holding a maximum of 10 people, the Clarke Room package includes a 60" flat-screen TV that seamlessly connects to laptops and other electronic devices, views to the surrounding gardens and an adjoining self-contained kitchen and lounge area, providing the ideal exclusive area for you and your executive team to focus and be energised.

Overnight guests in our Luxury Cabins are treated with Breakfast Grazing Boxes, as well as access to our premium on-site amenities including a 24/7 gym, Wi-Fi, a self-contained kitchen and an in-room bar fridge. Upgrades and enhancements are available at additional costs. Book and hold your event by the end of August 2023. T&Cs apply.

Escape into the natural beauty of a Macedon Ranges landscape and book your unforgettable corporate experience with one of our Event Coordinators today. ✪

[marnongestate.com.au](http://marnongestate.com.au)





# MEMBER EVENT REVIEWS



## Pullman Mercure Melbourne Albert Park

A **neighbourhood** hotel on the city edge, Pullman & Mercure Melbourne Albert Park is only moments from the hustle and bustle. And with more than 2,600m<sup>2</sup> of flexible function space, 32 adaptable venues and capacity for up to 1,600 delegates, the hotel is Melbourne’s meeting hub.

A team of experienced in-house planners can unlock the potential of your Melbourne event with customised seating configurations, décor and design that brings your vision to life and the best in AV technology and connectivity.

Delegates staying over? The hotel combines 378 Mercure & Pullman rooms with up to 500 on-site parking spaces, plus offers an in-house workout ready Fit Lounge, and a restaurant and bar.

The city fringe location gives the convenience of easy CBD access along with peaceful park views. After hours, your guests can explore the laidback laneways in the city centre, recharge in cosmopolitan St Kilda or network in Southbank – all options are within a 10-minute drive.

Attendees enjoyed an afternoon cocktail event where they were able to experience the action of Formula 1 in style in our hospitality suite.

[pullmanalbertpark.com.au](http://pullmanalbertpark.com.au)

### What the EAs said...

“The Pullman event was a huge highlight. We were hosted in a large suite overlooking Albert Park with great views of the track and all the action. Catering was exceptional with all food group options considered. The staff were all amazingly helpful and interested in the conversations around them. We were lucky enough to view the Grand Ballroom which was set up for an event being held that evening and it looked spectacular. This space would work perfectly in the future for my large events.”

Belle van Unen, EA, Spark – North East Link – D&C

“Fantastic space, stunning view. Venue staff super-friendly and knowledgeable. Space would work well for my smaller team offsite events.”

Meghan van Krieken, EA, Soul Fresh

“My colleagues and I attended and enjoyed the hospitality at the Pullman very much. They were very helpful and we will keep the Pullman in mind for future events.”

Sally Montalto, EA, Vision Australia



# MEMBER EVENT REVIEWS



## The Waiting Room Crown Sydney

**Executive PA** members were treated to a lunchtime gastronomer’s delight at Crown Sydney’s The Waiting Room (TWR) recently.

TWR is described as a space that exudes “warm, understated elegance” and it certainly delivers, with an extensive cocktail list, rare single malt whiskies and vintage champagne to be enjoyed as you watch the world pass by along the Barangaroo boardwalk.

TWR specialises in heart-warming breakfast meals and all-day dining right up until 10pm at night, with a great variety of options for those with special dietary requirements.

Enjoying either an Eden Road Tumarumba Chardonnay or an Eden Road ‘The Long Road’ Pinot Noir, around 25 Executive PA members sat down in TWR’s outdoor space for a sumptuous lunchtime feast with starters including a signature TWS seafood platter.

The platter was full to the brim with Appellation Sydney rock oysters, chilled

QLD tiger prawns, octopus carpaccio, Pioik sourdough and Lescure butter.

A charcuterie platter featured jamón, duck rilette, wagyu bresaola, whipped cod roe, house pickles and charred sourdough.

Mains included moules marinières – Spring Bay Tasmanian blue mussels, white wine, garlic; 180g grain fed Riverina Angus tenderloin, steak frites, and bénaise; and duck confit, bitter leaves, mustard fruits, honey and hazelnut dressing.

For those who could fit it in, dessert was a passionfruit brûlée and yoghurt sorbet, and a Valrhona chocolate marquise with a crème anglaise and pistachio.

The Waiting Room makes for a perfect casual-style dining experience that still delivers on great service, location and creative cuisine.

Learn more by going online and remember that bookings for this popular space are essential.

[crownhotels.com.au/sydney](http://crownhotels.com.au/sydney)

### What the EAs said...

“I noticed how important it was for the staff to make everyone feel comfortable and taken care of. It’s a beautiful space that I would definitely recommend.”

Rose Blanco, management assistant, Suncorp

“The lunch event was fantastic, great to showcase of The Waiting Room and what they offer. This space seems great for a business meeting over a semi-relaxed drink or snack, particularly the outdoor area during the warmer months.”

Chantelle Velez, EA, Hakluyt & Company Limited

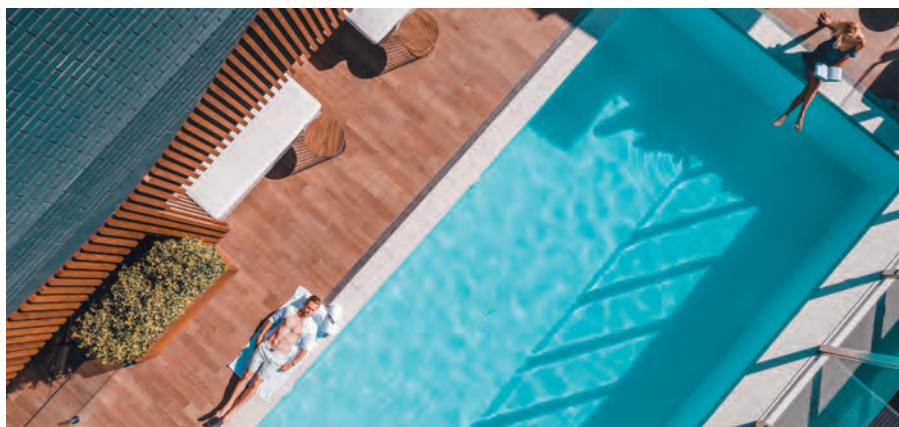
“Thank you so much for hosting lunch at The Waiting Room, it certainly has a comfortable, relaxed vibe with great views. Food was great and be very much appropriate for a team event venue, it’s one to put on our list.”

Gabriella Pirozzi, EA, cba



# MEMBER EVENT REVIEWS

## Pullman Mercure Brisbane



**Pullman & Mercure's** four- and five-star CBD hotels have won praises for inspired menus, excellent customer service, state-of-the-art function rooms and innovative solutions for all events and, boasting one of the River City's largest hotel conference space selections, Pullman & Mercure Brisbane King George Square doesn't disappoint.

High-level assistants were shown a selection of conference packages and more than 1,000m<sup>2</sup> of flexible spaces,

including the rooftop bar and pool deck area with amazing city views. There were also two huge ballrooms with large exhibit access and multiple spaces with natural light and superb views of King George Square and the surrounding streets.

Delegates enjoyed a vibrant evening of art, entertainment and connections at Pullman & Mercure Brisbane King George Square, with a masterclass in cocktail-making at Sixteen Antlers Rooftop Bar.

[pullmanbrisbanekgs.com.au](http://pullmanbrisbanekgs.com.au)

### What the EAs said...

"The lobby was a great place to start with the art installation that they had there. The staff were very welcoming, knowledgeable, and great hosts... I didn't realise you could block off the other end of the pool like they did for us. It was perfect and I've tucked the knowledge away for a suitable future event."

**Colleen Ocafrai**, Events coordinator, Queensland Nurses & Midwives Union

"I was very impressed with the Pullman and staff working there. Everyone was really lovely and helpful. I will definitely use 16 Antlers in the future. I think it would be good for a cocktail event. The food was very impressive and yes it did cater for dietary requirements."

**Kristin Blewman, EA**, Rio Tinto

"Pullman Brisbane event was held in the rooftop bar – a great space for entertaining."

**Rhonda Fola**, Executive Assistant, Telstra

## Pullman Mercure Sydney Hyde Park



**Welcome to a** playground where people, ideas and ambitions come together to up their game. Modern in style the Pullman Sydney Hyde Park features 241 accommodation rooms and over 10 meeting spaces. The hotel is conveniently located by Hyde Park with impressive views over the city and eastern suburbs.

