

Dr. Brendan O'Regan Disk 8

BO'R: All the things that have been added to it will be seen, all the things that have been added to it like duty free, industrial free zones around the world, Bunratty Castle, the cottages, native Irish production and half a dozen other things that will be recognized, it will be recognized as a creative place for the Irish, once they got a chance to show that they were creative and had good management ability. That what they are going to do now to deal with the elimination of the advantage which Shannon has had because of the necessity to load up with petrol to get across the Atlantic. That's gone now with the jets. It will be seen as a place of creative ability, in other words there is the Celtic imagination, creativity and that's how I wrote those things down, twenty things every one of which could become a big operation if handled with imagination.

JH: Could I just mention finally a name from that group of first staff in Shannon Development, Paul Quigley?

BO'R: Paul was really the king of the castle there. To a certain extent I have often regretted that I got so much publicity myself that he didn't get enough but Paul was the manager of the Irish Management Institute. You have an interview that I gave to Paul's successor? Yes, I don't know where you got that?

JH: Ivor Kenny

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BO'R: Ivor Kenny, this was the best interview I got, I think anyway. Paul was a management man and he and I got on very well but there was a period when I felt that we had achieved what we had set out to do and we should do something that no organisation was capable of doing. That was to accept from the government a second commitment, and that was to Donegal. To do in Donegal what we had in the Shannon area. My object was related to what I felt was Ireland's greatest problem was lack of understanding between the Protestant in the North and the Catholics in the South. I felt if we were involved right on their border, we had a new outlook, that we weren't the Catholic Irish, not efficient and so on. That we were a different kind and I held a meeting of the board in.. I held it deliberately where there had been an IRA meeting with the Church of Ireland. My memory now isn't....

CO'C: In Feakle

BO'R: Yes in Feakle, so I brought the board to Feakle to the place where the IRA and the church people in the North had met and I discussed with them this, look we have done what we were told to do which was to stop Shannon from being eliminated and it's not going to go back now. The Industrial estate and the town are all going and Bunratty is going. We have a very-well- trained group of people and we could take a third of them now and send them to Donegal. We should propose that. Send them to Donegal to do what we have done here. These would be the rent-a-cottages and all the outward

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things that I have done to make it clear that Ireland in on the up.. up beat and will help enormously the political situation. The board agreed, yes, but I mean I hadn't worked hard enough on the management, to get the management to agree on I and of course it was a huge uprooting of some members and their families would have to go to Donegal. (Laughing). We didn't get it agreed anyway, one particular minister took steps to make sure that we didn't get it agreed outside the board. I still think that what we have learned in Shannon could be of value. Of course, we started about the same time, anyway, Co-operation North, which has done it.

***JH:** Could I mention some staff, which were appointed at the time? Just to run through the list. There was Tom Callanan*

***BO'R:** Tom Callanan came as a personal assistant and was an outstanding man at a very early stage and almost became the Chief executive after Paul Quigley. Just didn't make it but he has done a lot of good work for the Universities since then. There were a few like that.*

***JH:** There was JC Lynch as well*

***BO'R:** JC Lynch came as an accountant. He had been an accountant with Hugh O'Donnell and a wonderful person really and he took charge of the accountants. All of those people like*

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JC Lynch, Joe McElgunn they worked together like a team. They were personal friends of mine.

JH: There was Phil Bolger?

BO'R: Phil Bolger as well, an all-round man and played an important part in the development of the town.

JH: There was Arthur O'Keefe

BO'R: Arthur O'Keefe who nearly got drowned on one occasion, in fact he was in one of the first swimming pools we had, he was at the bottom of the pool for so long we thought he wouldn't recover. Extraordinary, he was a very excellent executive

JH: Peter Donnelly?

BO'R: Peter Donnelly, of course, was a leader in many ways. He had at the time I interviewed him in the beginning I know that he had written a book. I had gone to Trinity to get a look at the book and he was a very all-round man who had a big influence on the way the town developed. He could see ahead and visualise how big the town would be and so on and how big it needed to be in order to be economically viable. Peter Donnelly, I'm glad you remember those names because my problem is now the memory situation.

