

Great Reads to Lead The Way in Learning

By **Isabelle St-Jean**

“The greatest compliment that was ever paid to me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer.”

—Henry David Thoreau

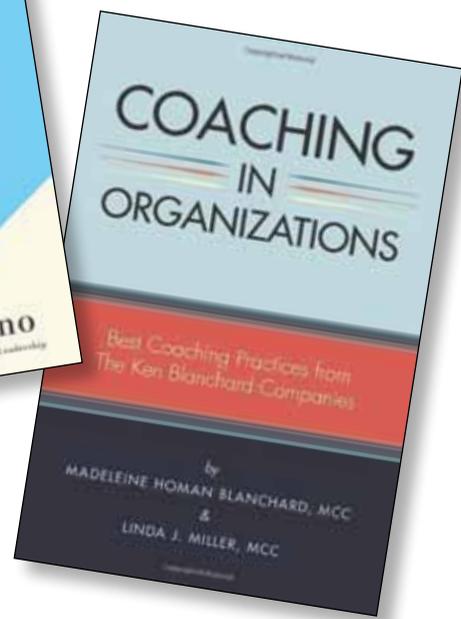
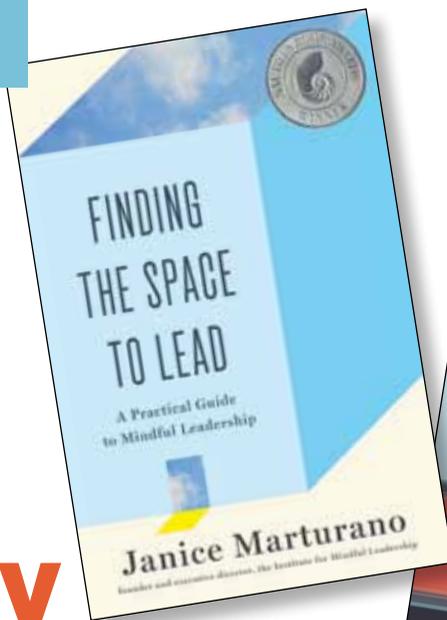
EVEN MORE SO NOW THAN IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY OF Thoreau, we are challenged to fully attend to each other in conversation. Fortunately, we thrive on that challenge, and the worth remains as precious as Thoreau’s many timeless truths. When we are truly attentive, it still sends the subtle and precious message that whoever we are listening to is 100 per cent worthy of our attention. No wonder that feels like a compliment, and remains a lesson in learning taken to heart by many leaders.

Such lessons abound, and while we have much to teach each other, reading remains the most available, affordable and practical way to develop ourselves and our interactions with others. Here are two books that have a great deal to teach us about learning, leadership, mindfulness, professional development and coaching in organizations.

Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership by **Janice Marturano**

Marturano begins by pointing to the factors that have generated our current need for mindful leadership: the constancy of change, our 24/7 connections to technology, anxiety-producing information overload, and the extreme distractibility which inhabits our modern minds. Without mindfulness, we tend to live under constant stress, as if on a nonstop treadmill and in autopilot mode, all of which takes a toll. This way of living and working stifles creativity, innovation, and learning; it also prevents us from leading with excellence.

The fundamentals of leadership excellence, affirms Marturano, are compassion, creativity, clarity, and focus—all of which converge in the service of others. Indeed, embracing



“Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.”

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

this mindful quality of attention gives life true meaning and enhances its quality. What’s more, this quality of presence is essential for interpersonal relations and for our leadership to have an impact—a significantly positive ripple effect.

We have all experienced a conversation in which the other person becomes distracted and has their mind wander off; at times we have been that other person. Precisely because most of us tend to inhabit the mental state referred to as continuous partial attention, we need the effective guidance Marturano provides to cultivate mindfulness and remain truly present.

Considering the delicate situations in which HR professionals often have to act and interact, embodying and conveying this quality of presence can foster a much more positive outcome among employees and team members alike. When people feel heard, they are less likely to act in ways that can lead to escalating tensions and conflicts.

Marturano has simple suggestions for developing a mindfulness practice by way of meditation and integrating it in one’s life. Over time, as research shows, one is likely to find a greater ability to quiet the mind more consistently which can provide access to better insights and inner knowledge, along with a better quality of attentiveness and focus.

Significantly, Marturano helps readers understand the value of a purposeful pause and provides instructions for creating these pauses as an invaluable habit that yields a sense of space and relieves the sense of pressure in one’s day. This is part of her suggested approach to working—in which we quiet the noise in our minds to better hear the voice of insight and wisdom guiding our next course of action on the path to mindfulness and leadership excellence.

Marturano’s book is timely. As stated in the article, “Give me a break” by Ferris Jabr in *Scientific America Mind*, progressive companies are starting to listen in response to the realization that mental downtime is vital to productivity and health. Among numerous studies on the popularity of mindfulness training and similar practices at work, Jabr states that in one study, meditation

and yoga programs were correlated not only with less stress, but also with 47 to 62 minutes of increased productivity per week.

Coaching in Organizations: Best Coaching Practices from the Ken Blanchard Companies by Madeleine Homan Blanchard, MCC and Unda J. Miller, MCC

An allied profession to HR, effective coaching is increasingly viewed as an invaluable investment with a strong ROI, making it a worthwhile endeavour that can produce sustainable results. As Master Certified Coaches with decades of experience, these authors are sharing a wealth of information and practical suggestions for successfully utilizing coaching to support learning, to enhance leadership development, to improve performance and to ignite a team's collective intelligence and commitment around a specific project.

Homan Blanchard and Miller have written this book specifically for HR and OD professionals to provide simple and easy tools to plan, implement and manage coaching interventions being fully aware, as they are, that many people are currently confused about the various definition of coaching, they clarify what it really means to them: "Coaching is a deliberate process using focused conversations to create an environment for individual growth, purposeful action and sustained improvement."

From the onset, the authors point out that coaching is being valued and integrated in many organizations due to several trends. Among the factors are: the "lean and mean machine"

companies expecting fewer employees to accomplish more, the reduced time and budgets available for training, the increased pace of business, and younger employees who respond well to the development implied by coaching dollars spent on them.

In addition to explaining methods and strategies to create a coaching climate in an organization, the authors provide insights on how to manage the coaching experience and measure the success of coaching in the company. Comprehensive in its appeal, the book also includes details on coaching skills and techniques for the diverse and specific use of coaching in one's organization.

By making available a list of powerful and relevant questions for use in a coaching role, these authors are truly enhancing the usability and pragmatic value of the takeaway. Providing clear explanations throughout and shedding plenty of light on the "how to" of breaking through limiting beliefs, the authors provide a manual for unleashing new heights of potential, performance and purposefulness.

Forward-thinking HR professionals are sure to benefit from integrating the learning, practice and skills sets abounding in these two excellent publications. 📖

Professional speaker, author and business coach, Isabelle St-Jean, RSW, PCC brings to her clients two decades of experience in leading, educating and providing practical solutions to major work/life challenges and transitions. (inspiredmomentum.com)

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