The event included a meet and greet from the Pullman Sydney Hyde Park team, food stations of the best culinary with matching beverages, a surprise sip and paint activity and a prize draw. Lucky winner Ruth Harrington (PA at WT Partnership) will enjoy a night at the hotel.

[pullmansydneyhydepark.com.au](http://pullmansydneyhydepark.com.au)

### What the EAs said...

"The food and team activity were fantastic."

**Dipali Parakhe**, Executive Assistant, Optus

"Pullman was very impressive. The catering was delicious, the team were very friendly and interactive, and the meeting rooms/spaces were really good too. Overall, I think Pullman Sydney has great rooms for training and events and definitely a space for us to consider."

**Gia Tamayo, EA**, Metrics

"The space was terrific, the food very tastefully done and the event itself great fun. The hosts were really nice and spent time with as many of the guests as they could. All in all, a great evening."

**Margaret Bird, EA**, First Sentier Investors



# GASTRONOMER'S GUIDE

*Sanjay Singh*, executive chef at Kingfisher Bay Resort on in K'gari/Fraser Island, shares the delicious details of his signature dish



## THE DISH

### Island-side Penang Duck Curry

Combining incredibly tender slow-cooked confit duck legs with the authentic Penang curry fragrances of lemongrass, kaffir lime and coconut, this selection is arguably the island's top choice twilight delight. Be sure to pair it with fine sharables like mapo tofu, tuna tataki... And save room for coconut ice cream or custard bao buns – very indulgent!

## THE RESTAURANT

### Dune Restaurant

Kingfisher Bay Resort provides a well-rounded Queensland island getaway with well-curated culinary journeys immersed in World Heritage-listed paradise. And its latest offering, Dune Restaurant, takes guests through an aromatic, Asian fusion adventure. Expect sweet, salty and spicy selections – you'll find decadent dumplings, fragrant curries and sizzling stir fried meats as well as noodle dishes packed with authentic flavours.

## THE CHEF

### Sanjay Singh

Originating from New Zealand with Fijian-Indian heritage, Sanjay has more than 30 years of culinary experience. In that time, he has developed a passion for creating Asian, European and Pacific Island specialities. Based on his multicultural experience on both a personal and professional level, Sanjay's goal at Kingfisher Bay Resort is to create a new island-style flavour, incorporating the cuisines of the Asian and Western worlds. ✘



# BOARDING PASS

All the latest news for the busy EA organising corporate travel

## Emirates' new premium economy cabin from Melbourne is looking good

Emirates' new premium economy cabin, available between Dubai and Melbourne and part of the airline's multi-million dollar retrofit program, has seen significant local demand since launch – and we're not surprised! From plush cream leather seats and a five-star dining experience to the generous baggage allowance, it sounds lavish.

The introduction of premium economy between these destinations is part of a global push by Emirates in which almost 4000 premium economy seats will be installed in aircrafts by 2025. Meanwhile, the introduction of the new cabins to and from Melbourne means the airline now offers three daily services from Australia, including two services from Sydney.

Emirates' divisional vice president of Australasia, Barry Brown, said this was an exciting period for the company in Australia, with Melbourne and Sydney sitting at the forefront of Emirates' biggest investment in cabin redesign to date: "We have a strong commitment to Australia as one of our most important markets on our global network," he said.



### Premium economy: The facts

- On a four-class Emirates A380, flying from Melbourne or Sydney, the premium economy cabin is located at the front of the main deck with 56 seats laid out in a 2-4-2 configuration
- Each 50cm wide seat is designed to provide optimal comfort and support, with six-way adjustable headrests, a

footrest and a generous recline

- Each seat has a 30cm screen (one of the largest in its class), plus in-seat charging points and a walnut wood-finished side cocktail table.
- The décor is inspired by Emirates' private jet service, with cream-coloured leather and a wood panel finishing, similar to business class. ✪

## United announces largest South Pacific expansion ever

**Need to get the CEO** or some of your executive team to the States from Australia or New Zealand? It could soon be cheaper and easier, thanks to United Airlines announcing its largest South Pacific network expansion on record.

The company is planning to operate 66 flights between America and Australia/New Zealand each week, including take-offs from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Auckland and Christchurch. United will be the

only airline to offer direct flights between the States and New Zealand's South Island with the first direct San Francisco to Christchurch service. The airline will offer this route three times weekly from December.

Before that, United will add an additional four flights per week from Auckland to Los Angeles, and offer daily flights between San Francisco and Brisbane, all starting at the end of October. At this time, it will also

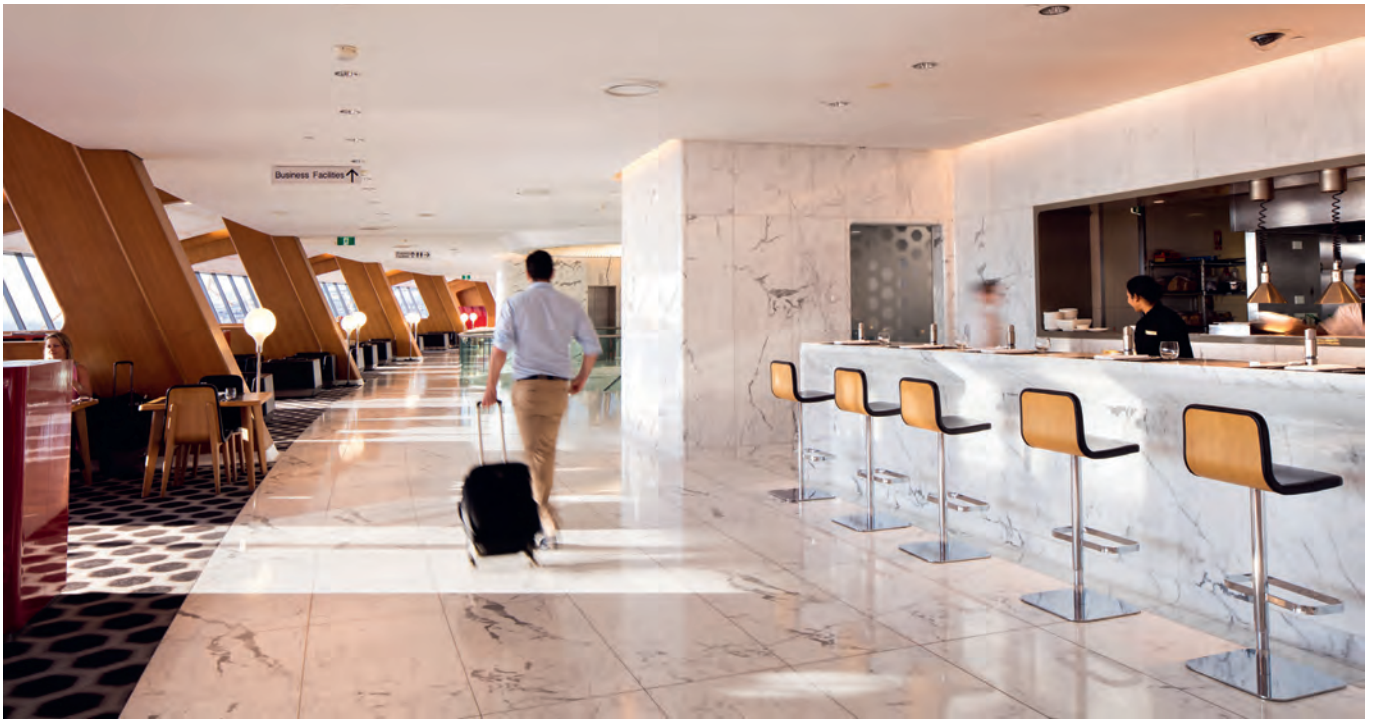
fly twice daily between San Francisco and Sydney, offering more flights to Sydney from America than any other carrier.

Now on to the financials, and it's believed that the increased frequency of flights from Australia/New Zealand to the States will see a reduction in the current high costs associated with travelling between the countries. Great news if your boss is on a cost-saving mission this year! ✪



# BOARDING PASS

All the latest news for the busy EA organising corporate travel



## Qantas announces \$100m lounge upgrade

**Always seeking** to satisfy its business travel and high-end travel market, Qantas recently announced it will spend \$100 million to transform its airport lounge network domestically and internationally. A highlight, according to Qantas, will be a new first class lounge at London's Heathrow Airport (great if your exec is heading to the UK),

with a slated opening in late 2025.

This will be Qantas' fifth international first-class lounge, joining Los Angeles and Singapore, and of course, Melbourne and Sydney. On that note, refurbishment of many Australian airport lounges will also be undertaken, with consideration given to increasing capacity in each lounge.

