

## **Authors want Canadians to answer call of leadership**

By Steve Proctor

Amal Henein and Francoise Morissette were tired of the whining. At every conference the Ontario human resource specialists attended, it seemed someone was complaining about the shrinking pool of leaders in the country, issuing dire warning about the consequences for the economy.

"There was too much wringing of hands, too much despair and not enough action," said Ms. Morissette in a recent interview. "I looked at Amal one day and said, 'Let's stop talking about this and find some solutions.' "

It took two years of research and interviews with hundreds of leaders from the arts, business, sports and non-profit sectors but the pair developed a plan which is detailed in their book, *Made in Canada Leadership: Wisdom from the Nation's Best and Brightest on Leadership Practice and Development*.

The 361-page effort makes some interesting points and offers up thoughtful quotes from both high profile people and those in the trenches, but it suffers from an accessibility problem.

In the authors' attempt to be all things to all readers, the narrative walks a line between academic thesis and general reading, a move that likely leaves both readers in both groups a little frustrated.

For those willing to persevere there are rewards. The first couple of chapters examining the nature of leadership and its impact on society are crisply written and clear in intent, and the quotes by the likes of Clearwater president and CEO Colin MacDonald and Anne McGuire, president of the IWK Health Centre, are woven professionally into the text.

The pair argue convincingly that with the healthy economy and demographics that will see baby boomers retiring en masse within the next decade, the leadership deficit is going to move from crisis to national emergency.

"We have to produce more. We can't wait for them to emerge," says Henein.

The book details some of the programs that are already in place in schools, industry and in unlikely communities like Barrie, Ont., but the authors are clear that there is not enough happening.

"Lots of good things are happening, but in isolation. It's all happening willy-nilly. It's all scattered," said Morissette.

The book argues that part of the solution is for leadership training to begin in elementary school, to be promoted in the community and valued as an integral part of the workplace.

As part of a national strategy, the authors call for the creation of a National Leadership Institute, a non-bureaucratic clearing house of sorts that would connect the best leadership training offered by governments, businesses and universities. It could conduct and sponsor research, produce educational material and connect mentors with those seeking guidance.

"It could become to leadership development what the Canadian Olympic Committee is to athlete development," they write.

Exactly who takes up the plan and how the institute might be funded are questions not addressed in the book, leaving the reader to suppose that would be the first challenge of those who want to move the plan into action.

In a break from tradition that leaves some management books on leadership one-dimensional, the pair chooses not to focus exclusively on business. There are good leaders in all sectors of the economy, they insist, and they took the time to consult widely and ensure the views from many sectors were represented.

"The best quotes we got are from people in the arts. In other books they'd be left out," said Henein.

The inclusiveness message is hammered home with two middle chapters focusing on leaders in the Canadian co-op movement and the processes non-profits use to create the next generation of leaders.

Another part of the book that was done well was the emphasis on Canada. The authors were clearly weary of seeing American books on the subject in Canadian schools.

"We need to hear about leadership from our own leaders, in our own voices," said Morissette. "Hopefully we've done that."

But are Canadian leaders really any different than leaders in other countries? Absolutely, say the authors. Because we live in a geographically large and culturally diverse nation, Canadian leaders are very good at consensus building and process, they say. We have a proven reputation for being able to bring people together to focus on a single goal. It's why many Canadians are asked to head UN commissions.

"We're never going to be suspected of having a secret world-domination agenda."

People from outside Canada see our skills more clearly than we do because in our modesty, we don't think about what we are really good at. We just put out heads down to get the job done.

Will the book, as the authors would like, inspire Canadians to answer the call of leadership as the authors hope? Maybe, but only if they are willing to slug through some pretty heavy prose first.

Business editor Steve Proctor freelanced this story.

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