

Two Canadian Women Start Leadership Dialogue with Book

by D-L Nelson
France

It is easy to talk about a problem; it is much harder to do anything about it.

Two Canadian women, tired of hearing about leadership crisis, decided to kick-start a national dialogue. Françoise Morissette M.Ed., P.C.C. and Amal Henein CHRP spent almost three years developing their book, *Made in Canada Leadership: Wisdom from the Nation's Best and Brightest on the Art and Practice of Leadership*.

All types of organizations and governments need a steady supply of people with real leadership skills to reach their goals and ensure a positive future. Waiting around for a knight in shining armour doesn't cut it; the wringing of hands is a waste of time. Their book was researched and written to find and propose alternatives. In an interview, Morissette pointed out that ***the world spends more time and effort training athletes than they do training leaders.***

Morissette and Henein started with three questions:

- How could competent leaders be best developed?
- How could a reliable supply of capable leaders be ensured?
- What could be done to strengthen Canadian leadership?

Their questions and the answers their research generated could apply to any organization, any country and any government. The book was three years in the making: a year and a half dedicated to research and the same amount of time to analyze the data and write the book.

To find out what makes a good leader, Morissette and Henein conducted in-depth conversations with 295 exceptional leaders throughout Canada. They did not limit these interviews to any one sector but talked with those in the arts, business, community, co-operatives, public, and sports. The two women found that each of the successful leaders was happy to share their personal development stories as well as make recommendations on how to replicate their accomplishments.

But this alone was not enough. To increase their perspective they went on to talk to another 66 professionals who were involved in developing leadership through programs offered to a cross section of society.

Initially, Morissette and Henein had not thought of including co-operatives, but about a third of the way through their research they were introduced to the movement that includes fishery, dairy, credit unions and forestry co-ops. This exposure provided them with an insight into a different mentality as well as a new vocabulary. As a result, the women added two chapters dedicated to mechanics of co-operatives.

They found that by their nature, co-ops base their concept of leadership more on influence than authority. What impressed the authors was the co-op's ability to manage different mandates: long term vs. short term, economic vs. social, receiving vs. giving.

Co-op leaders consistently framed their answers in these terms: *mutual gains*, *common interests* and *win-win*. Co-op leaders talked about values, not as slogans, but as applied practices. As Morissette said, this was very different from business and government sectors who blow with the wind; to these entities, long term *is* the near future.

Many co-op leaders spoke about developing personal passions and relying less on structure and more on people. Co-ops invest a great deal in training and certification programs, yet another plus that sets them apart from the public sector more than the business sector. In co-ops, people assume leadership roles with little or no preparation. The concept of this training is something Morissette feels the public sector would benefit from greatly.

Instead of those knights in shining armour, the heroes riding off into the sunset, the writers prefer the analogy of geese flying in formation. Each one takes his or her turn as lead goose sometime during the flight, allowing a steady supply of leaders.

The book clearly shows that a fundamental shift in thinking is necessary to create a critical leadership mass for Canada. And this, the authors hope, is the opening volley.

About the Authors

Françoise Morissette M.Ed., P.C.C. is a human resource consultant and expert in organizational development. Her consulting practice takes her across North America and the world. She has led projects in Sweden, Finland, France and the UK.

She has been a faculty member at Queen's University's Industrial Relations Centre located in Kingston, Ontario since 1994 and was made a Fellow in 2006. She has played a key role in the development of the Organizational Development Certificates, the first of their kind in Canada. She is also an Associate at the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Guelph in Ontario.

Amal Henein CHRP has over 20 years of human resource experience in the business and non-profit sectors as an internal practitioner and as an external consultant. She has held senior management positions in human resources and led a national HR function for a global organization. Over the years, she has partnered with senior management to integrate business and human resource strategies in order to achieve an optimal fit and maximize business results.

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