Qantas' chief executive Alan Joyce

said this is the largest investment in the airline's lounge network in more than 10 years: "Being back in profit means we're back to making long-term investments for our customers. That started with the major aircraft order we announced last year and now we're building on that with a major investment in our lounges." ✖

## Best hard-shell carry-on luggage

**If your boss** doesn't like checking in airline baggage (who does!?) Melbourne-based travel company, July, may have the perfect alternative – its hard-shell Carry-On bag. Recently named the 'best roomy polycarbonate carry-on case' by New York Magazine's The Strategist product review site, it has a 42-litre capacity, a polycarbonate shell and a waterproof nylon lining. And, weighing in at just 3.4kg, it comes in a range of colours.

That's not all though – there's so much added value! Your boss will never be disconnected thanks to the built-in charger and detachable laptop sleeve, whilst he/she will have no problems handling bumpy terrain with the expertly-designed 'silent' wheels. The Carry On sells for just over \$300 and is available online at [july.com](http://july.com). ✖





# “Fifteen years ago, I couldn’t imagine a world where work/life balance was something CEOs strived for and EAs could ask for.”

*Claire Muir* talks to Sydney-based Bri Matkovich, an EA at 1835i, about being a career EA, finding your superpower and what she wishes her high school teacher had told her

## **How did you become an assistant?**

I’ve been an Executive Assistant for the best part of 15 years which is my entire professional career, if you don’t count the most fun stint working at the cinema as a 16-year-old! I started off as a receptionist, knowing only that I wanted a break before studying again and the ‘glamorous’ life of working in a corporate office. I slowly started to realise that certain personality traits and skills of mine were transferable to the executive support world. My annoying tendency to organise people is a job!

## **Tell us about your current role.**

My role is mixed. Like all EAs, there is the traditional element when supporting executives but overall, it’s heavy on the project management side of things. Being part of a venture capital business that also has what we call the ‘lab’ is exciting and maybe not something all EA’s experience. We are some of the first people to see and test financial technology developed by great start-ups and if we aren’t testing something that already exists, we’re building it ourselves. This year, I get the opportunity to project manage those technology builds and I’m excited to see what comes to life and is ultimately integrated back into the bank to improve the customer experience.

## **What were you doing before you were at 1835i?**

I worked at RiseSmart – they were experts in career transition, career development and change management. It was this role that led me to choose being a career EA. I supported some of the most amazing and inspirational senior

executives as their direct EA but I also supported the design and delivery of the executive career transition program. This meant I was having regular and quite vulnerable conversations and meetings with c-suite executives who had been made redundant from corporate or board roles. Learning how to converse in this way with some of the most senior execs across APAC, and helping them navigate the change, gave me a deeper appreciation and understanding for the value an EA can add. It also gave me the confidence needed to network at all levels.

## **What motivates you?**

In this position, we have a unique opportunity to lead growth and innovation. My motivation comes from the opportunity to continuously learn while contributing to the success of executives and organisations. Staying ahead of the game and surrounding myself with the best humans on the planet (EAs) is also a huge driving force.

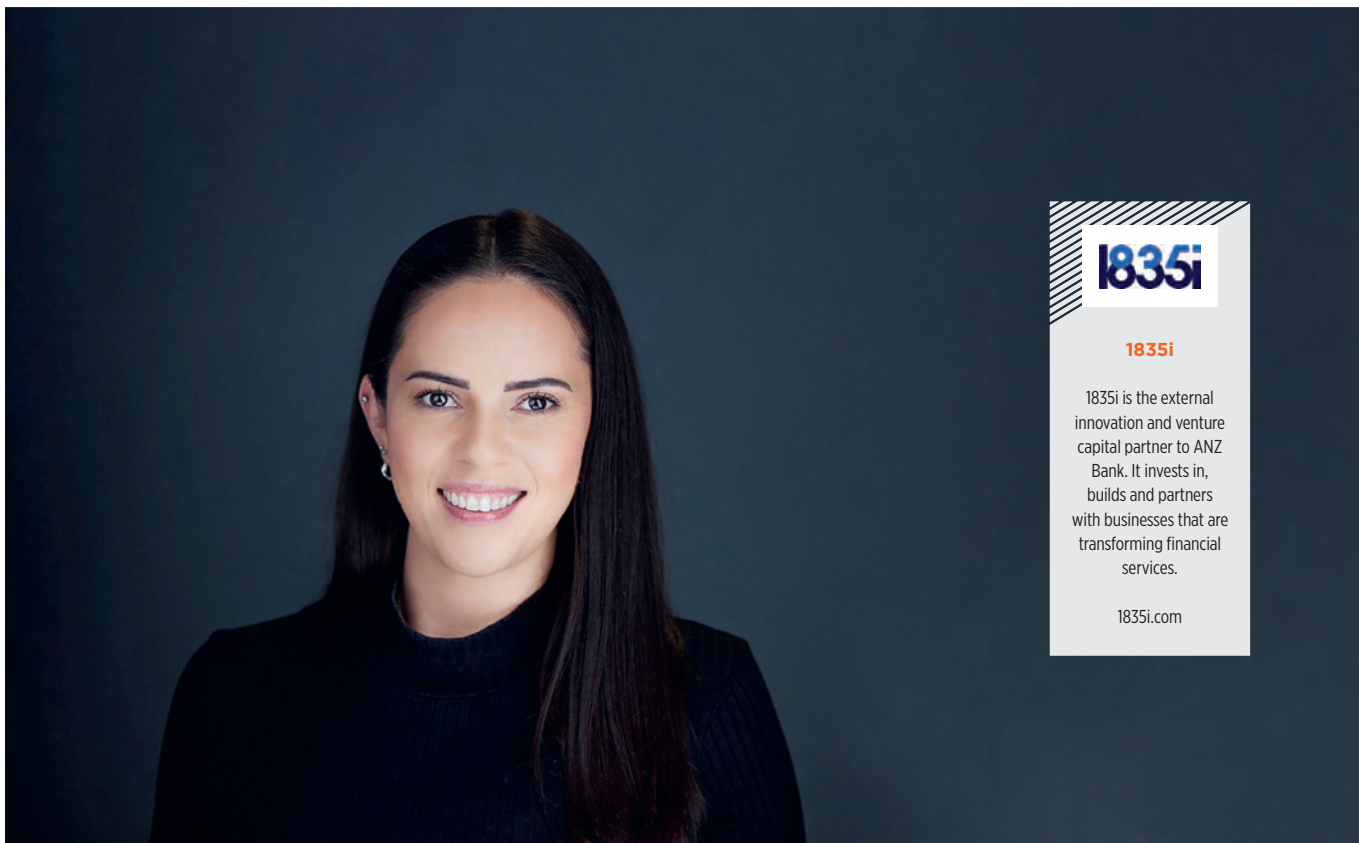
## **What tech helps you do your job?**

At 1835i, we use Google and I love it – I’m forever researching extensions to boost productivity. An oldie but a goodie is Boomerang, which helps you achieve inbox zero without forgetting to follow up on tasks that were sent via email. We live in Slack so it’s downloaded onto every smart device I own and I’m currently using and loving ClickUp.

## **Work/life balance... How does that look for you?**

I find work/life balance is a lot easier to achieve in a post-pandemic world. 1835i is a very flexible employer




**1835i**
**1835i**

1835i is the external innovation and venture capital partner to ANZ Bank. It invests in, builds and partners with businesses that are transforming financial services.

1835i.com

(productivity and quality outcomes over the number of days in the office or hours worked per day), and very give and take so it's up to individuals to create balance, whatever that may look like for them. In true EA spirit, I live in my calendar so I make sure lots of personal development, rest and friend/family time is scheduled. I am lucky to live by the water so watching the sunrise by the beach as part of a morning walk is a non-negotiable for me. I don't have children so I'm lucky to have the luxury of a little more time to myself – I aim to try one new restaurant, one new cafe and get to a concert or show each month. This also helps me keep up to date on venues I may need to use for events professionally.

#### **To what extent do you invest in training and development?**

I have a degree in event management, and I've done numerous training courses in business administration and project management, as well as soft skills like emotional intelligence and strategic conversations. I also participate in at least one EA-related webinar per week, which has actually been the most valuable to me over time. And I've been incredibly lucky to have access to and work with the very best career coaches and organisational psychologists over the last 10 years. Next up: a mini-MBA, hopefully!

#### **What advice do you wish you could have got earlier on in life?**

I wish my high school career advisor had suggested the EA role as a career path. It's often looked at as a stepping stone

to something else – which it can be, but it can also be a fulfilling career in itself.

