



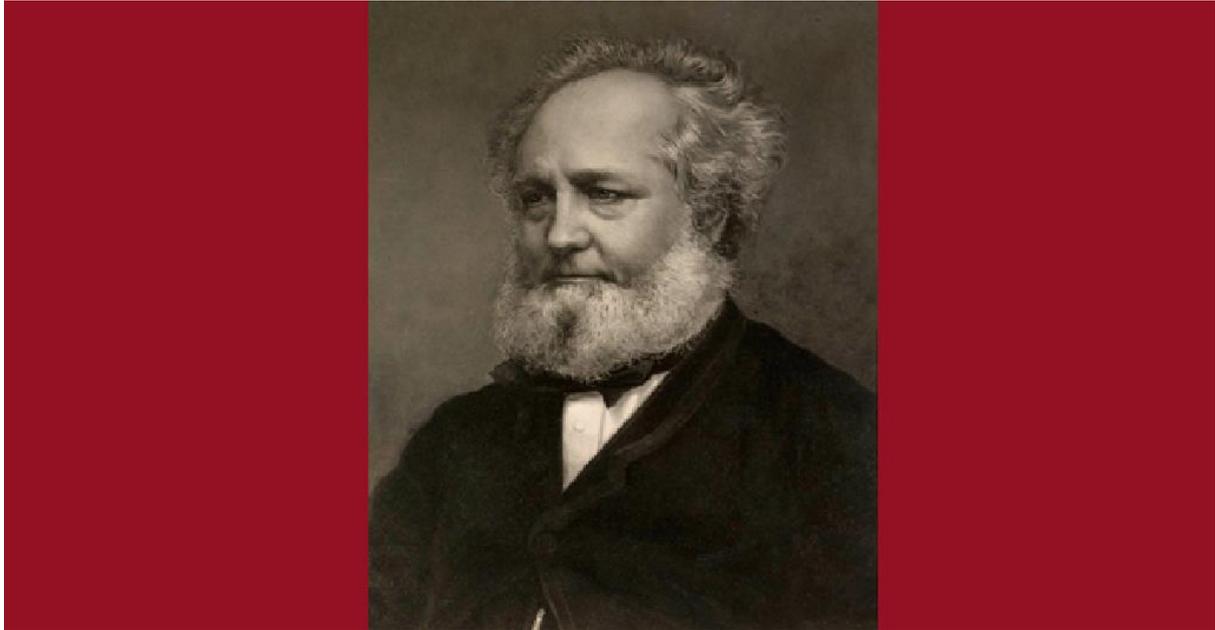
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Executive Search & Board Advisory

## LESSONS FROM JOHN FAIRFAX

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John Fairfax was the founder of one of Australia's most respected and influential newspapers, the Sydney Morning Herald. It is the flagship of a communications empire, an incredible achievement for a man who arrived in Sydney September 26, 1838 with five pounds in his pocket leaving behind a very upset group of creditors in England.

Fairfax's journey to Australia, apparently in haste, was occasioned by a libel suit brought against him and his small English provincial newspaper, the Leamington Chronicle and Warwick Reporter. Whilst Fairfax defended the suit successfully, he was not able to meet his court costs. It would not be the last time he would be sued, but he decided that in any future legal wrangle he would never again be embarrassed by a lack of funds. He also pledged to himself that someday he would return and clear his debt and his good name. Not an easy task. On his journey to Australia were his wife, three children and his mother. At thirty-five he was almost penniless, with no job and no contacts in the colony. However, he did have an iron will and excellent grounding in newspapers.

Fairfax was born in Warwickshire, England in 1804 and left school at thirteen to be an apprentice bookbinder, printer and bookseller in Warwick. On completion of his trade he tried journalism with the London Morning Chronicle but preferred to work for himself and returned to Warwickshire and started his own printery.

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In 1827 with a partner he founded the Leamington Spa Courier, and later established with another partner the Leamington Chronicle. Unfortunately this venture finished in a libel suit and his move to Sydney where he took what work he could find, as a journalist and librarian.

In 1841 his fortunes would change. The struggling Sydney Herald was up for sale and with his friend Charles Kemp he bought the paper on long-term credit.

The paper's circulation and level of advertising was down and for the first few years the partners did almost everything themselves – that is reporting, writing, and the mechanical work of proofing the paper. On August 1<sup>st</sup> 1842 they designed a new format and renamed the paper the Sydney Morning Herald and began to make progress. In 1851 Fairfax achieved his ambition of returning to Leamington and paid his creditors in full. On his return to Sydney, Fairfax bought out Charles Kemp's share in 1856, the company assumed the name, John Fairfax and Sons, later to become Fairfax Media.

With the newspaper growing, Fairfax passed control to his sons and became a director of AMP, Sydney Insurance Co., the Australia Joint Stock Bank and the Australian Gaslight Co and a trustee of the Savings Bank of New South Wales.

In 1874 he was accepted to the Upper House of New South Wales Parliament. He died June 16, 1877 and two sons carried on to build the Fairfax business.

Gregory Robinson, Managing Partner “John Fairfax illustrates what iron will and integrity can achieve. Starting all over in a foreign country, Australia, he had the resolve to establish a newspaper and clear his sullied name. A great example of never giving up. We now watch with great interest the discussions around the future of Fairfax.”

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- Non-Executive Director Search;
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- Executive Re-Engagement / Transition.

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