

World Class Virtues

by Shannon Warren for the August, 2015 edition of The Journal Record

If I met him as a stranger on the street, Dermot Ahern is not someone I would instinctively picture as a powerful world leader. The approachable sixty-year-old speaks humbly with a charming Irish accent, belying his influential role in orchestrating the ground-breaking peace settlement that ended a brutal era of violence in Northern Ireland.

As a statesman for the Republic of Ireland, Ahern hailed from an area that bordered Northern Ireland. His home town was in close proximity to warring parties of Unionists Protestants and the Nationalists represented largely by Catholics. Ahern felt the pain of the feuding, witnessing his neighbor's bloody riots, kidnappings, torture and bombings. During his years in public service, his driving passion became resolution of the conflict. Working behind the scenes with opposing groups such as Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army and factions from Great Britain, Ahern helped to end the disputes. In 1998, the Good Friday agreement concluded three decades of fighting.

Later, the Secretary-General of the United Nations enlisted Ahern's help to facilitate peace in other areas of the world, including the Middle East. Ahern's benign approach to resolving issues sharply contrasts with the heavy-handed rhetoric often expressed by many political leaders. Instead of the blustering ego of a bully, Mr. Ahern is a gentle but determined soul.

When addressing an audience assembled on the campus of Oklahoma Christian University by OK Ethics and General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute, Mr. Ahern discussed the key elements of his successful methods for achieving cooperation under difficult circumstances. He emphasized respect for one another, coupled with an underlying "golden rule" mentality. In addition to the healing power of clemency, Ahern focused on the need to truly listen to other's concerns and "put yourself in the shoes of the other side."

Corporate executives would be wise to follow Mr. Ahern's model. A *Huffington Post* piece by Russ Warner cited a study by Minneapolis-based consultants KRW International. They found that moral principles of integrity, responsibility, forgiveness and compassion are essential to business success. In fact, they revealed that CEOs receiving high marks for those characteristics "had an average return on assets of 9.5%." Those having lower character ratings resulted in an ROA of 1.9% - nearly five times lower! Clearly, having world class virtues such as those extolled by Mr. Ahern makes good business sense, too.