#### **What has surprised you most about the role of EA?**

Overall, how diverse the role is. If you're part of the right organisation working for the right exec (for you), you really can get involved or upskill in as much as you like across the full scope of the business. I'm also surprised by how well the exec/EA relationship has worked in a hybrid environment. I started my career in a world (as did many) where you went into the office five days per week and followed your executive around 10+ hours per day to ensure everything ran smoothly. Fifteen years ago, I couldn't imagine a world where work/life balance was something CEOs strived for and EAs could ask for.

#### **What will an EA be like in 25 years' time?**

Overall, the role will continue to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of organisations and executives – be that now, or in five years or 25 years' time. Automation and AI is, and should be, giving rise to more strategic partnerships between EAs and their bosses. I think 'greater specialisation' will become key with EAs in terms of how we work, the executives we align with and how we market ourselves. Companies are becoming more diverse and complex so I believe EAs will need to specialise in specific areas like finance, legal, project management, etc., to better support their teams. Most EAs I know have an area of interest something they're really good at and/or enjoy, so it's about honing those skills and passions, and making it your superpower. ☺





# Let's get rid of imposter syndrome

Behavioural scientist and mentor to senior leaders wanting to master their mindset, *Darren Fleming* believes changing your mindset can banish imposter syndrome from your professional life – for good. Read on, EAs...





#### THE EXPERT

Darren, a behavioural scientist and peak performance specialist, is a speaker, trainer and mentor to senior leaders wanting to master their mindset. With a background in psychology, elite sport and entrepreneurialism he has authored seven books on the topics.

**According to** a 2020 KPMG study, imposter syndrome affects approximately 75% of female executives. Males don't appear to be as affected by it as much – a Workplace Insights article from April 2023 puts it only at 12%, while others put it as high as 20%. Interestingly, one of the reasons cited for the lower stats for men is their reluctance to talk about it. Surely that's a sign of imposter syndrome right there!

#### Most strategies fail at overcoming imposter syndrome

Did you know that the process (right) is automated and can't be changed? Your brain chooses the thoughts it believes will give it the most accurate assessment of the situation. By the time you realise you want to have different thoughts you're too late.

And this is why most actions for overcoming imposter syndrome fail. When you are told to think differently, you are trying to replace automatic thoughts with manually generated ones. You will always lose with this strategy.

#### A strategy that works

The only reliable way to move away from imposter syndrome is to work with the sensations the brain sends to the body in relation to it. We work with them by experiencing them and paying attention to them, all without reacting.

Here's how it works... When you feel the sensation in your body that causes you to feel as though you are an imposter, give your 100% close attention to the sensation. Don't have any thoughts about it at all. If thoughts come up, ignore them and go back to the sensations, even while the thoughts scream loudly in your head. Just focus on the sensations.

And here are some rules to remember as you go:

- Don't make the sensations wrong by thinking: 'I should feel more confident'.
- Don't justify them by thinking: 'I have a right to feel this way'.
- Don't try and own them by thinking 'I always feel this way in these meetings'.
- Don't label them by giving the sensations a name like 'nervousness'.
- Don't try and suppress it by ignoring the sensations.

In short, just pay attention to the sensations and see what they do.

#### Nothing lasts forever

When we pay attention to the sensations, we are giving them an opportunity to deactivate themselves. They do this naturally and without any effort from us. Just let the sensations rise then exist for a period of time (it will usually be less than a minute) and watch as they subside.

When they subside they are deactivating themselves and they will then be gone. When they are gone, they can't bother you again. You will then be free of the imposter syndrome. ☘

[darrenfleming.com.au](http://darrenfleming.com.au)

## What is imposter syndrome?

"Regardless of the accuracy or otherwise of the belief, imposter syndrome is experienced as a sensation in the body. You don't feel good enough for the job. You feel as though you'll be found out as a fraud and then kicked out. That would be so humiliating!

These bodily sensations are the end result of thoughts that we generate when we encounter the situation in which we feel like an imposter. It plays out like this:

- ⌚ You're sitting in the boardroom with your ELT colleagues waiting for the CEO to arrive and the meeting to start. You see your colleagues as they're doing their thing.
- ⌚ As you observe the scene, your brain interprets the signals from your senses and assesses what it thinks is happening. Part of this assessment includes drawing on memories that are not part of the current scene but are given importance as though they are. This assessment then becomes about what it thinks is happening, not what is happening.
- ⌚ Based on the assessment of the scene and memories it has decided to include, your brain might conclude that you are not good enough to be in the room because everyone else looks, acts, or sounds more qualified than you to be there.
- ⌚ If your brain concludes that it doesn't like what's in the room, it will send a signal to your body that you find undesirable. You may even label that sensation as nervousness or anxiety."





# How to get back on track

In the past, taking time out from your career was seen as a derailer but now – with some planning and focus – it can be real asset, says *Michelle Gibbings*



## THE EXPERT

Michelle Gibbings is a workplace expert. She is the author of 'Step Up: How to Build Your Influence at Work', 'Career Leap: How to Reinvent and Liberate your Career' and the new book 'Bad Boss: What to do if you work for one, manage one or are one'.

**There are many** reasons people take a career break, whether it be raising a child, caring for an elderly parent, recovering from illness or needing space after an intensive work project. Whatever the reason, it is actually a perfect time to assess your work journey so far. You can breathe, take stock and decide what (if anything) you need to shift or change to step ahead.

### Pick your speed

When it comes to your career, doing it well doesn't mean there is only one way or one path to follow. It's about being proactive and deliberate about your choices so you can lead your career in the direction you want it to go.

Each person's circumstances are unique, so be clear on what matters the most to you and identify what drives your career.

For you it may be having a fully flexible job where you can work where you want and when you want, or it may be about working part-time and still maintaining your professional occupation. For others, it could be about learning and challenge, leaving a legacy or career advancement.

### At this stage, ask yourself:

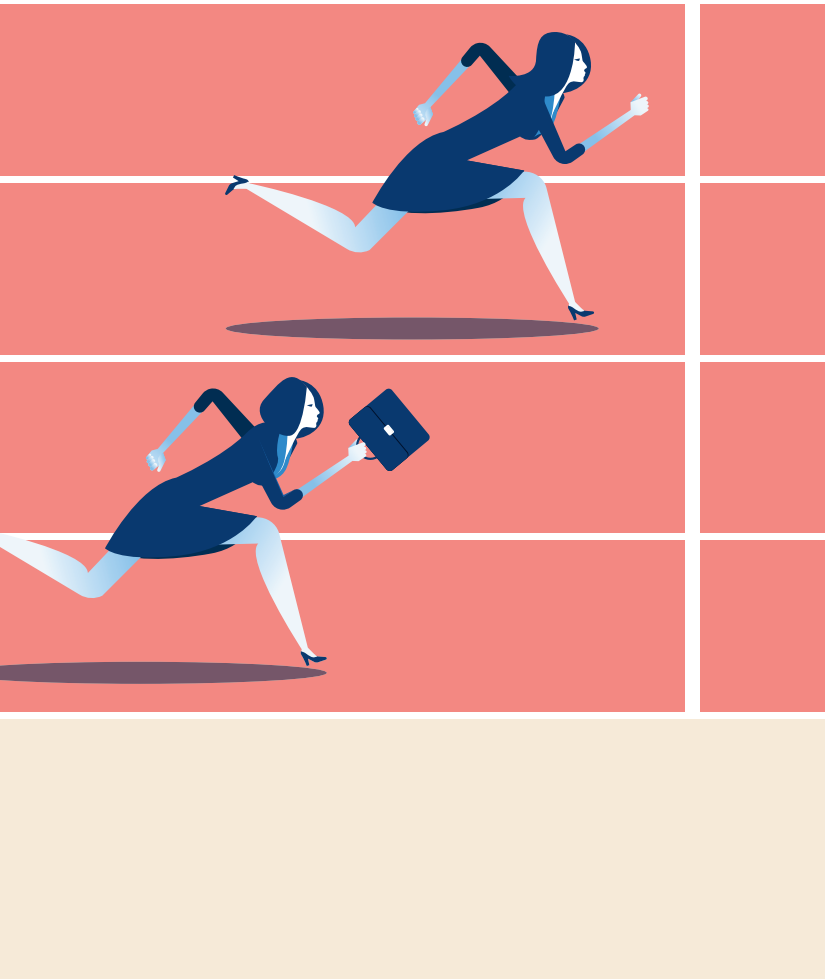
- What matters the most to me?
- When have I been the most motivated?
- What really drives me? (Status, financial security, learning, being challenged, service, being valued or something else?)

