

REAL ESTATE
Journal

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WHAT A YEAR!
The REINSW Board
reflects on a remarkable year

AI FOR EVERYONE
How to approach AI
with an open mind

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE
Celebrating the stars
of real estate

**Honestly
determined**

**Radical honesty and rising to every
opportunity defines Ewan Morton's
stellar career**



Honestly determined

When Ewan Morton decided back in his 20s that he wanted to run his own real estate business, it seemed like a simple goal to achieve. Now, looking back on years of overcoming setbacks, rising to unexpected challenges and dealing with life's inevitable curveballs, the Joint Managing Director of Morton can't help but laugh at how wrong his younger self was.

By TINA LIPTAI



“There really is no short cut to success, so it's important that you enjoy the journey and not be so focused on the destination. If you're taking small steps towards your goals every day, then you are making progress – and that's the only way to achieve big goals.”



After building a successful real estate career overseas, Ewan Morton found that establishing himself in Australia wasn't a smooth transition.

“It was stupid in hindsight,” he laughed. “I had basically no experience working in the Australian market as an agent, and had no contacts or client base to build from. I was starting completely from scratch and thought I would be able to just grow a business.

“Those first five years were extremely challenging and much harder than I expected, but they were also very formative to where the business went after that.”

An unconventional start

Ewan, like many agents and real estate business owners, didn't have a linear path to success.

After completing a Bachelor of Economics at Sydney University, Ewan was accepted into the IBM Graduate Training Program, where he went on to work for three years. Though he enjoyed his time at IBM, the pull to explore the world was strong and Ewan decided to take a voluntary redundancy and go travelling.

When it was time to come home, Ewan knew he wanted to find a way to eventually run his own business. With his father already experienced in the industry, Ewan had a good understanding of real estate and felt like it would be a good fit.

“One of the things that initially drew me to real estate is that I like the idea that if you do

more, you get more,” he explained. “There are lots of industries where if you are selling and you do well, then you are rewarded with higher targets or quotas to meet – but real estate is not that kind of environment.”

Ewan landed a role at Laing+Simmons in Annandale. But it wasn't long before there was a twist in his career path and he was offered the opportunity to move overseas and work for Colliers Jardine selling Australian property to investors in Hong Kong.

“It was a great experience for me,” he said of the move. “At the time, in 1992, Australia was in a recession, so things were tough here – but in Hong Kong everything was buzzing. There was great energy.”

As the lead for the firm's Australia and New Zealand International Properties Group, Ewan was very much thrown into the deep end. But the appetite for investing in Australian property was strong and he notched up a big sale within his first two weeks in the role.

A few years later, London was calling and Ewan landed at a UK firm located just down the road from Kensington Palace. The experience he gained from selling London property to locals set Ewan up to then take on yet another new opportunity and relocate to Singapore to head up a team selling London property to Singapore investors.

“Yeah, it was a bit of an unusual start to a career in real estate,” he admitted.

Why I love real estate

"What I love most about what I do is the people I work with," Ewan said. "I enjoy trying to find out what people want, where they want to go and then do everything I can to help them to get there."

"Everyone has some magic – some talent – and when you find it and engage with it, you'll get the best out of them and they will thrive. Some people have been with Morton for more than 20 years and I'm proud of that longevity. The quality of the people makes a big difference to the health of a business."

"I love that the real estate industry has given me the opportunity to carve my own path and build a strong business. Being a leader isn't easy, but it's something I've always been attracted to, even when I was a kid at school."

"Leadership is challenging on so many levels, but it's critical to growing a business. If I'm passionate about something, I find a way to do it – so I read a lot of books about leadership and business, and the work of Brené Brown particularly resonates with me."

"I want to be a good leader and be known as a good leader."



"A lot of people are not prepared to do what is needed to be successful. They're not prepared for the hard work. That's the difference between people who have longevity in business and those who don't. Success requires consistency and persistence."



Putting down roots

Despite the thrills of working in international markets, Ewan was still passionate about achieving his goal of owning his own business. So, in 1996, he decided to move back to Sydney and put his plan into action.

After some initial choppy waters, including splitting from his business partner, by 1998 Ewan had launched his business – Morton – and built up his property management business to 40 managements.

The business slowly grew and four years later he had the opportunity to manage the leasing of all apartments at a new development – Finger Wharf at Woolloomooloo.

"The developer wanted one person to manage all 260 investors, it was a big job," he recalled. "There have been a lot of twists and turns in my career – and this is one of them. It was a very tricky project and I came close to giving up, but what I learnt during this time changed the dynamics of our business entirely."

