



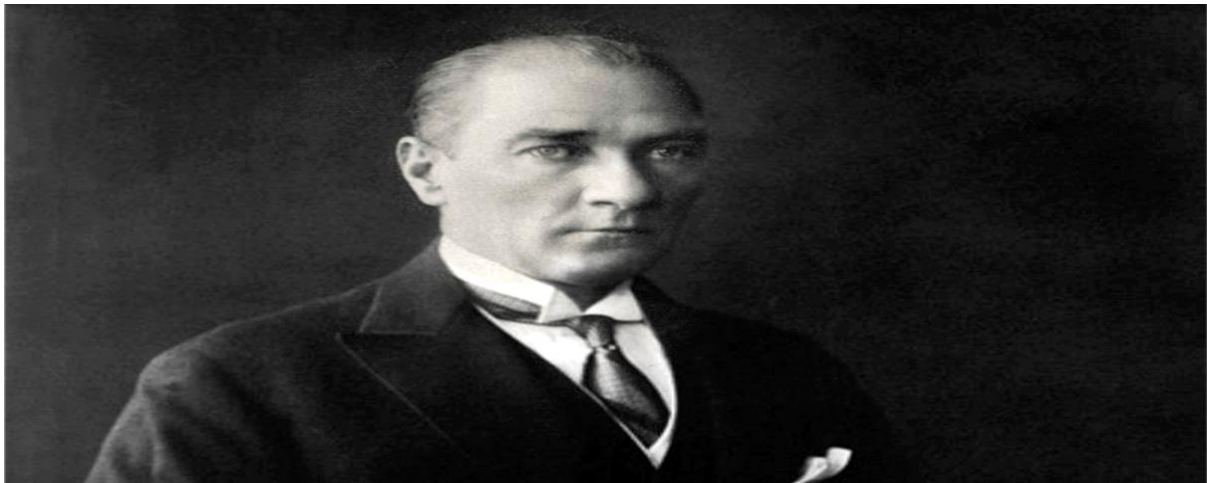
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Executive Search & Board Advisory

## FATHER OF A NATION: ATATÜRK

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*"Do you want to be a man of today or a man of tomorrow?"* Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, born 19<sup>th</sup> May 1881, known simply as Atatürk was a Turkish army Officer, Revolutionary, and founder of the Republic of Turkey, serving as its first President from 1923 until his death in 1938. His name Atatürk which means, father of the Turks, was granted to him by the Government. He was born in a town called Salonika which in the 1800's was a part of the Ottoman Empire but is today's Thessaloniki, Greece.

At the age of twelve, he began his military training and in 1911 served in Libya fighting against the Italians who were invading. During World War 1 Mustafa Kemal was entrusted with the responsibility of commanding and organising the 19<sup>th</sup> division at the Battle of Gallipoli. He anticipated the position where the Allies would attack, and as a result, he was promoted to a front-line commander. Until the year 1916, he served at Edirne. In 1917, he was promoted to an overall commanding officer of the second army after he declined to establish a new army.

In 1919, Atatürk led a nationalist revolution that took place in Anatolia. The revolution was organised to resist settlement by the allies coming from the fallout of World War 1 who now intended to seize Smyrna. In response, Atatürk secured an amendment in which he was able to strengthen his country and thus established a Provisional Government in the aftermath. In 1922, the Ottoman Empire was abolished. In 1923, Turkey became a republic and Atatürk became its first President. He created a regime which was free from conflict and as President established a political and social reorganisation of his nation.

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The skills which Atatürk possessed allowed Turkey, a nation on the brink of collapse to re-establish itself as an independent, strong nation which retained its dignity and prestige.

As the President of the new formed Turkish republic, Atatürk began a rigorous program of political, economic, and cultural reforms with the ultimate aim of building a modern, progressive and secular nation-state. Atatürk made primary education compulsory and free and opened thousands of new schools over the country. He introduced the Latin-based Turkish alphabet, replacing the old Ottoman Turkish alphabet. Turkish women received equal civil and political rights during his presidency, way ahead of many Western countries. In Particular, women were given voting rights in local elections and just a few years later were granted full universal suffrage, earlier than most other countries in the world.

### **Broad thinker**

Atatürk was a skilful military and a political leader. This is evident from some of his accomplishments in the military, for example anticipating the position where his enemies would attack. He was also entrusted with challenging assignments where he performed well and received a promotion as a result. Being the first President of Turkey when the Republic was being transformed required him to be a critical leader. In 1919, he launched a revolutionary defensive war against antagonistic empires even though the Ottoman Sultan opposed it.