### Know your value proposition

Everyone brings specific skills and ways of operating to the work they do. Think of it as your unique selling proposition; what makes you stand out from the crowd. It includes the value you deliver through your work and how you engage and lead.

When you step back into your profession, you must explain how your value matches your desired role. It is easier to do this when you play to your strengths. And these strengths are the skills and competencies that help you stand out. These can be cleverly used as a launching pad to get back into the market, highlighting them in your LinkedIn profile and CV, and talking about them with your network, recruiters and prospective employers.





*At this stage, ask yourself:*

- What are my strengths and how have they helped my career?
- What is unique about what I do and how I work?
- How can I best articulate my value and worth?

**Find your advocates**

Reports suggest that between 60 and 80% of jobs available are unadvertised and/or are sourced through a contact. Consequently, your network is crucial in helping you land your next role. So, systematically review your network and consider those whom you believe are strong advocates.

These are people who:

- Know what you do
- Respect your skills
- Are willing to speak for you.

Make the time to meet with them and discuss your desired next steps but beware – this conversation isn't about hitting them up for a job. Instead, it's getting their advice about how the

market has moved and seeing if they know people you should connect with.

*At this stage, ask yourself:*

- Who in my network knows my strengths and values well?
- How can my network support my career step?
- Who don't I know that I need to know to help support my next career move?

**Assess your learning edge**

During your time out of the profession, it's likely that aspects of the work have changed. Talk to former colleagues and find out what's stayed the same and shifted. Bear in mind, also, that you may need to take short courses to upskill and build out your capabilities and competencies.

Remember, the quest for knowledge and understanding never ends, particularly in a world of increasing connectedness and complexity.

*At this stage, ask yourself:*

- How has my profession changed, and what new skills are required?
- What are the best options for uplifting my skills?
- How much time, money, and energy am I willing to devote to this?

**Make each day matter**

Be deliberate as to how you spend your day. You want to prioritise and plan, so you're making regular and sustained progress – and it can help to document your plan. Consider it your 'Career Reinvention Plan', covering the activities you need to do to get your career on track, complete with dates and any resources you need. You can then use your plan to track your progress.

As you build your plan and implement your approach to get back in the game, you will have good and not-so-good days. So, manage your energy wisely and, in your schedule, set aside time for you. This means considering activities that are good for you and will revitalise your body and soul, for example – how does listening to music, regular massage or a daily run sound? Whichever does it for you, put it in your schedule and commit. When you're busy, it can be hard to prioritise yourself but your body needs time to rejuvenate and you want to be ready to put your best self forward.

*At this stage, ask yourself:*

- How will I best balance developing my career and health and wellbeing?
- What self-care activities do I need to prioritise?
- What new habits do I need to establish to ensure I put my best self forward each day? 🧘

[michellegibbings.com](http://michellegibbings.com)



# Diversity and open dialogue

*Dr Lynda Folan* shares her top tips on strengthening cultural diversity, dialogue and development within the workplace



## THE EXPERT

Lynda Folan is an organisational psychologist and a specialist in leadership and organisational development. As well as leading companies across the globe through transformational change, she has authored the book *Leader Resilience, The New Frontier of Leadership*.

**We have known** for a long time that diversity delivers better decision-making, improved results and more innovative outcomes. And a lot has been written about the organisational benefits of embracing diversity and enhancing the quality of dialogue.

However, we are still not seeing the systemic shift that we know is required to embrace diversity and open dialogue. Individuals and teams need to fully embrace the fact that innovation and change does not result from a homogenous group of people who think and do things the same way due to their cultural scripting. Instead, strengthening diversity in the workplace needs people to effectively cognise the positive impact of a diverse group of people in creating something better, different and unique.

The key to creating the shift? Two key transformations, which will make inroads into strengthening cultural diversity and dialogue:

- A change in the mindsets of the dominant culture
- A shift in the thinking and behaviours of leaders concerning diversity and open dialogue.

## A change in the mindsets of the dominant culture

Here, we need much more than tokenism and being seen to do the right thing. If we are going to have an impact on the issues of cultural diversity and dialogue, we must systemically shift mindsets.

The internal processing of individuals drives destructive thinking, which is the basis of discrimination. So, if we don't shift the internal processing, we won't achieve sustainable change. Even if we teach people how to cover it up, they will never truly embrace diversity.

Unconscious bias is a hot topic and there is a lot of talk about shifting this. But in organisations, we still see daily demonstrations of unconscious bias in action. Until we hold people accountable for this and demand they shift their attitudes, we will never truly embrace diversity. Beware that when people talk about needing to be 'politically correct,' they're unlikely to have changed their mindset on diversity and inclusion. Instead, they may be holding on to unconscious bias and attempting to cover up attitudes to appear politically correct. To fully embrace diversity in teams and organisations, everyone must shift their mindsets and embrace diversity in all forms.

## A shift in leadership thinking and behaviours

Leaders are the key to delivering an organisational culture that enhances diversity, open dialogue, and engagement. If we are going to shift the dial on these issues, the change must happen at the highest levels of leadership in the organisation – and who better to nudge this forward than the EA? It needs to start with a shift in leadership mindset and thinking, resulting in a change in behaviours.

Actual change happens when leaders accept their unconscious bias and actively shift their thinking to embrace diversity and open dialogue. It is no longer enough for leaders to be emotionally intelligent and do the right things on the surface. They need to change their mindsets and thinking to bring about systemic and sustainable change in how they do things. This change in behaviours will help deliver a positive organisational culture that embraces diversity and transforms communication and engagement levels.

We live in exceptional times and leaders must step up and make changes to deliver a sustainable shift in your culture. But the most significant barrier to this shift is not the shift in behaviours. The biggest challenge for leaders? Being brave enough to face their unconscious fears and biases, then being disciplined in shifting their thinking and mindset... ✖

[inspireddevelopment.net](http://inspireddevelopment.net)





# How to keep your workload sustainable

The biggest challenge for many EAs is the sheer workload you're expected to handle. Let *Dr Jenny Brockis* (an expert in the science of high-performance thinking, and improving brain health and wellbeing) help you...



## THE EXPERT

Dr. Jenny Brockis is a medical practitioner specialising in brain health and mental performance in the workplace. She is also the author of *Future Brain: The 12 Keys To Creating Your Own High-Performance Brain*.

As a busy high-level PA, you will know that heavy workloads can be stressful, although not always in a bad way because that is what you're good at. But there can be a fine line between efficiency and overwhelm, and it's the overwhelm that does damage because over time. That accumulation of extra bits of stress is what, little by little, eats into your capacity to function optimally. And we are often blind to what's happening.

Studies have shown the person at greatest risk of burnout, stress-related illness or mental health challenges (including anxiety and depression) is the exhausted, enthusiastic and overextended individual who is in denial; oblivious to what's happening – probably because you love what you do and it never feels a burden to be asked to step up and do more.

In fact, you may even not-so-secretly love being of service, demonstrating your capabilities, and feeling valued and appreciated for everything you do, because it feels rewarding and you care deeply about your work. And that's OK!

But, as the world becomes increasingly complex and complicated, your challenge is to recognise what you need to keep yourself safe from overwhelm.

Three ways to check in:

**1 Schedule time to reflect on how much you're currently handling.** And honestly ask yourself: "Is this sustainable?" If the answer is no, look at what's happening to create too much demand and investigate how you can reduce the load. Do you need to speak with your exec? Can you streamline processes? Can you automate more of your work to free up time?

**2 Keep yourself accountable for your own self-care.** What have you identified as your non-negotiables; those daily activities that ensure you have the energy, drive and positive feelings for your work? And how well would you rate yourself on these right now? Because while you might know you feel so much better after a full night's sleep, if your reality is that you can't remember the last time this happened, it's time to reprioritise what's important here. Next, look at what could you be doing differently to nudge you towards being the best version of yourself consistently. Don't worry, this isn't a radical overhaul. Often, it's the smallest of nudges, like giving yourself permission to take a 10-minute walk during your lunchbreak or scheduling a short coffee break with your partner.

**3 Challenge your thoughts.** If you're constantly berating yourself for not being 'enough' (whichever aspect of enough you subscribe to) ask yourself, in whose eyes is this true?

Showing yourself some compassion, being gentle with yourself and remembering the good you've achieved helps to keep things in perspective, raises your coping skills and makes you happier.

