



THE ENERGETIC WORLD OF John Studdy

John B Studdy AM FCA (BEC '52) has piloted the boardrooms of some of Australia's biggest companies, including the Ten Network. He is a man who thrives on hard work and has not taken an extended holiday in his entire 60-year career

JOHN BEGAN HIS association with the University of Sydney back in 1946 when, at the age of just 16, he enrolled as an evening student at what was then the Faculty of Economics.

During his degree, John continued to work full-time at the chartered accounting firm now known as PricewaterhouseCoopers, which together with studying for his chartered accounting examinations, left little time to become involved in campus life.

In his time at university, he forged a friendship with his economics lecturer Hermann Black, later Sir Hermann Black, the legendary Chancellor of the University.



TED SEALEY

“Neither he nor I had a car in those days so we used to go down to Wynyard Station in a tram to get home, and I got to know him a little bit,” John remembers. “We would talk about economics and his favourite topic, which was a book by Schumpeter called *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. He was probably the best lecturer I’ve ever known.”

Once he had completed his degree and qualified as a chartered accountant, John travelled to the UK to gain experience at his accounting firm’s London office. On his return to Australia in 1954, he was tasked with opening a new office for the business in Newcastle. Four years later

he was admitted to partnership as the youngest partner the business had ever had.

After spending 26 years at the accounting firm, John decided it was time to seek out new opportunities. He took up an offer to become managing director of a large UK property company and then, in 1972, accepted his first non-executive company directorship. Over the following decades, he built on those board responsibilities until he had become one of Australia’s best-known chairmen and company directors.

John has worked across a wide array of industries, holding chairmanships at Goodman Fielder, Mercantile Mutual Ltd (now ING) and the French bank subsidiary, Paribas Australia Ltd, as well as serving as chairman or director of more than 30 other companies, including the Bell Group when it was controlled by Robert Holmes à Court (“one of the most dramatic directorships I ever held”).

Of all his achievements in the boardroom, he says his chairmanship of the Ten Group from 1993 to 2002 – directly after the company had gone into receivership – is the one he is most proud of. “Keating, who was treasurer, demanded that the company have an independent chairman and for reasons unknown to me, I was chosen,” he says. “It was a very exciting period because we succeeded in getting Channel 10 out of the Westpac ‘sickbay’ and it became a highly profitable and well-regarded organisation.”

Today, John continues on the boards of both Ten and a subsidiary of Investec Bank Australia, while his directorship at Westfield Group, which he says was another highlight of his career, ended earlier this year.

Since his early years in boardrooms during the 1970s, John says the environment that company directors operate in has changed dramatically. “As the years have gone by, it takes much longer to understand a new

directorship because of all the changes in regulation and the potential for liability that directors face. Directors have also assumed a much greater responsibility in the public eye.”

A man who thrives on challenges and managing multiple responsibilities, John says that business has been his life’s main hobby. In fact, he has not had a vacation of more than three weeks in his entire career, apart from a working visit to the UK in the early 1950s.

Apart from his zeal for work and his lifelong love of surf-skiing, a sport he pursued until very recently, the other chief passion of John’s life has been philanthropy. He has served a diverse range of charitable and non-profit organisations, including the Pain Management Research Institute, affiliated with the University of Sydney, which he currently chairs. He is also chairman of the ING Australia Foundation and a former president of Palm Beach Surf Club.

The organisation he has given most to, however, is the Multiple Sclerosis Society, where he served as president for a period of 18 years up until 1997. During his time at the helm of the society, he played a pivotal role in helping to raise public awareness about the condition of multiple sclerosis in Australia. His commitment to the society has been honoured with the titles of Emeritus President and Life Governor, and by the naming of a multiple sclerosis facility at Lidcombe as the Studdy Centre.

“Both my father and my grandfather were medical doctors and it was my plan to do medicine,” says John. “Getting involved with multiple sclerosis and people with MS has provided me with the satisfaction I hoped I might have got if I’d pursued that path.”

In acknowledgement of his impact on community health and business in Australia, John was recognised with an AM in 1988 and the Centenary Medal in 2003.