### **Open-Minded Learner**

Atatürk believed that acquiring knowledge was the main recipe for survival. His past influenced his thinking. He invested a lot in knowledge, as he had to remedy the shortage of skills and information in his country at the time. He valued civilisation a great deal and the only way Turkey could survive its transition into a new modern nation-state was through acquiring knowledge. Atatürk could acquire merchants and professionals who were able to run the republic as it slowly found its way to modernisation. He also believed that civilisation would drive away what he referred to as a “dark cloud of general ignorance.”

### **Transformational leader**

Atatürk believed in change. He reorganised the Arabic alphabet to Latin in Turkey. This forced the people to learn a new language. He also declared that the state was to be separate from the Muslim Religion; he closed Islamic institutions, allowed alcohol and granted prayer to be in the Turkish language instead of Arabic. Also, he allowed women to wear dresses or jeans and permitted them to have easy access to education, which prior to his presidency was not available to women. By changing a remnant of The Ottoman Empire to a secular Republic, he led Turkey out of a conservative ditch and into the modern era by allowing ideas of liberalism and freedom to populate the minds of the people and allow for a drastic change in the identity of Turkey.

## Consistent Performer

Atatürk's steady nature is seen from his endless energy in his career. He consistently fought against political forces that led to the crumbling of the empire. He also worked tirelessly in all assignments entrusted to him. As a result, Atatürk served successfully in every chain of command, operation and defensive battle assigned to him. Winston Churchill also referred to him as "a man of Destiny."

## Loyalty

Atatürk was a man who trusted and respected his friends and associates. His close friends admired him and were outright loyal to him in every significant step of his life. Some of them included Fevzi Cakmak, who was the Chief of Staff, Ismet Inonu who was the Prime Minister, and Karim Ozalp who was the Defence Minister. These friends supported his leadership ideologies, while Atatürk supported them and carried out universal ideals so that they could realise their potential. For every leader in a business or a political forum to succeed, it is imperative for them to have close associates who support them in their endeavours.

## Altruistic Goals

Throughout his presidency, Atatürk worked for the good of the country and its people. He worked tirelessly and unselfishly to promote the ideals which he knew would help Turkey become a stronger nation. By changing Arabic alphabets to Latin letters, he enabled the people to become literate more quickly. As a result, more people became well educated during his presidency. He also made a profound impact by implementing westernised legal systems like commerce codes, civil codes and new legislation.

## Peace-Maker

Atatürk adopted a policy in which he believed peace should be the ultimate aim of his country and others countries. During his presidency, he established relations with the neighbouring nations to ensure there was harmony amongst them. More so, he had an enemy, Eleftherios Venizelos, a Greek statesman, who later became his ally and nominated him for the Nobel Peace award. He was rational in his decisions and did not take sides at any given moment. He clearly stated that he did not have a religion.

## Strict Morals

Every decision made by Mustafa Kemal was not for his own personal gain but for the sake of Turkey. He was also strict and loyal to his virtues. Some of the ideas that motivated him include developing a national power, transforming Turkey into a westernised country, achieving a standard of living and movement to liberal political and economic status. More so, he was not distracted by the lost provinces of The Ottoman Empire in Asia and Europe as well as provinces of The Russian Empire that had fallen when he was fighting for

independence. He understood that imperialism was steadily becoming a thing of the past and a continuation of imperialistic ideas would lead to the downfall of his country.

### Enlightened Flexibility

Atatürk's flexibility could be observed when he tried to consult his fellow leaders on some reforms. He did not assume a despot kind of leadership, but a diplomatic attitude with an open mind towards the notions provided by evident resistance. As the Turkish war of independence was fought, Atatürk supported his troops and encouraged them to win. He also promoted a way of modernisation in his country that called for everyone to leave their old ways and be more flexible.

The legacy Atatürk left behind is one of a tireless, selfless leader who loved his country and wanted only the best for his people. He was respected by all, even those who were once his enemy. In 1981, the centennial of Atatürk's birth, his memory was honoured by the United Nations and UNESCO, which declared it 'The Atatürk Year' in the World. As a testament to his character, the countries in which he fought against at Gallipoli, the ANZACS, established memorials dedicated to him, with the Atatürk Memorial in Wellington, New Zealand (which also serves as a memorial to the ANZAC troops who died at Gallipoli) and the Atatürk Memorial in the place of honour on Anzac Parade in Canberra, Australia.

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