The thing about work is it will always be here. It's a fallacy to believe we can ever be completely on top of everything there is to do. Which is why we take work home in the evenings or over the weekends and why we end up sacrificing those other aspects of our lives; the non-work part.

Although work plays an important role in our lives (from being stimulating, challenging and rewarding to paying the bills), it's only one aspect of you. Remember to tap into what's most important as the lines between work and life blur now more than ever. Ask what it is that gives you the most pleasure, the greatest joy and happiness... Then go do those things. ☘

[drjennybrockis.com](http://drjennybrockis.com)



# Introducing the one-month email rule

EAs, you should archive – or even delete – any email that’s more than a month old suggests *Donna McGeorge*



## THE EXPERT

Donna McGeorge is a speaker, author and mentor who helps people make their work work. Using a creative, practical approach, she improves workplace effectiveness while challenging thinking on leadership, productivity and virtual work. *'The First 2 Hours: Make Better Use of Your Most Valuable Time'* is published by John Wiley.

**Once upon a time** I used to keep every email I got because I mistakenly thought I might need it again, usually to point out something someone said they’d do, and then they didn’t. If, like old me, you tend to hold on to all of your old emails thinking you might need them in the future, here are four reasons why you might want to reconsider:

**1 You won’t need them:** Despite 11,000 odd emails in 250 folders, chances are you’ve only gone back two or three times to retrieve something. And when you do go looking, can you be sure you’ll find it anyway? These emails are using up a lot of mental and physical capacity.

**2 Frees up space which improves computer performance:** If your IT department isn’t already onto you to reduce your saved emails, they soon will be. Many of us are given gigabytes or even terabytes of space to store our stuff, which feels huge but fills up quickly.

**3 It’s overwhelming:** Some of you reading this might be old enough to remember in-trays on your desk – email was meant to emulate that. Something comes in, gets processed, and then moved on. Email was not meant to be a storage app so your inbox (and

in-tray) should be sparse or empty. Otherwise, all the emails and folders will overload and overwhelm your brain.

**4 It’s a security risk:** Hackers break into networks all the time. Chances are, particularly in HR, many of those emails contain sensitive and personal information about others.

## What to do instead

**Apply the 30-day rule:** Delete any email older than 30 days, including all those folders. If that makes you feel uncomfortable, create an archive folder and dump the whole lot in there. That way, they aren’t gone – they’re just out of the way. Do it right now... Select and drag!

**Scan incoming email:** In his book *Smart Work*, Dermot Crowley has some great advice for handling email. He explains there are three types:

- **Action:** Requires a planned and considered response (usually only 10 percent of incoming email)
- **Information:** Read and delete
- **Junk:** Unsubscribe and delete

**Create a ‘Done’ folder:** You don’t need all those email folders. They’re not helping when you need to find things, and are only clogging up the system. What you need is a short term (30 days) way to hang on to emails that you may need to recall for projects and such.

Here’s how it works:

- Open the message
- Attend to it accordingly
- Drag it out of your inbox and into the ‘Done’ folder
- Create a rule to automatically delete or archive emails when they’re more than 30 days old.

## Here’s your get out of jail free card

Working on a specific project? Create a short-term folder for messages related to it and once its finished – you guessed it – drag the folder into ‘Done’.

## And finally...

Most of our email productivity problems come about because we don’t have a system for managing them. We operate out of a default setting that says we open emails first thing, spend most of our day dipping in and out of them and (because we’re tired, overwhelmed and suffering from decision fatigue) we hang on to everything. It’s time to consciously decide on a system for managing your email. Start with the 30-day rule and trust me, your future self will thank you. ✘

[donnamcgeorge.com](http://donnamcgeorge.com)





# The ideal time to seek feedback from your boss

While it may be tempting to wait until completion to present your project to your boss, doing so often limits the potential for growth and improvement says *Dr Amantha Imber*



## THE EXPERT

Dr Amantha Imber is the Founder of Inventium, Australia's leading behavioural science consultancy. She also hosts an insightful podcast about the habits and rituals of the world's most successful people, called *How I Work*.

**Picture this...** You have just finished working on an important presentation that you have to deliver in two days' time to your team. You've spent hours writing and polishing it. And finally, you're feeling like it's in a really good state.

You send the presentation to your boss to look over. You casually ask them to give any feedback they have you. Unexpectedly, they send you a shopping list's worth of criticism (they also clearly failed to read between the lines and realise that you were really just looking for compliments). In an instant, you go from feeling confident and proud of your work to feeling miserable. Ouch.

## What those feelings mean

Feedback received at the wrong time can be extremely demotivating. Dan Heath, the bestselling author of books including *Made to Stick*, *The Power of Moments* and *Switch*, has experienced how demoralising ill-timed feedback can be.

"I think a lot of writers make the mistake of getting 90% of the way there and then they start asking for feedback," says Heath. "And at that point, if you get negative feedback, you can't afford to take it on. Your instinct is going to be to push back and think, 'Oh, well that's just nit-picking' or 'I can't afford to revisit that.'"

## So, when do I ask for feedback then?

Heath says the sweet spot for asking for feedback is roughly at the halfway or 60% mark: "Asking for feedback earlier in the process allows you the mental space to really rethink things if necessary," he explains.

Scientists have investigated why this might be the case. They found that when people sought feedback on a speech or draft once it was complete, their primary motivation for the input was to seek affirmation – after all, they're only human.

In contrast, when people asked for feedback well before they had finished a project, their main motivation was to improve their work. So, when we can adopt the mindset of striving to improve (as opposed to just wanting to demonstrate how great we are), research suggests we are more open to criticism and are thus more likely to embrace the feedback.

## The next steps...

Instead of waiting until the last minute, make it a habit to seek feedback at earlier stages in your projects. While it may be tempting to wait until you are near completion to present it to your boss or colleagues, doing so often limits the potential for growth and improvement.

Aiming to share your work when it's around 50% to 60% complete will demonstrate your willingness to learn and adapt – and it will provide you with the opportunity to genuinely consider and implement suggestions that can elevate your work, instead of leaving you feeling defeated or defensive.

As a seasoned EA, you will know that being open to feedback (especially early in your career) sets the stage for continued development and professional growth. This openness to critique and constructive criticism not only leads to improved work but also helps in fostering a growth mindset, which is essential for personal and professional development.

When you prioritise learning and improvement over seeking affirmation, you become more resilient in the face of setbacks and better equipped to handle the inevitable challenges that arise throughout your career. So, embrace feedback, ask for it early and use it as a tool to refine your skills and become the best version of yourself. ✨

amantha.com

# Focus: The science and the benefits

Find it hard to focus? You're not alone. But in a few simple steps, you and your boss can get clarity and create capacity for focused attention – *Curt Steinhorst* explains all



## THE EXPERT

Curt is an author, speaker, business owner and entrepreneur. A distraction expert, he equips professionals across the world – from Fortune 100 companies and global leadership associations to Universities and not-for-profits – to work smarter and stronger in this constantly-connected age.

### The science of focus

An executive's success is contingent on how effectively they think, prioritise, make decisions, and communicate in a complex and changing environment but the challenge is that the resource they need to do this well is the one most under assault and in most limited supply... Focused attention.

Helping a leader monitor and manage this attention is what makes the PA role more critical than ever but why supporting your boss (often unknowingly) is nearly impossible without some understanding of brain science – in this case, the science of focus. We humans are hard-wired with two systems of attention? Each has a different purpose – let's get to know them.

### Bottom-up attention

The first, which scientists call 'bottom-up attention', responds to new stimuli – things that bring us pleasure or pain – and to which we react with joy (chocolate cake) or anxiety (house on fire). These stimuli help focus our attention – very helpful in prehistoric times when we needed to run from a venomous Megalania, but now spent too frequently on things like emails and texts.

Our ancestors may have experienced these anxieties once or twice a day but did you know the modern office worker can get a mini-adrenaline rush every time an email requires an urgent response? And with scores of those stress-triggering occurrences every day (most of which are distractions rather than actual emergencies) it's no surprise our brain wants to stay in 'distraction-response' mode, even when all the emails have been handled. That's why, once you're neck-deep in your inbox or swamped with texts, it's so hard to stop.

This form of attention is all about immediacy

and makes it hard for us to focus. Its faux-urgency makes our days very busy but often we can't say what we've accomplished by the end of those days.

### Top-down attention

The other system we have is the opposite. This is the function of the brain that allows us to plan by making active choices about what gets our focus, as opposed to responding to external stimuli. Someone operating with top-down attention may hear their phone beeping but decide to ignore it or turn it off while they put their undivided attention on something more 'valuable'. This form of attention is about planning, exerting control over the future and making a difference.

