



HOW TO ACE YOUR EXIT LIKE BARTY

Leaders urged to leave while on top of their game

ADRIAN LOWE

More of Australia's business leaders should be prepared to emulate tennis world number one Ash Barty, and leave when they're on top, executive coaches say.

But many lack the awareness to do so, or even contemplate doing so, which means they overstay their welcome.

Barty, who announced this week her retirement at age 25 having won three grand slam titles, said she simply had other things to do with her life besides tennis.

While there are clear differences between a professional sporting career and a business career — including that many people at age 25 would be unlikely to be in a position to retire — having the confidence to decide at the top of your game there were other priorities was rare.

Many of Australia's recent

corporate leadership changes have come through scandal forcing the executive's hand or simply hitting retirement age. Perth-based corporate leadership coach Margo Halbert said making a decision like Barty had was about having the "confidence to choose your future".

"And to actually give yourself time and reflection," she said. "In my coaching, I hold people's feet to the fire and say 'Are you a product of circumstance or are you choosing what would most fulfil you in your life?'"

"Business leaders who don't stop and question whether they've still got the right energy and focus and passion to give their best, we've all worked for leaders there too long and waiting for the payout, and it's toxic or locked in a contract or their ego."

Margie Hartley, the chief executive and founder of

Gram Consulting Group, said spending time to work out what success looked like was crucial.

"That is the first step for everyone: who are you, and who do you choose to be?" she said.

"Most of us go through the day to day and go through life being pulled from one thing to another. To define success and then spend time working out what that looks like for us is really important. There need to be principles around how you make decisions at any level with your career."

"More people are doing this ... (asking) 'Did I sign up for this, and this kind of life? What do I want from my life?'"

Leadership and Executive Coaching Perth owner Dianne Dawson said business would benefit from having more leaders capable of reflecting and, when needed, making decisions like Barty had.

"We would have a lot more happier people around and their direct reports (would be)," she said.

"We have a lot of poor leadership, people leading people who don't even know how to lead their own lives."

Ms Hartley said she had three clients currently in their 40s and leaving chief executive roles.

"They've nailed it, they've been incredibly successful and turned around and said 'I'm done, seven years is enough in this business, seven years of me is enough of me in this business,'" she said.

"All of those people have done so from a position of thinking 'I'm not done because I'm busted or exhausted or done something wrong, I'm done because I'm making a calculated decision to do the next thing'. More and more I see that."

Ms Halbert said having the

confidence to make such a decision was learnt.

"It's recognising we all have a blind spot and it's recognising the value of mentors, coaches and people that can help hold a mirror up to our lives and create the space to ask the hard questions," she said.

"The leaders I've worked with that have done that are constantly going 'Am I bringing best version of myself?'"

All three expected Barty's decision to prompt broader reflection among business leaders about their future.

"Take the time to take stock of your life and check in with yourself and ask some questions about who you are, what you want and how you're going about it," Ms Hartley said.

"It's not rocket science, but I have to say, it takes work, tools, time and reflection, and it can be uncomfortable."

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MARGO HALBERT



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DIANNE DAWSON

