



MANAGING BOOKS

## Calm, cool and collected: The mindful leader

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### Mindful Leadership

By Maria Gonzales

(Jossey-Bass, 198 pages, \$26.95)

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“Mindfulness” is one of those unconventional ideas that is slowly moving into the mainstream. Executives used to view it as a practice seized upon by airy-fairy followers of charlatan yogis. But now it is common to recognize the benefits that mindfulness, and the meditation associated with it, can bring to people in the workplace.

Maria Gonzales, a consultant who has taught strategy and organizational development at McGill University’s Desautels Faculty of Management, believes that mindfulness – which at its core involves noticing the way things are – is essential to good leadership.

“By being mindful you can transform your life, your organization, and even your community,” she writes in *Mindful Leadership*. “The first step is to transform yourself.”

She notes that Phil Jackson, who has won the most NBA championships of any coach, follows a meditative practice. Robert Shapiro, former chief executive officer of Monsanto; William Ford, chairman of Ford Motor Co.; and Robert Stiller, chairman of Green Mountain Coffee, all practise meditation to be more effective. Google Inc. began offering mindfulness meditation classes in 2007.

Mindfulness meditation is a skill that can be learned, training your mind to focus on the moment. It can provide greater concentration, improved time management, enhanced judgment and decision making, an increased ability to deal with conflict, greater inspiration, and an improved ability to deal with stress.

Ms. Gonzales suggests you can incorporate it into your work life by listening more carefully in a challenging meeting, and paying more attention to the cues of your audience when speaking. When the phone rings, take a deep breath before answering and focus on what the caller says. When you’re drifting off in a meeting, concentrate on the speaker’s voice and tone.

She highlights nine aspects of mindful leaders:

**They are present:** They are in the moment, rather than fussing over the past or future. Most people do not pay full attention to what’s happening now – they are reliving the past, wishing it had been different, or fretting about the future. Abandon the habit of worry.

**They are aware:** They know what is arising within themselves at any given moment, so they won’t be blindsided by emotions or negative patterns of behaviour. They are also aware of their effect on others, through words, action and demeanour.

**They are calm:** They keep their wits about them in times of stress, which reduces the chance that others will panic. “Regardless of circumstances, they are able to face any situation without losing control,” she writes.

**They are focused:** They deliberately channel their time and resources to their priorities. Instead of multitasking, they concentrate their attention, even though a long meeting. They are not scattered.

**They are clear:** They understand what motivates them and know what is important, which helps them to make solid decisions and ignore proposals that would divert them. She notes that if you listen to the many circular presentations in a workplace, you will recognize that clarity is rare – and valuable. “Making clarity a priority signals to all around you in the organization that it is your standard and expectation,” she writes.

**They are equaniminous:** They accept “what is” with equanimity, not feeling compelled to resist. They have inner peace, and don’t waste time fighting what can’t be changed (or fighting themselves). They are content and happy even if everything is not in ideal order.

**They are positive:** They inspire others by being positive forces in their own lives and organizations.

**They are compassionate:** They care for others but at the same time aren’t so attached to others that they are diverted from doing their best every moment of the day.

**They are impeccable:** They accept responsibility for their actions and do not blame others for mistakes. They have integrity. But being impeccable doesn’t mean they are perfect.

The first half of the book is devoted to understanding the techniques to achieve mindfulness, and the second is focused on how it is expressed in mindful leadership. This involves some repetition, and the sections on mindful leadership are at times cotton-candyish. But we are in a new age, and this book can help you to become a more mindful person in the workplace.

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