The biggest mistake that leaders, PAs, and everyone else make is to assume they can spend the first three quarters of their day paying attention to immediate needs and then switch their focus to important projects or long-term priorities in the late afternoon or evening when it's quieter.

While that sounds logical, it doesn't work for two reasons. First, your brain has a finite amount of 'attention energy' each day and if you spend it on immediate demands (emails, meetings and interruptions) during the first part of the day, there isn't enough left to generate quality work for the really important things later on. Second, that deep focus time has to come when you're at a point of high energy – and for most people, that means the morning.

### How to manage focus

This is where you can be particularly helpful. Many bosses need very little encouragement to shut their door, even during prime morning time (such as 9 'til 11am three or four days each week) if they know you'll be their gatekeeper. Soon, they'll find that the remaining hours are usually plenty to





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- ☞ handle the other demands of the workday.

If your boss gives you access to their email or phone, could you reinforce their protected time by addressing anything urgent that comes in? Think: “Rob, I noticed you asked Angela to comment right away on the attached document. I just want to let you know that she’s tied up until 11 and I’ll make sure she sees it then.” This keeps Rob from coming down the hall or texting Angela while she’s reconfiguring a complicated and expensive marketing plan that’s due in two days. Other means of enforcing sequestered time are do not disturb features on office communications – or a good old fashion sign on a closed door.

PAs can find it more difficult to get deep focus time than their bosses because so much of the job is handling immediate needs for your exec. But that doesn’t lessen the expectation that you will also get projects completed on time, despite the overwhelming volume of messages, notifications, Zoom sessions, and calls coming your way.

So, you may have to make compromises, like working on a project early from home or ignoring emails and messages until you’re at work. Then, surrender the rest of your day to on-demand mayhem. By doing this, or something like it, you can consistently make progress on larger goals.

Here are two guidelines for you to use daily, both in guiding your boss and managing your own time.

### Getting to clarity

One of the many roles of EAs is to help the boss think through difficult problems because, most of the time, a leader doesn’t have a ‘safe’ place to work through their rough thought process before making more public statements – or even to say: “At this moment, I have no idea what to do about this.”

That’s where you can help your exec (and by extension, the whole team) gain a better footing – be their sounding board and help them figure out where to put their time and attention:

- **Get your boss to identify what matters most today.** Recognise that if that list is longer than one or two items, none of them will get done. So, help them choose one thing that will benefit most from their attention today.
- **Do the same for yourself.** That might mean picking up a task that’s on your boss’s list, or it could be something you’ve identified in your own area. Whatever it is, put that front-and-centre in your mind as early in the day as possible.

Note that it’s more productive to be decisive about what to focus on today than it is to overthink which choice would be perfect or ideal. Just by establishing a ‘choose one thing and drive

**“It’s more productive to be decisive about what to focus on today than it is to overthink which choice would be perfect or ideal.”**

it to completion’ pattern, you will make future priorities easier to identify and complete. And whatever you choose today, remember you’ll have one less unfinished item waiting for you tomorrow.

As you get better at this, you’ll find it also gets easier to identify things that can wait so more important things get a little more focus. You’ll find that saying “I’ll handle that this afternoon” often works to group lower priority interruptions into an after lunch bucket when they can be handled in a batch.

### Creating capacity

One big obstacle to concentrating deeply on a priority project is that you or your exec may not have the capacity (meaning the tools, time, place or training) to handle something or get it done. This could be a failure of your facilities to support your needs, the absence of up-to-date technology to help you save time elsewhere or enough staff or expertise to handle a persistent or overwhelming need.

Help your boss identify and correct this situation by lobbying for the resources you both need because without the capacity to do what’s most important, it’s impossible to succeed.

### Final word

As you plan the next week or month, keep in mind the two types of attention you use – the distraction immediately before you and the desire to plan and manage the future. Teach those above and around you about the difference and encourage those you work for to set aside a quiet zone for productive, uninterrupted work each day for those longer-term, future-oriented projects. Then leverage your own schedule to get some of that deep-focus time for yourself.

Getting clarity about what’s most important is the key to organising how you use your sequestered time and having the capacity to do that work – the tools, time, and support you need for it to happen – will make or break your ability to finish important projects.

By the way, studies show that humans are happier when we achieve more. So, if you let a little brain science guide your working day, you could be more satisfied in your job. ☺

curtsteinhorst.com





# How to nurture a growth mindset of change for yourself and others

There is a lot of talk in the business world at the moment about adopting a growth mindset and rightly so, because it's a growth mindset that helps us grow as individuals. It's where we see our skills, talents, and abilities – not as things that are fixed, but as things we can expand upon. It helps us see challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities. And helps us see change not as something to push against, but as something to embrace. So, *Nigel Collin* asks, as a busy EA, how can you nurture your own mindset and help those around you – your exec, for example – adopt a healthy growth mindset as well?



## THE EXPERT

Nigel Collin is a change and leadership expert helping people and organisations make change happen through small consistent steps. He is author of 'Game of Inches', an internationally recognised keynote speaker and executive coach.

**Back in 2007** Carol Dweck, a Stanford University psychologist wrote a book called *Mindset* and sparked a revolution in how we think about and nurture the right mindset; the premise being that we all adopt one of two types of mindsets – either fixed or growth.

### If you adopt a fixed mindset:

- You tend to believe your skills, talents and abilities are fixed; you're born with a certain level of smarts
- You tend to see things as very black-and-white and focus on outcomes where you either win or you lose
- You nail your to do list or you don't and that's where it ends

- You see challenges as insurmountable and tend not to step outside your comfort zone.

### If you adopt a growth mindset:

- You believe your skill, talents and abilities can be expanded upon, and you can learn new things and continually grow
- You focus on progress and effort. If you don't complete your to do list you ask what got in the way, what can you delegate, what can you change and what can you learn
- You see challenges as opportunities
- You tend to be curious and hanker to learn new things.

Now, here's the thing: Dweck suggests you're not born with one or the other – instead, you tend to adopt either a fixed or growth mindset – nor are you ever totally one or the other. She adds that once you understand the difference, you tend to gravitate towards growth.

### How do you help those around you nurture a growth mindset?

From my experience, there are three really simple things you can do:

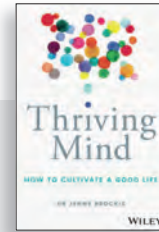
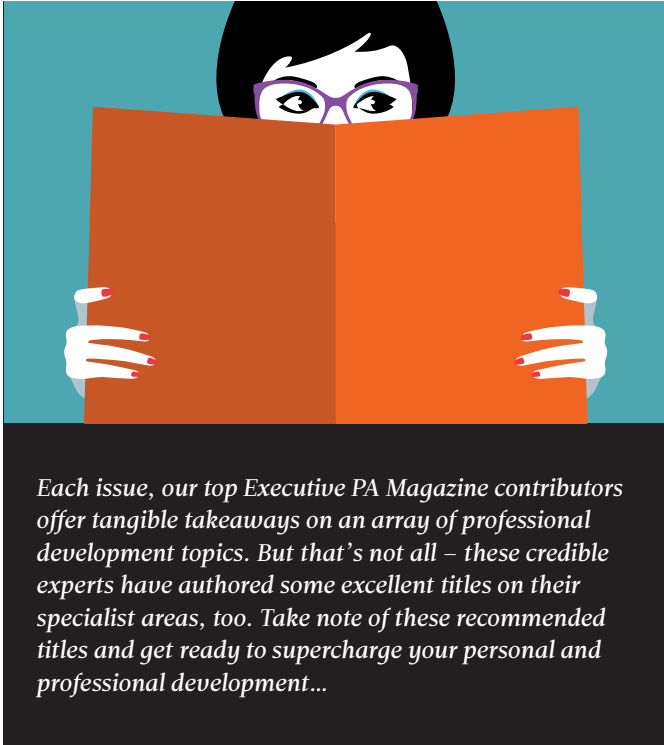
- Nurture your own growth mindset. The best way is to go directly to the source and grab a copy (or dust off your old one) of *Mindset*. (I think this should be compulsory on any EA's bookshelf).
- Understand that shifting their thinking and adopting a growth mindset isn't a once-off project. It's not a matter of just doing a short course; it's a continual process. And like anything, it's the little things that make the biggest difference. That takes the overwhelm away and makes shifting mindset accessible to everyone.
- Let's watch our language. Not just our self-talk but how we talk to others. For example, say "yes" instead of "yes" but...' For example, rather than saying: "Yes but that'll never work" try "Yes, tell me a little bit more about your thought process". Also, try adding other words like "yet" or "not yet" to the end of a sentence – how about saying "I didn't get everything done yet", instead of "I didn't get everything done"? This opens the door to further exploration.

