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Perth Modern School

What Employers REALLY Want

ANNUAL MODERNIAN ORATION

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What Employers **SAY** They Want

The Need for Employees With: A Greater Level of Resilience

'Resilience' is code for broken workplaces

WHEN ABC chair Ita Buttrose declared that the generation born between 1981 and 1996 lacked resilience, needing “hugs” and constant reassurance, millennials around the country were left marinating in misery.

Resilience is a first-class buzzword. It rolls off the tongue, is satisfying to say and ambiguous enough not to mean a great deal when spruiked around the workplace on a daily basis.

Often referred to as “mental toughness”, “grit” and sometimes “stamina”, resilience is linked to statements such as “the ability

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to suck it up and get on with it”, “toughen up”, and “what doesn’t kill you will make you stronger”.

If we had none, our mental health would suffer enormously and we would not be able to deal with even the least difficult situations.

Besides, our workplaces are awash with all types of stressors, such as job insecurity, wobbly financial

markets, regular restructures and panic-stricken bosses.

But people invariably do not fail because they lack resilience.

They end up lacking resilience because workplace circumstances set them up for failure.

Often the leaders yelling the loudest about workers lacking resilience are the ones who use the “toughen up” line to obscure less-than-ideal work environments.

James from accounts struggles with an oppressively excessive workload. His boss tells him he must become more resilient. The truth is the

boss should be managing James’ workload more fairly.

Laura from sales claims she’s being bullied by a colleague after a number of repeated and ugly one-way communications. She, too, is accused of being overly sensitive and “overreacting” to a routine bout of workplace conflict. Laura’s boss does not understand his obligations to provide a psychologically safe work environment for all employees.

John, a bricklayer, regularly becomes upset when colleagues use racial slurs to target his ethnic background.

His boss, who has no

concept of discrimination, tells John to “grow some balls”.

It is perfectly appropriate in any workplace to have to deal with tight deadlines, peak times of extra work and difficult situations that might arise every so often. But it is simply not OK to accuse others — regardless of the generation to which they belong — of lacking resilience only to mask a broken or toxic workplace culture.

Besides, when we shut down everyday experiences that expose our vulnerabilities by being told to toughen up, we deny workers the opportunity to develop both

the emotional skills and behaviours that end up defining resilience. In other words, we must at times be able to live vulnerably to learn how to be more resilient.

Millennials are no less resilient than any other generation. Nor are they the bulletproof beings that some bosses desire. But they are more aware of their rights — and those rights include being part of a workplace where everyone is respected and no one is exploited or excluded.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

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The Need for Employees With: A Greater Level of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional smarts big factor in success

YOU'VE brought together a group of workmates and asked them to reflect on the qualities of their least admired colleagues.

When the results are in, chances are they will highlight someone who displays a lack of emotional intelligence or, to be more technically correct, a colleague who has a low emotional intelligence quotient (EQ).

Simply put, EQ is the ability to identify and manage one's emotions at the same time as being able to influence the emotions of others.

Some mistake EQ with a

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colleague's general lack of agreeableness or unhappiness, or a co-worker's lack of calmness or optimism.

In the modern workplace, EQ is considered a "must have" when it comes to working with others.

This is a big change from the past when raw intellectual horsepower, or IQ, was regarded as the single-most important

ingredient if you wanted to advance your career.

If you have ever wondered where you sit on the EQ continuum, consider the following pointers.

Those with high EQ tend to have a strong capacity for building positive working relationships with their colleagues, business partners and customers.

Considered to be great listeners, those with a healthy EQ possess a seemingly telepathic quality that enables them to pick up on the emotional state of others.

They recognise that for

their every action there will be a reaction.

They therefore frame their responses or actions in any given circumstance in such a way as to enhance professional relationships.

EQ-charged workers are aware of both their strengths and shortcomings because they are aware of their triggers, or what causes their most adverse emotional reactions.

This also enables them to take steps to maintain self-control.

But most of all, those with high EQ are able to keep their egos in check while allowing

others around them to shine. The reverse, of course, is true for those with little or no EQ. They will often be completely overwhelmed by their own emotions.

