

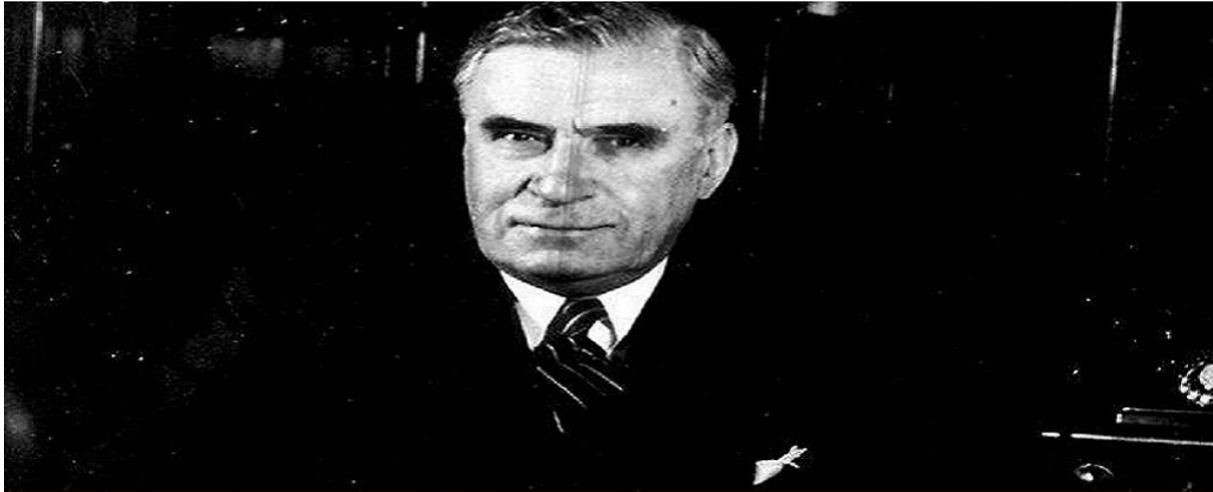


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LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP – SIR KEITH ARTHUR MURDOCH 1885-1952



"Everything that can be done will be done" Keith Murdoch

Beginning his career as a reporter, Keith Murdoch went on to build Australia's largest media empire.

Born in Camberwell in 1885, the son of a Presbyterian Minister, he commenced his working life as a journalist at the Age newspaper. He soon became impatient with reporting the deeds of others. He decided, the only way to power and influence was on the management side of newspapers, and realised he needed business qualifications. So in 1908, aged twenty-two, he sailed to England and enrolled in the London School of Economics.

He wrote to his father "I'll be able to learn ever so much here. That's very evident; and with health I should become a power in Australia."

His health was never robust and in addition, he suffered from a stammer. His other aims were to find suitable work in Fleet Street and improve his speech impediment.

On his return to Australia, he accepted a role with the Melbourne Herald reporting the activities of the Federal Parliament and settled in that city. This brought him in contact with political leaders including future Prime Ministers, and with these contacts, he began his climb to power.

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In 1915, he was sent to London as Manager of the United Cable Service for Australian newspapers, principally the Herald and the Sydney Sun. On the way, he stopped over at Gallipoli. His experience there would become the foundation upon which he would base his subsequent career. Though he did not spend long on the peninsular, he was able to see first-hand the horror the Australian troops were experiencing and to perceive the appalling mismanagement of the British generals in charge of the campaign.

When he reached London, he immediately typed an 8000-word letter to the Australian Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher. He described the terrible and desperate conditions, heavily criticising and recommending the recall of the British General and Commander in charge, Sir Ian Hamilton.

Through newspaper friends, Murdoch met members of the British cabinet and under pressure from Lloyd George and others, sent a copy of the Fisher letter to British Prime Minister Asquith, who agreed that it should be printed and circulated to the cabinet as a State Paper.

As a direct result, Hamilton was recalled. Murdoch stayed in London for six years on friendly terms with the British Cabinet and became the de facto personal representative of Prime Minister Billy Hughes in his dealings with the British Government.

He returned to Australia in 1921 to become Editor of the Herald and immediately set about improving its quality and circulation by hiring top line journalists. He later became managing Director and then Chairman and supervised its acquisition of controlling interest in papers across all the States. He was knighted in 1933.

He became the most influential newspaper proprietor in the country. At the beginning of the Second World War, the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies created a Department of Information, with Murdoch as its Director-General, having direct access to the War Cabinet. However, after an outcry, Murdoch retired from his appointment completing only six months as Director-General. He then extended the Herald's activities to include radio nationally.

In his private life, he was a patron of the arts and founded a Chair of Fine Arts at Melbourne University. Keith and his wife Dame Elizabeth had a daughter and a son, Rupert who would follow in his father's footsteps.

Gregory Robinson, Managing Partner, "Sir Keith had aspirations of power and success early in his career and seized the opportunities that arose to fulfil his ambitions. He was a person who valued education, hard work, and relationships and ultimately reaped the rewards."

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Contact us

Sydney p +61 2 9253 0950

Melbourne p +61 3 9653 9510

w www.blenheimpartners.com