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HD **Meet Cook, Investa's man in black**
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Investa Office executive Michael Cook had a tough decision to make as the **group** was in the midst of the hostile takeover of Principal Office Fund in 2003.

He had to decide whether Investa would take on a rising star at Principal, Campbell Hanan.

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"I'd formed a view: I didn't want him," Cook tells The Australian. With Cook ready to throw Hanan on the scrap heap, one of his colleagues convinced him to go into the interview with an open mind.

"After about 30 seconds I went: I love this guy," Cook says. "I liked his enthusiasm, his love for the market and his deep understanding of **property**." Hanan became chief executive of the nearly \$9 billion Investa Office platform last year.

Cook, who heads Investa's capital **transactions**, **commercial** development and leasing, says that he and Hanan complement each other.

"Campbell is a great people manager and he understands process better than anybody, and he understands the need to bring people along for the journey," Cook says.

"I don't care about any of that. I want to know what the outcome is and I'll go straight for it." The Morgan Stanley-owned Investa has a \$2bn development pipeline across its balance sheet, its listed office trust and its wholesale fund.

The **group** is close to selecting a design winner for a new \$750m office tower to be built at Sydney's 60 Martin Place when its tenant, Westpac, moves to Barangaroo in 2016.

It also plans developments at 33 Bligh Street and 151 Clarence Street and it is building a Melbourne office tower at 567 Collins Street.

Cook says his career low point was Investa's elimination in the bid to build the \$800m Melbourne headquarters for Telstra.

Lend Lease and the UBS-Grocon partnership were last month selected as the final two parties left in the bid to build the tower, the axe falling on Cook's team and Cbus **Property**. Telstra is Investa's biggest national tenant.

Cook says that Investa's bid spruiked its abilities as an office manager rather than focusing on the bells and whistles of a new tower. "We can't do every deal with Telstra. There was a bit of a concentration issue as we do own a lot of their buildings," Cook says.

"But I'm already thinking about the next deal with them." On the leasing front, Cook says Perth and Brisbane remain tough markets, but he is happy with Investa's results in Sydney this year.

The **group**'s wholesale office fund has fully leased its Sydney CBD building at 135 King Street, which it co-owns with Stockland.

It was 30 per cent vacant at the beginning of the year.

Cook jokes Investa would not have had such leasing successes if he didn't don his all-important black shirt, just about the only colour he wears.

"I wore a black shirt once and it really upset some people and I thought just to be a little bit controversial I will **buy** a few more and then there was a special on so I got even more," he says.

"It's like your game kit. Outside of this I'm pretty laid back and quiet and pretty boring. But I put this shirt and tie on and I'm ready for the kill." Cook studied US and Australian politics at Melbourne University. "It was a degree in self indulgence; I just didn't know what I wanted to do." He entered the **property** business in the mid-1980s at about 24, when the consulting **company** he worked for was taken over by a **property company**.

He moved to Lend Lease in 1990 and to BT two years later, where he developed 400 George Street and managed the newly built QV1 building in Perth, both which are in the Investa stable.

By 2000, he was working for AMP, followed by a six-month stint in **Hong Kong** before coming back to Australia in 2003. Cook took a role at Investa **Property Group** when its then chief executive, Chris O'Donnell, asked him to start at the **company** in a yet-to- be determined capacity.

"The day I started, he said: 'I've got something I want you to help me with'. It was the takeover of the BT office trust (Principal Office Fund), which was a lot of fun," Cook says.

Cook says that O'Donnell faced criticism during the takeover that Investa had little experience in running major assets. "So by getting me on **board** no one could say that because all of the assets were assets that I had been involved with," he says.

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