They will fail to recognise their feelings as they experience them, find it challenging to read other's emotions and often refuse to listen to alternative points of view.

And those with a low EQ reservoir will be somewhat surprised or taken aback when their comments are taken the wrong way by others — and they will regularly feel completely and unfairly misunder-

stood. The good news is that unlike IQ, which is largely determined by genetics, EQ can be learnt, developed and refined — and it starts by you undergoing your own informal assessment of your emotional smarts. Those at the upper end of the EQ continuum are almost certain to have fulfilling working lives, including greater career opportunities.

This should be encouragement enough for you to work on your EQ.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive officer of the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: With Some 'Humbition'

'Humbition' key to exceptional employees

WE'VE all had colleagues who we've considered great employees — reliable, hardworking, committed and bringing a variety of valuable and much-needed skills to the table.

But how do you spot an exceptional employee?

Ask any employer this question and they will be quick to point out there is no magic formula that sets the exceptional employee apart.

But there are some key characteristics they look for and some of them might just surprise you.

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So if you are looking for that promotion, are out to impress your boss this year or have decided you are in need of a career hot streak, then it might be worth taking note of at least some of the characteristics that make for an exceptional employee.

Topping the list of characteristics of exceptional employees is adaptability.

Exceptional employees

think and act way beyond their job descriptions. They respond quickly to an organisation's shifting priorities and jump in and do what is necessary to get a job done — without being asked.

Exceptional employees also have egos — that is what drives them.

However, they possess a unique blend of both humility and ambition, which is sometimes described by experts as "humbition", so their egos rarely get in the way.

Exceptional employees are focused and driven. They are rarely satisfied with the status

quo and gain job satisfaction by taking on new challenges, whether solving some wicked problem or fixing a faulty process or procedure. And in solving problems, they are willing to take calculated risks to achieve the best possible solution.

It probably will not surprise you that exceptional employees demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence, or EQ as it is known. EQ is the capacity to manage your own emotions and those of others — all facilitated by a strong dose of self-awareness.

This high level of EQ

provides a sturdy foundation for being a highly effective team member who demonstrates confidence, communication and leadership skills, and is able to get along with most people — and even neutralise toxic people.

But it is exceptional employees' robust levels of resilience that really help to set them apart from others in the workplace. They have a seemingly innate capacity to absorb negative experiences in their lives and their career, and turn them into positive outcomes.

And they carry out their

role with the utmost integrity — doing the right thing at all times — even when they are not being supervised, which demonstrates the highest moral and ethical principles.

Of course, not all exceptional employees display all of these characteristics, and there are many other qualities that might be mentioned. But if you seek to shine in the workplace, giving these characteristics some thought gets you off to a very good start.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Are Engaged with their Own Self-Care

Burnout means it's time for better self-care

HAVE you witnessed a colleague who is displaying an increasingly negative attitude at work and who regularly talks about quitting their job?

Or what about the colleague who complains of physical ailments, such as headaches, stomach pains or backaches? Or perhaps the co-worker who is easily irritated and blames others for their own mistakes, and who appears to be pulling away from their colleagues.

Chances are, these colleagues are suffering from a debilitating condition doing the rounds of our workplaces.



It's called burnout. While many bosses continue to wonder if the burnout phenomenon is real rather than just an excuse used by workers to dodge extra work, there is growing evidence that says the condition is very real — and an increasing number of workers are cracking under the pressure of heavy workloads.

Experts believe one in four

employees regularly experiences burnout, with close to half of all workers feeling it sometimes.

Even the World Health Organisation (WHO) has homed in on the condition by describing it as a work-based syndrome caused by chronic stress.

WHO says burnout's broad characteristics include feelings of depleted energy levels, increased disengagement from one's job and colleagues, and declining professional effectiveness.

It is widely accepted that burnout takes the top spot among workplace productivity

killers and costs businesses billions of dollars each year. Yet many bosses do little to respond to the epidemic.