Over the years I've had the opportunity of interviewing and working with hundreds of successful individuals and leaders... The one thing that stands out? The importance of nurturing the right mindset. Imagine the impact developing a better mindset, not just in terms of the benefits of performance and productivity but the impact on those around you... ✖

[nigelcollin.com.au](http://nigelcollin.com.au)

# FURTHER RESOURCES

Top titles to supercharge your personal and professional development

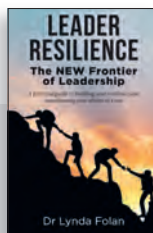


## Thriving Mind: How to Cultivate a Good Life

by Dr Jenny Brockis

In Thriving Mind, Dr Jenny Brockis shares the “amazing science” for reclaiming your humanity and being happy. Based on research and her own 30+ years of helping people, she will walk you through issues such as loneliness, stress, relationship breakdown, loss of social connection, and mental health, demonstrating practical ways to alleviate or even banish these difficulties, making for a happier working and home life. Expect to explore:

- How happiness works, and how you can integrate your emotions and use mindfulness to achieve it
- How to harness your natural biology for better energy, resilience, and mood
- How to connect with your superpower of social, and enrich your relationships with compassion, respect, and courage
- How to take full control of your life by giving up on counterproductive short-term solutions and the blame game.

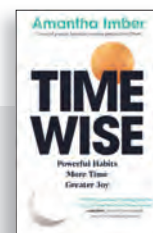


## Leader Resilience: The NEW Frontier of Leadership

by Dr Lynda Folan

If you're looking for a practical way to build resilience and transform your ability to lead, this book could be it. From years of working with people, teams and organisations across the globe and researching what makes an effective leader thrive, Lynda Folan endeavours to uncover the secrets of enduring and transformational leadership – and she says she'll bring you a new way of conceptualising leadership.

Within these pages you'll find a comprehensive array of assessment measures, strategies and tools for developing the attributes and thinking patterns of an effective leader. That means taking a closer look at your personal and professional capacity to cope with change, as well as looking at how to manage stress and avoid burnout in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business world.



## Time Wise

by Amantha Imber

Organisational psychologist Dr Amantha Imber has interviewed more than 150 bestselling authors, musicians, entertainers, entrepreneurs and business leaders to get inside their heads and understand the routines and rituals that enable them to achieve their purpose. As a result, she has uncovered a wealth of proven strategies that anyone can adopt to improve their productivity, work and lifestyle.

Promising to be a value-packed title, Amantha's practical and research-backed guide covers energy, efficiency, decision-making, self-talk and digital distractions, investigating how you can shortcut your way to achieving more in less time with less stress and greater joy.





## **Bad Boss: What to do if you work for one, manage one or are one**

by Michelle Gibbings

At one time or another we've all had a bad boss – whether it's through bullying and intimidation, unfair feedback or unrealistic workloads. Their behaviour sets the tone for what's acceptable in an organisation and can cause major issues for productivity, staff turnover and wellbeing, especially during difficult times like we're experiencing now.

In her book, Michelle draws upon decades of experience in corporate leadership to provide a practical transformation guide – EAs if you're in a tough or toxic environment, prepare to challenge your thinking and shift perspective to make relationships work! Rest assured, she covers all three perspectives (the direct report, the boss and the boss's boss) so you can quickly identify where the issue lies, along with reading about and taking actionable steps to turn things around.

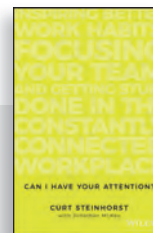


## **The 1-Day Refund**

by Donna McGeorge

If you're constantly juggling multiple tasks and operating at 100% (or more), if you feel like you're on a treadmill you can't get off and you have zero capacity for anything urgent, you need to get your hands on best-selling author Donna McGeorge's latest release, The 1-Day Refund. As a time-management expert, she'll show you how to recover an extra 15% of your time. That means 10 minutes per hour, an hour per day or a full day each week to think, breathe, live and work. Wow!

But that's not all – she says that by creating more space, you'll discover a new ability to focus on what's truly important to you...



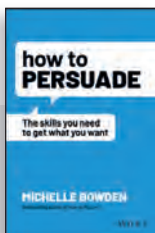
## **Can I Have Your Attention?**

by Curt Steinhorst

Are you ready to cut through the noise and get your team away from the many distracting temptations every day? If so, Curt Steinhorst and Jonathan McKee are about to drill down into the nature of distraction in our constantly connected workplace. They'll reveal the hidden costs, and outline the strategies and systems needed to tackle the problem head on – and get productive results.

The book is packed with simple rules and guidelines that will improve focus and create the mental space needed to enable individuals to work to their full potential. EAs who believe they, their employees or their organisation can be more productive but aren't sure how to get there can learn how to:

- Take back control of the technology in your organisation and life
- Establish a 'Communication Compact' that defines how, when and why a team will communicate with each other
- Create a 'Value' to increase productivity, decrease stress and boost creativity
- Implement a comprehensive organisational strategy to increase focus and overcome digital distraction.



## **How to Persuade: The skills you need to get what you want**

by Michelle Bowden

Every day we're faced with moments where we either win or lose, whether it's trying to convince your boss to approve your leave, secure a business deal or even win an argument with friends. But does anyone know the key to winning most of the time? It seems you might, with the help of Michelle Bowden's latest release...

Packed with proven techniques and engaging real world examples, you'll learn how to recognise and improve your persuasive strengths and weaknesses, adapt your persuasion style where necessary, build undeniable likeability and trust to compel people to action, arouse passion and enthusiasm for your ideas and, ultimately, persuade anyone, anywhere, anytime.

# CAREER

Professional development tips for executive-level PAs

THE FINAL WORD FROM A CHIEF OF STAFF



JO JONES

## Why relationship management is important and how you can improve yours

**Resilient, approachable,** collaborative, warm, dependable, authentic, trustworthy... You will have your own views on what these words mean but one fundamental opinion that combines all EAs is that we are all of these things. And we have to be to get our jobs done.

A person I used to work with many years ago was a very unpleasant individual and didn't succeed in her position because of how she conducted herself. She was utterly convinced that if her role title was changed from EA to Senior EA, she would automatically get the respect she deserved – her words not mine – and nobody could tell her any differently. This, of course, was not how it worked.

Instead, as you will know, gaining buy-in from everybody we interact with is key to our own success as EAs... And, subsequently, key to the success of our boss and wider organisation. Quite simply, our reputation is everything and relationship management is extremely important for EAs. We cannot deliver without our colleagues and peers on the same journey with us, it's just not possible. And, unlike my previous colleague, we don't automatically get that buy-in. Proactive management of our stakeholders is necessary. But it's rarely easy and never just simply given.

### Five ways to supercharge your relationship management

- Most of us have a level of emotional intelligence and that's the sweet spot. Being able to read a room or a situation effortlessly will let you press forward with your journey – or pull back and review depending on what you're doing. This intel gives us an understanding of the requests made and feedback received, and helps us bridge any gaps, which ultimately creates

stronger relationships (Talking of requests, don't say 'yes' to everything. Having the confidence to say 'no' goes towards getting that crucial buy-in that makes us successful).

- Trust me when I say, stay away from emotional decision-making. Of course, everyone's feelings are valid but reactions and passions will send you on a pathway of decision-making you don't want to be on!
- Facts are essential for us to gain trust from our colleagues (conjecture has no place in the high-level assistant's mindset) and they help us help our bosses because what they don't know, we can find out for them.
- Don't know something? Can't do something? Transparency is key. Say it as it is and don't make anything up as you go. Being open and honest will quickly build a foundation of trust amongst your various stakeholders.
- If you acknowledge, internally, the different personalities that you deal with day-to-day but make sure to avoid internal politics, you won't go far wrong. As far as you're concerned you are forever neutral... And subsequently will be successful!

Being chief of staff, although becoming more in demand, is still very much misunderstood and we can't assume that what we do and why is widely known. Therefore, we need to be a key communicator, working with trust – which we have earned, of course – while recognising that we're operating with a level of 'narrowed' trust from across our organisations. As you are the closest person to those at the top, it's not uncommon for us to be treated like some out of space creature, with caution! ☒

Jo Jones is deputy chief of staff at Institute and Faculty of Actuaries



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