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A lust for life: Meet Harry Lustig

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Flat white, please. After placing his order – and shooting the server he knows by name a quick, warm smile – Harry Lustig turns to face the window. Gazing out through the glass towards Ikeman Street's busy Monday afternoon hub, he gathers his thoughts. Now, looking to face me across the table at Harper's Kitchen – the coffee shop across the road from his office – Harry takes a deep breath. His eyes, alive and interested, dance. He chuckles. Edules. Passos. And tells me his story.



'I was the daggy kid': Harry's sporting school days

Growing up, there was one thing on Harry's mind – sport.
 In secondary school, sport was my life. You name it, I was playing it! I was the daggy kid at a new school, so sport was my way of fitting in.
 But he didn't just fit in. He stood out – and shined up.
 In a single year, Harry topped up the school's top awards for soccer and volleyball – as well as others, and overall champion, of the year. Throughout his secondary school years, he coached and captained teams across codes to fame and glory. (More glory, less fame.)
 Naturally, then, Harry harboured dreams of becoming a PE teacher. But fate had other plans.
 Because while it was always sport – rather than school – that thrilled Harry's friends, he headed off to fit the books. To Warwick University, in fact, to which he credits a year of personal growth, independence, and resilience.
 Always interested in the mind's machinations, Harry delved in psychology, sociology, and politics. Soon, though, his studies saw him stumble upon something about himself. That it wasn't studying people that motivated him. But talking to them.
 Harry dropped out, and a string of part-time jobs followed. Pizza delivery. Tending the counter at the local bottle-o. And going door-to-door for a market research company, surveying southeast Melbourne's populace from the thresholds of their homes.
 'I couldn't work in a call centre,' says Harry. He grimaces as he goes, as though irritated by the idea of being sat, idling, behind a phone. 'I needed the presence – and purpose – of meeting tangible people.
 In many ways, that door-to-door role was my first introduction to real estate: seeing, and sometimes entering, different types of properties. Talking to people, understanding them.'
 Which begs the question. Just how did Harry get into real estate, exactly?



Pinball and pizza: When Harry met Gary

'It was a hell of a fun, really.'
 Harry smiles, digging through decades of memory. 'My dad just turned to me one day and asked me if I'd ever thought about real estate.'
 It was an interesting moment – especially considering Harry's father had nothing to do with real estate houses. (He was a tailor and, along with Harry's mother, an active participant in the local Yiddish theatre community.)
 Before long, Harry had taken up his dad's suggestion, and was cutting his teeth in the property management team at a local agency UMS. That was, Harry's best friend Mark introduced him to his housemate – a young, ambitious chap by the name of Gary Peet.
 It was 1995. Gary had been running his own real estate business for five years, and his property manager was leaving. Might his new mate be interested in the opportunity?
 For Harry, it wasn't simply a case of the right place, at the right time – but the right person.
 'I had to say, in one word, why I've been with the company for this long?' reflects Harry. 'It's Gary. He's honest, trustworthy, reliable – those traits all resonated with me. And still do.
 'We clicked immediately.'
 Soon, Harry was Gary's right-hand man. The two were working closely, broadly whether it was the weekend's auctions by day, or Friday-Saturday's early morning viewings by night.
 'We'd be not playing pinball and making pizza until 2am,' remembers Harry. 'Then he'd go off to see a client, I'd head in the other, and we'd be out selling our auction books and flags of fun.
 'I'd be in the office by then, and he'd be congratulating an auction at 8am. We were running on passion, pepperoni – and pure adrenaline.'
 To this day, Harry's love for, and loyalty to, Gary's plain to see.
 'Gary works from the heart,' says Harry. 'And that's pretty special.'