They talk up the need for workers to take care of themselves, but they then applaud those who work 12-hour days, extend their working spree well into the weekend and front up during holidays — even though it is well known that workaholism is the enemy of self-care and will escalate the already troubling high levels of burnout.

Some bosses have even created an informal expectation that workers must

be switched on 24/7. This means the boundaries between work and play are blurred to the point that some feel guilty any time they are not working, or at the very least find it near impossible to disengage from work.

With more workers cracking under pressure, it's time for workers to step up and embrace the notion of self-care and to rely less on their bosses to ensure they do not fall victim to burnout.

This has to start by you developing an effective professional support network that can provide the right “bolstering” when you need it.

This will include scheduling regular time for self-care activities.

At a minimum, your self-care routine should include getting more sleep, making extra time available to prepare healthy meals, engaging in regular exercise, and taking breaks during the day.

And if you are really keen, purchase a book or two on self-care — you'll be surprised at the changes you might introduce as result of the read.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: With Digital Tattoos That Support their Capability to Carry Out a Role

Digital tattoos can be a ticking time bomb

JUST as some of our workplaces begin to soften their stance towards those who sport ink on their bodies, it is tattoos of a different — but equally permanent — kind that are catching up with our pasts.

From politicians to sporting celebrities, civil servants to police officers, chief executives to artists, the carnage caused by the unearthing of some workers' digital tattoos from a distant past are increasingly casting a powerful spotlight on a cache of disturbing tweets and posts. And it is those tweets and

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posts that can result in professional digital disasters, ranging from damaged reputations to missing out on a job opportunity or even being fired.

Despite their capacity to help to build career prospects, social media platforms are increasingly becoming hard drives of shameful behaviour featuring employees who log on and upset, offend, shame

and even threaten others — and not realising the often dramatic employment-related consequences.

What sits behind a mindset that permits people to jump online and behave so radically differently to how they might in a face-to-face situation?

Social media is still a relatively new phenomenon for many and some may not have learnt the rules of engagement.

We appear confused in this new social setting, which can appear devoid of real people and their feelings.

Our growing levels of bad

behaviour in cyberspace might also be explained by what some experts describe as the online disinhibition effect — a phenomenon that results in people dropping their guard, loosening up and expressing themselves more openly when online.

This often leads to flippant comments, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred and even threats.

Even more disturbing is that our toxic ways seem to have become contagious, to fuel an epidemic of online incivility.

We are dish up rude or hostile behaviour online from

others and we “pay it forward”. However, there is an explanation for this bad behaviour that is even more sinister: social media envy.

This condition causes some users to become so jealous of the heightened levels of attention lathered on others that they set out to attract a much larger share of the hype by purposely knocking out comments online that they wouldn't dare make face to face.

But if you want to protect your ongoing career prospects, turn on “safe-mode” and become a great netizen — one whose

online behaviour matches the very best of who they are offline. That way your digital tattoo could well become a career booster rather than killer.

And remember that, just like a regular tattoo, digital tattoos are not easily erased.

If they resurface, the increased bandwidth you will receive might reveal more about the real you than you care to share with your present or future employers.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Use Technology Constructively

Don't let tech put bullies in the box seat

THE idea of trashing colleagues through bullying is far from new, nor is it news that repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards an individual or group of employees creates a risk to workplace health and safety.

Now a newer and more insidious form of bullying is taking hold of the modern workplace — cyberbullying.

It empowers perpetrators to cause even greater distress and humiliation to colleagues, enables them to act in a more reckless fashion, and to wreak havoc beyond the immediate workplace environment by

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allowing the abuse to spill into the public domain.

Cyberbullying is abhorrent workplace behaviour that takes the form of ongoing intimidation, threats and humiliation, amplified through technology. It represents a much bigger threat than more traditional forms of bullying.

For the workplace cyberbully, the possibilities of attack are endless. Often

colleagues are not even aware they have been targeted until long after an attack has been launched.

While the most frequent and potentially damaging form of workplace cyberbullying makes use of social media to share rumours, outright lies or even personal photos, perpetrators can also harass colleagues through mobile phones, instant messaging and email.