"There were too many apartments and the rental prices were set too high for the market. I know that's hard to imagine when you look at today's market. It was a tricky situation, but the most valuable lesson I learnt was around giving bad news. No one wants to give bad news, but I realised the client expects you to give them bad news – it's part of the job and it's an important part of leadership."

"Because I was proactive in telling my clients the truth about what was happening, they all went along with the plan I was proposing, which was to lower the rent until we found the right price for the market. I only lost one owner. I learnt the importance of telling the truth and having empathy, because that's what clients want from you."

It was during this time that Ewan doubled down on his commitment to his business and realised he needed to redefine what success looked like.

"I remember thinking that I should be proud of what I had already achieved, but I felt like I was just barely surviving. I decided that I'd do whatever it took to make this business thrive," he said. "A lot of people are not prepared to do what is needed to be successful. They're not prepared for the hard work. That's the difference between people who have longevity in business and those who don't. Success requires consistency and persistence."

Radical honesty

The success of the Fringe Wharf project gave Morton a solid rent roll, which helped Ewan take the business into the next phase of growth.

"I took what I had learnt into the negotiations with the bank to obtain a loan to expand the business," Ewan explained. "Some people thought I was crazy to be so candid and transparent with the bank, but it was important to me to be genuine and honest. I used it as a learning experience and a way to test how good the business was. After all, the bank is going to lend you money if your business is doing well."

With the loan eventually secured, Ewan then acquired two real estate businesses, which proved to be yet another big learning curve.

"One of the businesses merged successfully and one did not," he said. "From that, I realised how important cultural fit is. If you're trying to merge with a business that doesn't value the same things you do, it's simply not going to work out."

Since then, Morton has continued on a steady trajectory of expansion and today has 3,500 managements and eight offices across Sydney.

Lessons learnt

After all the career curveballs Ewan has navigated, what comes across most clearly is his resilience and willingness to still learn on the job.

"I think of it like this – if you can get out of bed and you're breathing, you might as well try your best," he said. "Even if nothing works out how you want it to, the worst case is you've learnt something."

"Having said that, I've also learnt that sometimes doing your best isn't going to be good enough to get the result you want. It's important to be able to reflect and self-evaluate, so you can get better. At the end of the day, if I fail but have done my best then I'm OK with that. I reflect on what went wrong and work out what to do differently."

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Woodrow Weight Award

The Woodrow Weight Award is REINSW's highest honour and bestowing it each year is a time-honoured tradition, acknowledging the outstanding contributions of a member to REINSW and the real estate industry. At the 2024 REINSW Awards for Excellence Gala Dinner, Ewan was announced as the recipient and joined the honour roll of our industry's greats.

Ewan has been a member of REINSW since the early days of his career. He's passionate about doing all he can to support the work of the Institute, as well as advocating for members and the wider industry – but he never thought his name would be called out as the recipient of the Woodrow Weight Award.

"It's funny, each year at the Gala Dinner, I always try to guess who will receive the Woodrow Weight Award," he laughed. "I know a lot of people in the industry, so it's a fun thing to see if I can piece together who it is from the speech before the name is announced. This year, when I heard that the person started their career at IBM, I genuinely thought, 'I wonder who that could be?' I really had no idea it was me!"

Ewan said that he's proud to be able to give back to the organisation that has supported him so much.

"I've always been a big fan of what REINSW does with lobbying government and I think it's important we are represented," he said. "REINSW has also helped me so much with education and learning, and has always been an important source of information. Also, the Helpline Team were so fantastic to me early in my career; they knew me so well because I called all the time!"

"I am humbled to receive the Woodrow Weight Award and it really means a lot. It's definitely inspired me and given me a lift. It's nice to know my contribution is appreciated."

"Since the announcement, I've received many, many messages from people to congratulate me and say they think I deserve it – and that's a really wonderful feeling. It's given me the motivation to keep pushing forward."



Ewan's top tips for real estate success

1. Play a long game

Think of real estate as a career from day one. Build your skills, decide where you're going to specialise and focus on that as soon as possible. Try not to move around to new agencies too much. Plan to stick with an agency for the long run, and if you don't like something that's happening, fix it.

2. Build leadership skills

Being a good leader is going to deliver you more success in the long run. Focus on building those skills, rather than spending all your time prospecting. Sales agents need to be good leaders.

3. Enjoy work

Take joy in the process. After all, you're going to spend a lot of time working so you might as well enjoy it. If you can get to a point where you like working hard that's a great start, because real estate is a lot of hard work.

4. Have clear goals

Drill down and be clear about what you're trying to achieve. Then put realistic steps in place that you can take to reach your goals.