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JH: Well Cian has helped with these names; he has helped us with these. Another name was Pat McNabb I think, a sociologist

BO'R: Yes, well we needed a sociological thinking, in fact at the same time we tapped into Pat Mc Nabb's brain, we were doing those into Fr.His name isn't coming to me now?

JH: Fr. Harry Bohan?

BO'R: Fr. Harry Bohan, and I asked, I said to the Bishop we are forming a new town, first new town in Co. Clare and we need sociological advice. We need a priest or a parish priest who will be sure to hear a man who has already shown himself to have great social judgment in the work that he is doing. He became a member of the development company executive team.

JH: That was a very advanced thing at the time to appoint a sociologist was it not?

BO'R: I suppose it was, but we were becoming aware that we were doing things that needed special kind of thinking

JH: Now another name mentioned was John Dilger.

BO'R: John Dilger was an outstanding (laughs) character with aviation. He was associated with Air France. We realised that we required somebody who is close to airline thinking. So John

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was engaged and a very great promoter and I remember at the time that De Gaulle came over and we decided to give him lunch in Knappogue Castle and it would be cooked by Andre our French chef. We had a message from de Valera to say that General De Gaulle was on a private visit and that his privacy shouldn't be broken too much. I don't think it said too much (laughs). John wanted to have him photographed in Knappogue at his luncheon. He would do it if he were in your position he would do it. Well listen John, we have the direction from our own President that we are not to use him for publicity but I will ask De Gaulle I won't ask him direct. So I spoke with De Gaulle's number one man. I'm being pressed by my very effective publicist to make sure that we get a photograph of the President while he is here, and would you mind asking him if I can do it? The message that I got back was "Tell Dr. Regan that I said that he can make his own decision on that" (Laughing). So I went back to John and I said no John no, because it's being put up to me, he doesn't want to be photographed here. But I do think that you can take a photograph of his party who are here. He did that, he was satisfied with that. John Dilger.

JH: About this group of staff that came, the new staff of Shannon Development. There was an existing staff in sales and catering, different management. Would there have been any tensions between the new arrivals and the existing Sales and Catering people? Would you recall that?

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BO'R: I don't think there was any tension, I think what was evident to everybody was so exciting that we the Irish were succeeding in something that was a new development in the world made it a happy relationship. There was really no conflict that I know of between the Sales and Catering staff and the development company. For quite a while you had both of those organisations working as one. You had a very remarkable situation in that the audit was being done in the exchequer and audit department who themselves got involved in the idea that we were working on to the extent that three of them eventually moved to us. The human co-operation is really the most important virtue and of course Christianity tells us that all we have to do is love one another. The way you love one another is by co-operation.

JH: *Just, it's been mentioned that, the group we talked about these personalities in management, that ye had regular brainstorming sessions?*

BO'R: Yes

JH: It has been written that the idea of industrialisation, although at first was on a limited scale, first came out of those brainstorming sessions? Can you recall any of those?

BO'R: Yes, we as well as having brainstorming meetings we had what we called brainstorming picnics!! That we used to take

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sandwiches and go out to the extremities of the airport and talk about what we were involved in and the opportunities that were ahead of us, which we could use. So brainstorming began a very important part of our thinking, and of course in brainstorming there is one person who has to write down and make a report of what are the ideas that have been put forward. Then there is a sub-committee, which tries to eliminate ones that aren't really practical at all and try and circulate to the group a note of the ones that are possible. Nothing really is impossible where you have good management and you have money. We were of course, after creating a money machine.

CO'C: Developing company like how the developing company actually came into existence, the kind of early people, the Buist McKenzies, think there was a guy called Huggard before my time, there was Jerry Farren and so on.

It's a very small group, to see the management people involved. I think also that thing about the town, really wanted to build the town.

JH: That's for a future date

CO'C: But I think particularly the people that came onboard in the early sixties

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CO'C: what contribution that made because you evolved from a situation where you had really total control and then you had a board to cope with and us management to cope with as well. So that was the early sixties, was it time, I meant that was a time when Paul Quigley, God rest him, would have come?