Managing properties, and people: Harry's calling

Months became years; years became decades.
 Now, in 2023, Harry is a Senior Property Manager & Team Leader at one of our two Ikeman Street offices. He manages a portfolio of 400 properties, plus a team of five – a position that, in a sports hall of who once aspired to be a PE teacher, he's a natural fit for.
 As a coach and captain, what fueled me was putting people in the spot where I felt they'd excel, about encouraging them to do better. I have seeing them around me reach their potential.'
 What does Harry love most about his role, then?
 'I enjoy that mix of being in the office and out on the road. You're meeting people every day – something I still love. Each day can be just as fun as it is a challenge in the way that some before.
 'I like to learn about other people – tenants, rental providers, independent – because you quickly realise that everyone has a story to share.
 'And I love clients.'
 Of course, Harry's job also lets him show off one of his natural talents – his gift of the gab. For over the milestones, Harry's been working around since his time, as a child, in the Yiddish theatre where his parents were keen participants.
 Harry finds his stage at 10. And in a number of Ikeman's Classic Cinema, you'll find a gold-framed photo with a young, star-eyed Harry beaming back at you.
 Yet, when asked if he's a natural showman, Harry is surprisingly shy.
 'Well, I suppose when I have to describe clients I am,' he admits. 'But I'm generally not the sort of guy who likes to be the centre of attention. I'm often the quiet one in the background.
 'Change on the showfloor?'

Don't judge, empathise: Harry's formula for success

A vibrant, memorable personality. Harry's best name – Louie – means 'happy' in Yiddish. Not if it's more than a name; it's a philosophy. Affectionately dubbed 'Louie Harry' by his colleagues, Harry's blend of candour, enthusiasm, and experience sets the tone.
 He's quick with a self-deprecating joke, too – and will be the first to point out that he's been working for Gary Peet longer than most of his clients have been alive.
 So – what advice does someone who's been in real estate for more than three and a half decades have for aspiring property managers?
 'You need to keep in mind that there's a lot going on in people's lives – not only their rental property. There could be family issues, or financial problems – and you can't always assume people have the money to do things up.
 'It's about taking an open, non-judgmental approach to every conversation. And attempting to understand, and empathise with, the person you're talking to.'
 As for the key to Harry's stellar property management career, he's quick to point out that the formula for success isn't a secret. But a skillset.
 'Property management is about three things: being organised, solving problems, and communicating – all day, every day.
 'It's why I come to work with a mental baseball bat. I think, "Whatever comes at me today – I'm gonna deal with it!"'



Saints and sunshine: Mr Happy's happy home

Work, of course, is only a part of Harry's life. So, away from the office and the properties, where will you find Harry? Only he knows.
 At the Marvel Stadium, cheering on his beloved Saints. Taking to the tarmac to give his big beloved motorcycle a spin. Or heading to the garden of his humble waterbed home in Fairfield.
 Harry's greatest love, though? His partner of 38 years, Leanne.
 Together, the two enjoy nothing more than travelling the world. Between a recent Sydney road trip, Southeast Asia, and extended holidays to Europe, Gary's Sun Sebastian to Harry's favourite destination in Dubai, there's no shortage of sun-soaked moments.
 It's worth asking – might Harry be considering setting to a track by the sea any time soon?
 Not a chance.
 'I don't think I could ever retire,' Harry chuckles. 'I need something to do. I don't watch much TV. I'm not at all an home-and-read type of person. Even on holidays, I can only sit on a beach for so long.'
 Harry relishes a recent anecdote, and it's a perfect encapsulation of his vitality. His veins, his almost-constant pulse, pulse through, despite the inevitable sleeping jitters Harry's demonstrated throughout his 32-year (and counting!) Gary Peet career. This is a man who can't sit still.
 'Leanne and I went to Thailand last month,' Harry grins. 'Usually, on these holidays I hire a scooter, so we can go exploring. This time, there wasn't one nearby – which Leanne was grateful for. She says she doesn't need the anxiety of the traffic and noise – she's over that.'
 So what does do? Harry chuckles, open to anything. 'Get a mountain bike.'



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