Workplace cyberbullies can post threatening messages on a colleague's social media site, set up social media profiles to make fun of a co-worker, hack into a victim's personal

accounts, tormenting them from within a colleague's user profile and among the victim's own connections.

Anonymous posts on social media are written and not spoken, enabling an element of permanency not often encountered with more traditional forms of bullying.

This serves to elevate a colleague's distress, not to mention the potential for such posts to be viewed by a wide audience to create even greater humiliation for the victim. And because cyberbullying is not restrained by time or location, harassment can continue

outside the workplace to leave little if any respite for victims.

If you are experiencing bullying in your workplace, there are steps you should take in response.

As with any type of bullying, you should report this unacceptable behaviour to someone more senior or a workplace health and safety representative or, at the very least, a trusted colleague.

If you lodge a complaint, your employer should conduct an investigation in a timely and thorough manner, even if you are not able to identify the perpetrator.

Avoid the temptation to

reply to messages that you receive because often your reaction will be exactly what a perpetrator will be looking for.

Keep all evidence of your bullying colleague's attacks on you. If the cyberbullying occurs through a social media site, attempt to block the source of the attack.

Above all, take the high road and attempt to maintain your composure at work — your goal needs to be to remain professional, calm and focussed.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Bolster Workplace Productivity

Work not the place to become a thief of time

ASK most employees what it means to steal from their employer and you are likely to get answers that relate to taking home office stationery, or fabricating work-related expenses.

But there is another form of theft that is far more prevalent in our workplaces than we care to acknowledge.

And it is growing and impacting heavily on the bottom lines of many Australian organisations.

Time theft occurs when employees accept payment for time that they did not put into

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their work. This type of theft is more easily executed by those with fixed paid hours, as opposed to those in salaried positions who must perform the job regardless of the hours required to do it.

It occurs in many different forms across most workplaces, but it is one particular type that has thrust the concept into the spotlight — using paid

work time for online personal activities.

How often, for example, have you spent time at work surfing online to get the best airfares for your overseas summer vacation?

Or perhaps you have been made aware of a sale at your favourite retailer, yet because of your work commitments you have not been able to shop in store. Instead, you embarked on a spot of online shopping during working time to secure a bargain.

Maybe it is an activity as simply and innocuous — to you, anyway — as whiling

away your work day chatting to your cyber friends on your favourite social media sites, or even just paying your bills online during the work day.

The bottom line is that if you engage in these behaviours regularly, then you are most probably guilty of using company paid time and resources when you are supposed to be working.

Therefore, you are committing time theft.

For many employees who engage in time theft, it does not stop at online surfing.

Think also about the paid work time that you devote to

lengthy, non-work related chats, those extended breaks and those extra-late starts, or even those early knock-offs.

And at the more extreme end, do you run your own business on the side and spend time returning emails or taking calls for that business during your employer's time?

Or do you use your time in front of the work computer to sell some of your unwanted personal items on eBay?

Of course, most employers acknowledge and accept that many employees will devote a small amount of work time to attending to personal matters

— and many employees will make up the time by reducing their breaks or extending their work hours.

But the bottom line is that time theft reduces productivity. Employers are now moving to stem the flow of resources lost because of time theft. So, next time you decide to play an online computer game during work time, perhaps rethink that move — you'll be a winner in the eyes of your employer.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Embrace Older Workers

Maturity in the workplace a bonus, not a bind

It is rarely blatant and often quite difficult to spot, but it is coming to a workplace near you. Welcome to the not so wonderful world of ageism, where employees — usually over the age of 50 — are passed over for jobs, promotions and training on the grounds of age.

Most experts on workplace-based ageism agree the foundation for age-related discrimination is linked to the perception that older workers are technophobic and resistant to change, have lower levels of energy, are unable to learn new skills quickly, and are generally less innovative and creative.

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A second layer of negative perceptions relate to the health of older workers, who employers sometimes view as lacking an adequate level of fitness and regard as physically slower and more prone to injury.

For most older workers, none of this is true.