BO'R: Yes, I was very fortunate in that I had about a dozen people who were as enthusiastic as I was in regard to what had to be done. In other words, it wasn't just another job. It was a job for the Irish to show what they could do in, in a world which was rapidly changing. Paul Quigley one particular man that I sought because he was managing the Irish Management Institute. The Irish Management Institute was the first organised group of Irish people studying management. I felt that with the head of the management team then we would be on the right road. He was joined by several people of outstanding, not just Cian, but Joe McElgunn and Ray Joyce and ..as I've said to you, I have difficulty....

CO'C: There were other people like Tom Callanan who came from Cork and of course John Dilger and J.C. Lynch.

BO'R: JC Lynch was outstanding

CO'C: Peter Donnelly?

BO'R: Peter Donnelly had written a book I was so keen on getting the right kind of person that I went to Trinity library

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and asked could I see the book in Trinity. So, I read half of it anyway and said well he's good. So, we had a number of very clever people but it's a great pity that I can't rattle them off because you get me at time when I have run into forgetfulness. It's one feeling of having a group of enthusiasts working on a project.

CO'C: What was your secret of motivation always?

BO'R: Well I think it was, what was motivating me was the fact we had at the beginning of aviation the chance to show that we are not inefficient and in fact taking over from the British and could do as good a job as they were doing. To a certain extent, a restaurant is something that can be measured and we were suddenly doing something better than had been done by British Imperial Airways. As well as that we were doing something that was being appreciated because these passengers who got off, they very often wanted to talk to people. I didn't have to say it, it was apparent that we were succeeding.

CO'C: Brendan in terms of leadership style you certainly weren't adversarial in any way? So, what was your psychology in leadership?

BO'R: Well I think, of course, that humanity is a miracle. I mean we are ...it is evident to all of us that we are part of the creator, which we are told we are, he couldn't have become part of us.

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We are therefore not just humans, but we are given opportunities to do exceptional things and particularly if we love one another, and I think that was very apparent between the management group, we were very good friends and we were excited about what we were doing.

JH: The word that would come to mind with me, and there are four keywords that come to mind with me as we talk to you, one is quality and the provision of quality and quality service to people and the need for that. That had come to you at a very early stage perhaps back even in your German experience and in your experience training in hotel management. The other is participation that you seemed to put a value on getting people involved and feeling that an essential part of providing a quality service was the sense that people could play a part. That every individual had something to say. You quoted the last time the great story of asking, I think one of the porters or somebody like that, what should be done. Afterwards it got back to you that he had said 'well when the boss has to ask me what has to be done, he must not be a great leader'. (Laughing)

BO'R: Yes, that's right he doesn't know what to do

JH: That notion of participation you seemed to have grasped that, that everybody could participate in the success of Shannon and that seemed to be key.

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BO'R: I remember saying to one of the porters in the men's toilets on one occasion: 'you know you have one of the most important jobs in this organisation, because you can be like what no other porter was like, you give him a smile and say something nice to him which usually won't be done'. What was his name again?

CO'C: McGlynn?

BO'R: He became quite an important photographer after a while

JH: The other words, we might actually come back to this again devote a specific session to it. The other word was values; you identified sort of core values in providing and working towards a service. Again, that was the bedrock of good leadership that you could refer back to core values. We'll look at those again; we might ask you to even think about those in the weeks ahead. What were the essentials of your management style? We'd like to sort of tap down into the bedrock of that?

BO'R: I wouldn't like to put too much value on my style because I think in fact what was happening in Shannon was a very unusual situation that the Irish were being exposed to people from abroad and that they had it within themselves, not necessarily coming from me, to realise the opportunity that had arose. I find now, and maybe it comes from those days, that I try every day to relate helpfully to somebody and you'll find

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that if you do that, the other person will relate helpfully to you fairly fast. That might be even a smile or looking for something that has been said to acknowledge the talent of the other person.

NOTES:

1. Speakers on disk:

BO'R: Brendan O'Regan

JH: John Heuston

CO'C: Cian O'Carroll

2. ***** indicates breaks between tracks on the disk

3. This manuscript may contain errors in transcribing from the disk and in the interpretation of the spoken word. For external quotation the text above should be checked against the original recording.

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