



The Weekend West Saturday 19/03/2011

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LEADERSHIP Q+A with Ian Laurance

The Perth Convention Bureau chairman tells **Rachel Donkin** that Sir Charles Court taught him about dedication

Q What does leadership mean to you?

A I'm very committed and passionate about all the things I take on, and I guess I expect those around me to be the same. Of my leadership style, I think it's inclusive. I like to involve all the stakeholders and people around me.

Q How has your leadership style changed?

A I don't think it has. It's probably matured — I'm probably a better listener!

Q Which person in business do you most admire?

A There are several of my contemporaries: (Rio Tinto Iron Ore boss) Sam Walsh comes to mind immediately — he's been a generous sponsor of a number of tourism-related projects, particularly in the Pilbara, that I've taken to him; (former Challenge Bank chief executive) Tony Howarth is another one — as well as being a great businessman, he helped me change what used to be the Perth Superdrome (in Mt Claremont) into Challenge Stadium; and Lynda Dorrington, the inspirational head of FORM — she's done wonderful things in arts and culture, particularly with the Pilbara community. But the person who's had the most influence on my life has been Sir Charles Court — he appointed me a minister back in 1980; I was minister for tourism and minister

for regional development and the North West. He had a great passion for the Pilbara and the Kimberley and I shared that with him and worked very closely with him. He taught me a huge amount about discipline and dedication and, looking back now, I think if I could even be a little bit like him I'll turn out all right.

Q Best advice?

A I helped my brother Peter start his own business 40 years ago — we're still in business today — and his philosophy is "just keep going — never give up".

Q What was or is your biggest business challenge?

A I'm involved in one at the moment: in addition to my chairmanship of the Perth Convention Bureau I'm also chairman of a mining company, Arafura Resources. In three years we're transforming from a junior explorer to a major chemical producer — we're going to be producing rare earth oxides. It's a huge, but exciting, challenge.

Q What was the most important event in your career?

A Being elected to State Parliament in 1974. More recently — just a week ago — I was awarded the greatest contribution by an individual to the tourism industry at the Australian Tourism Awards. I wasn't even aware I'd been nominated; it was a heck of a

surprise!

Q What's your outlook for the Australian economy over the next year and five years?

A Unfortunately, we've been through an unprecedented bout of natural disasters, in Australia and around the world, so we've got to get through all the challenges to do with the reconstruction effort (in the short term). But longer term I see tremendous growth. I spend a lot of time in China, particularly with my work in the resources industry, and I've witnessed the growth over there.

Q Does money motivate you?

A Not particularly. I've been involved with many organisations and what motivates me is seeing individuals, and organisations, succeed. I've had a lot of enjoyment and satisfaction over the years seeing people reach their potential.

Q How have you encouraged a work/life balance for employees during your career?

A I've been fortunate to reach a stage in my life where I only do things that I enjoy; work is my life because that's what I enjoy. So I encourage my employees or associates to find what they enjoy doing, and that tends to lead to a good work/life balance.

Q What gadget can you not do without?

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A My iPhone.

Q How do you relax?

A Golf; swimming and grandkids. I have three. They're great.

Q What would you do to improve Perth or WA?

A I think Perth's progressing as a city; my focus is on the regions. The project that the State Government's embarking on —

Pilbara Cities — is very exciting. I've been campaigning for years now for Broome to (host) an international airport, and I'd still like to see that happen. And just more growth, infrastructure, in the regions — WA is 90 per cent about Perth and 10 per cent about the rest, but it's a huge area and a lot of the wealth comes from there. Queensland is a great example. They've got Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton — a number of large cities along the coast — and I think we can follow that.



Inspired: Ian Laurance is motivated by seeing individuals and organisations succeed. Picture: Nic Ellis