In fact, many older workers demonstrate a range of highly favourable and attractive characteristics, including

workplace loyalty, stability, reliability and maturity.

On top of this, many older workers have well-developed leadership skills, refined communication skills and often have strong networks, which can be an asset to the organisation.

But perhaps the greatest value older workers bring is experience, or, put another way, workplace wisdom.

Older workers have learnt how to get along with colleagues, how to solve problems without fuss, and are willing to call for support when needed.

There are many signs suggesting a workplace is ageist.

For example, in an ageist workplace there is often subtle pressure from management for older staff to stop working to make way for the younger generation.

But it does not stop there.

Ask yourself:

IS there a pattern of hiring only younger employees?

DO people frequently joke or tease an employee about their age?

ARE older employees encouraged to retire or accept voluntary redundancies?

DOES workplace flexibility favour younger employees with more a rigid approach applied to older employees?

ARE the more challenging assignments and tasks allocated to younger employees?

DO older workers tend to be isolated or excluded in workplace-related social activities?

If the answer to any of these question is yes, you could well be working in an ageist workplace.

Employers interested in reaping the many benefits associated with older employees should look for signs of ageism in the workplace and develop strategies to remove the barriers that older workers may face.

They can train managers to help eradicate biases and

embrace age diversity, and they can ensure employment policies address issues related to discrimination on the basis of age. They can also ensure older workers have access to training so they continue to make meaningful contributions to the workplace.

Organisations play a fundamental role in creating fair and inclusive workplaces that both attract and retain the talent needed for ongoing success.

That includes embracing workers of all ages.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Have a Sense of Balance

When perfection is bad for the greater good

EVERY workplace has at least one person who clings to incredibly and unrealistically high standards, and pursues every work task in a flawless fashion.

While the approach of the perfectionist might seem to demonstrate an outstanding work ethic, the reality is that no one is perfect.

And to strive for perfection can be a treacherous move.

There is a huge difference between an appetite to excel and an insatiable need to be perfect.

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The workplace perfectionist's voracious need to be flawless often results in excellent work outputs.

But the journey of getting to the final destination can be fraught with twists and turns that can derail performance.

Perfectionists are their own worst enemies because the fear of failure quashes their belief in their own ability to succeed.

They agonise over every detail when completing a task, causing projects to fall behind schedule.

They become defensive and appear crushed when given feedback, which might be of a critical nature, and they become obsessed by their errors and dwell on even the smallest mistakes for hours — if not days.

And it gets worse.

Perfectionists in management positions are capable of becoming the most horrendous micro-managers and refuse to delegate even the most basic of tasks, creating morale problems and

frustration within their teams.

And because perfectionists view everything as equally important, they are particularly ineffective at prioritising, which is arguably one of the single-most important tasks of a manager.

If you think you might be a perfectionist, there are number of steps you can take to start to kick your habit into touch.

First, recognise that you might have a problem and ask yourself two basic questions.

Do you have trouble meeting the standards you set

for yourself, and do you get anxious or depressed when trying to meet those standards?

If you answered yes to both, this may well be a red flag.

If you are able to identify and accept that you are a perfectionist, it is useful to try to reframe this reality through positive thoughts, such as, "I can only do my best", "making a mistake does not mean I am incompetent", and "nobody is perfect".

Some perfectionists find it useful to practise being imperfect by deliberately choosing in advance those

tasks they will complete well, but without their usual level of perfection.

Completing tasks well but in an imperfect way often helps them realise the world will not come to an end if a task is not completed in a flawless manner.

Just remember that if you are able to keep in mind that "what's perfect" and "what's possible" are two different things, you will likely be able to function more effectively in the workplace.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Know and Show Appropriate Workplace Etiquette

When a work colleague has offensive habits

FROM clipping finger nails at the desk to passing wind in a confined office or enjoying a pungent lunch snack at your desk — some of your colleagues do have offensive habits that if left unchecked can make your working life miserable.

