

Celebrating our folksy ham-handedness

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MADE IN CANADA LEADERSHIP

By Amal Henein

and Françoise Morissette

Jossey-Bass, 364 pages, \$39.99



WHY MEXICANS DON'T DRINK MOLSON

By Andrea Mandel-Campbell

Douglas & McIntyre,

328 pages, \$34.95

As Canada Day approaches, perhaps it's fitting to address this question: Is there a Canadian leadership brand - something about our approach to leadership that stands out and differentiates us from the rest of the world?

Human resource practitioners Amal Henein and Françoise Morissette believe there is and it is exemplified in two of our prime ministers, Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau, the scholar and the warrior, respectively. Meanwhile, journalist Andrea Mandel-Campbell would probably provide three even better known individuals as symbols of our leadership brand, based on her years in Latin America and back in Canada covering our ham-handedness in foreign trade: the Three Stooges.

Ms. Henein and Ms. Morissette's book is based on interviews with an astonishing number and range of Canadian leaders - close to 300 - and among the many issues they discussed were the sense of Canadian leadership identity. "The scholar represents wisdom, perceptiveness, diplomacy: Pearson. The warrior represents courage, determination, assertiveness: Trudeau. These two complementary energies convey our nature and aspirations," they write in *Made In Canada Leadership*.

That brand rests on the bedrock of Canadian values and is composed of five traits that interact and intermingle.

Principle: The desire to behave in accordance with strong ethical, moral and democratic principles, which we often take for granted.

Professionalism: We want to do a good job and we care. "Like beavers, we labour until we get it right," they write. And this isn't a country where sleaze prevails.

Possibility: As a young and successful nation, we believe in the possible, and display creativity and resourcefulness to attain it. The authors point to British Columbia loggers and environmentalists joining forces to ecologically operate a forestry business, the success of Research In Motion Ltd.'s BlackBerry, and Cirque du Soleil's marvellous reinvention of the circus.

Diversity: Managing differences has almost become second nature, and we've learned to co-mingle different cultures.

Peace: We seek fairness, harmony, and win-win solutions. We balance different viewpoints, ensuring everyone has a voice, and preventing conflict escalation. We are tolerant and diplomatic.

When asked how their leadership journey began, the interview subjects gave responses that fell into two distinct categories: accidental and innate.

Much to the authors' surprise, two-thirds of their interviewees said they never set out to be a leader but had to do it for various reasons, such as the fact no one else was available or they deeply believed in a cause. The other slice, the innate leaders, detected a strong interest in leadership at an early age, liking to start something new. The authors label that second path "the Force," because an inner presence provides impetus and guides innate leaders in their actions; "the Blueprint" is the route for accidentals, since they must find compelling reasons to lead and apply rational analysis to the decision.

The innate leader trusts the gut while the accidental trusts the mind, and the authors argue that as these leaders mature they must learn to acquire the opposite flow.

Ms. Mandel-Campbell's book, *Why Mexicans Don't Drink Molson*, begins by noting that Canada has the ideal conditions for brewing beer - we have the largest repository of fresh water in the world and are the second-largest producer of barley. Yet, Canadians are drinking a pale Mexican ale, Corona, while Mexicans aren't drinking Molson's Canadian. That is one of many examples she gives where Canadian companies - "comfortable, complacent or crippled by government" - are failing to penetrate foreign markets.

We like to consider ourselves great traders, but most of that is with the United States, often from American multinationals doing business with themselves across the border. In her eyes, we are anything but warriors, seeing the possible, and often too goody-goody and diplomatic to succeed.

The world's centre of gravity is tilting toward China, where we have little economic presence, she points out. "If Canadians continue to ignore these tectonic shifts, we will eventually fall through the cracks. The threat is all the more dangerous because it won't be a calamitous collapse, like that of Argentina, but a slow, stealthy slide that will sneak up on us while we snooze, our bellies still uncomfortably full after gorging on a feast of oil sands and high copper prices."

She blames the timidity and arrogance of our business leaders and the stranglehold of government - the word government is invariably accompanied by a negative adjective in her writing - and in the first half of the book she cites example after example of folly. Her prose is scathing, and the analysis unrelenting, with not a single interview subject offering even a mildly dissenting word.

Then, almost as if replaced by another writer, the second half of the book is optimistic, as Ms. Mandel-Campbell finds companies to praise and she explores reasons that might explain some of the goofs they have made. She sets out a highly useful guidebook to doing business outside of Canada (although she is somewhat agnostic on the delicate issue of sleaze), urging us to make use of our immigrants rather than hobbling them.

She is highly knowledgeable and a terrific writer, and her work an eye-opener for those who see us as a trading nation, but the lack of balance weakens the book.

Made In Canada Leadership covers enormous territory, from opening chapters that are a leadership primer, to a push for a Canadian apprenticeship model for leaders, to a call for a national leadership strategy with a "national leadership institute" at its core. The book also takes a look at public leadership in which the many business leaders they canvassed inevitably deride politicians and the authors, as good HR consultants, appeal for performance management.

The book is poorly written, often a string of quotes limply laid out for the readers to decipher and, while it has some interesting leadership insights, in the end it is probably too unfocused and soporific to hold many readers' attention.

Just In: Carol Fishman Cohen and Vivian Steir Rabin provide a guide for stay-at-home mothers who want to return to work in *Back On The Career Track* (Warner, 297 pages, \$31.99).

Robert J. McKay of Hewitt Associates compiled the third edition of *The Canadian Handbook of Flexible Benefits* (John Wiley, 615 pages, \$159.99).

A leading business journal brings together some of its top articles on decision-making in *Harvard Business Review on Making Smarter Decisions* (Harvard Business School Press, 208 pages, \$24.95) and leadership in *Harvard Business Review on The Tests of A Leader* (Harvard Business School Press, 195 pages, \$24.95).