



# The Counsels of Cormac: An Ancient Irish Guide to Leadership

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Long before Machiavelli's *The Prince*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, The Japanese *Book of Five Rings*, *Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*, and *The Fifth Discipline*, there was the indispensable, bare-bones advice of the great Irish king, Cormac, who imparted essential lessons on how to be a great leader and how to live a life that was both productive and fulfilling. In these pages is the wisdom of thousands of years of Celtic civilization, now available in a masterful new translation by Thomas Cleary.

In the tradition of the *Tao Te Ching* and *The Art of War*, this ancient manual offers moral and practical instructions for wise and successful leadership—all imbued with distinctly Celtic flavor.

Celtic lore is replete with legends recounting the contact and cooperation between the ancient Irish peoples and the other great cultures of antiquity (including the Minoan, Egyptian, Greek, and Hebrew) and their influence on Celtic ideas and values. Knowledge was highly prized by the Celts, and their pursuit of learning encompassed everything from seeking an understanding of the ordinary to contemplating the inexplicable. The emphasis on education extended to the selection of leaders: elected by the freeholders of each territory, kings were expected to be well-schooled in all branches of knowledge. Traditionally, manuals of instructions were written to ensure the cultivation of people capable of leadership. *The Counsels of Cormac*, attributed to King Cormac MacAirt, who ruled in the third century CE, is one of the best-known classics of this tradition.

Cormac, portrayed by Irish poets and historians as one of the greatest of the Irish high kings, is particularly famed for his achievements in culture and for the personal qualities he brought to governing. In the words of a later historian he was, “wise, learned, valiant and mild, not given causelessly to be bloody as many of his ancestors were; he reigned majestically and magnificently.” Thomas Cleary’s highly readable contemporary English translation of *The Counsels of Cormac* brings the legendary king’s sage advice to present-day readers. From a to-the-point chapter outlining the “traditional prescription for a chieftain” to a charming discourse on “what is fitting for a chieftain and an alehouse” (a Celtic version of how to create a productive and pleasurable workplace), *The Counsels of Cormac* is perfect for those seeking to enhance their own leadership abilities, learn from the wisdom of the past, and connect with the roots of Celtic civilization.

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