And while clipping nails or passing wind in close proximity to others might hit the offensive end of the courtesy continuum, there are a raft of lower-key but nonetheless annoying and mildly disgusting behaviours that might cause you grief. Think crunching potato chips, slurping coffee, pen clicking,



constant throat clearing, sniffing and heavy breathing.

While some people couldn't care less about annoying sounds, for others the munching and snorting along with powerful smells can unhinge and unsettle them and greatly impact on their productivity.

And with the rise of open-plan offices, in which privacy is a thing of the past

and desk lunches can reign supreme, these issues have only been exacerbated.

If you are in the annoyed or disgusted camp, it might be time to think about whether you take some action to address a colleague's bad habit.

Firstly, work out whether a colleague's habit is something easy or more challenging to put right.

If a colleague is annoying you every so often with slurping a thick soup at their desk, the problem is fixable — have your headphones on standby to block out the sound.

But if, for example, your colleague wears a suffocating fragrance which lingers long into the day, every day, to give you a daily mild headache, the challenge is greater.

Confronting your colleague is good start but it will all come down to how you deliver your message. Adopting a blaming, aggressive or whining tone might result in your colleague digging in and creating a bigger problem for you.

On the other hand, a friendly appeal to refrain from the annoying habit or practice will more than likely deliver the outcome

that you are hoping for.

If the problem persists, though, you can try to enlist allies. If the request to desist a discourteous or disruptive habit comes from more than one of the offender's colleagues, strength in numbers may well give you the result you are looking for.

And if you get really stuck, think about dusting off that "how to behave in the workplace bible" — the employee manual — which perhaps you have never consulted.

While there might not specifically be a reference to "passing wind in a confined

space", it might refer broadly to inappropriate workplace behaviour, which could be used to your advantage in dealing with a persistent offender.

Remember, it is usually best to be honest with your colleague in "calling out" actions, habits and behaviours that impede your productivity.

Adopting an approach that firmly sets out your concerns in a courteous and respectful way will usually pay dividends.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

The Need for Employees: Who Are Confident to Network

Networking doesn't need to be awkward

Have you ever been to a function or event designed to create business or strategic networks, only to find that many staff tend to gather in clusters with people they know and avoid chatting with invited guests?

The fact is many employees feel uncomfortable in a face-to-face networking environment. For many, engagement in the networking process is awkward, painful and feels "forced" or unnatural.

For those who find themselves thrust into face-to-face networking situations there has often been little discussion

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or development on how "best to network" and avoid turning it into an awkward — and unproductive — occasion.

So how does one get the best out of an uncomfortable networking situation?

The most effective networking sessions are those that come with goals attached. The goals might be linked to who to meet and the reasons for wanting to meet those people. Some

preparation by way of gathering background information on those on the "meet and greet" target list is desirable.

Skilled networkers overcome their discomfort by "breaking in" to clusters of people at an event. They develop the confidence to move towards a group and position themselves around that group until they are drawn into the discussion.

And just like any introduction, first impressions are important.

So those attending a networking event should give some thought to an "introductory pitch". A short, sharp

introduction that typically lasts no longer than 30 seconds is best — any longer and the listener might get an impression of self-centredness or they might even lose interest in you joining the discussion.

Effective networkers use the information they have researched about an individual to make a connection with that person. Asking a question about a person's role or making a comment about a past achievement helps to establish a relationship. They plan open-ended type questions to create meaningful discussions and avoid a conversation being cut short by "yes" or "no" answers.

While many view networking as an opportunity to "win" something — think resources, access, promotion, job opportunities — effective networkers recognise that they need to give to receive.

They are helpful to and supportive of those they had planned to meet and attempt to provide some balance early on to guide the type of relationship they want to establish.

Above all, effective networkers are effective listeners. They are genuinely interested in others, listen carefully and respond meaningfully to what has been said.

The biggest challenge for

networking? Even some of the most proficient networkers find it challenging to move on from one person or group to the next without seeming rude.

So just like you need to plan your introduction to join the conversation, the skilled networker must plan a graceful exit.

And, by the way, effective networkers follow up on their conversations. If you promised some form of post-meeting action, make sure you follow through with it — promptly.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA

Thank you

