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MEDIA REVIEW

***MINDFUL LEADERSHIP: A GUIDE FOR THE HEALTH OF CARE PROFESSIONS,* BY CHRISTOPHER JOHNS**

Reviewed by Sara Horton-Deutsch, PhD, RN, PMHCNS, FAAN, ANEF, Caritas Coach

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Christopher Johns is a Visiting Professor of Nursing at the University of Bedfordshire and Canterbury Christ Church University in the United Kingdom. He is an internationally recognized expert in reflective practice and has published widely on the topic for decades. In this book he takes his work to the next level, exploring *Mindful Leadership* within the context of health care. Johns argues that leadership is the engine that drives health care—yet leadership is profoundly lacking. This thesis is consistent with the worldview of many health care leaders struggling to transform organizations in transactional environments. Transactional environments are rigid systems that aim to maintain their own flawed smooth running. Johns maintains that there is no such thing as transactional leadership, noting that command and control are the antithesis of leadership’s quest to enable growth through human relationships.

Consistent with Johns’ previous work, *Mindful Leadership* is written as a reflective text that opens dialogical space to trigger the reader’s engagement and reflection on his or her own leadership. His writing helps readers see leadership as an ontological concern of being rather than an epistemological concern of ideas and tasks.

Major premises of the book

- Leadership is about relationships, not outcomes: get the processes right and the outcomes will be achieved.

- Leadership is the organization's life spirit.
- Because of its culture, the transactional organization cannot accommodate leadership easily or effectively. These organizations actually resist leadership because leaders threaten cultural patterns of working by creating a tension between the idea of leadership and its lived reality.
- Everybody has the potential to be a leader, but he or she must integrate knowledge and skills with theoretical and practical knowledge as well as self-knowledge.
- Leaders work behind the scenes creating an environment for achievement.

The introduction briefly explores theoretical works and ideas on leadership, including vision, mindfulness, transformational leadership, servant leadership, leadership as chaos, leadership as feminine, leadership as caring, and *front foot thinking*. Front foot thinking may be a new phrase for some - it is about being in place, proactive, and prepared rather than reactive, defensive, and uncertain. Johns provides an extensive list of attributes of front foot versus back foot thinking, and encourages readers to use the list to score and support their leadership journey. All the ideas presented in this chapter are meant to inspire leaders to consider their own vision, and offer a starting point for deeper exploration and reflection. Johns encourages readers to explore other literature on the topic to further inform and deepen their leadership journey.

The remaining chapters weave voices of leaders with literature on leadership to both renew and redirect learning. Chapters explore themes related to the transformational leader, the learning organization, becoming a servant leader, and managing conflict, as well as a reflection on Johns' own leadership passages.

Each chapter is organized with narratives, analysis, and interpretation throughout. The conclusions drawn from the narratives, despite being from different disciplines, remain remarkably similar: transactional organizations attempt to function as rigid machines seeking to maintain flawed systems. Within this culture, humanism is diminished, alienating self from others. The narratives support the author's overall

argument that leadership in health care is both vital and currently lacking. The book's premises are supported through an in-depth description of health care professionals' experiences. The insights and conclusions are consistent with the latest research on leadership both within and outside of health care (Horton-Deutsch & Sherwood, 2008; Horton-Deutsch, Young & Nelson, 2010; Horton-Deutsch, et al., 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2015; Pearsall, Pardue, Horton-Deutsch, Young, Halstead, Nelson, Morales & Zungolo, 2014; Stiles, Pardue, Young & Morales, 2011; Stiles, Horton-Deutsch & Andrews, 2014; Young, Pearsall, Stiles, Nelson & Horton-Deutsch, 2011; Young, Pardue, & Horton-Deutsch, 2015).

Chapter 6, "No One Said This Would Be Easy," is one of the most compelling, and very pertinent to leadership in the current health care arena. Johns begins this chapter by acknowledging that effective leadership requires resilience and the ability to transcend and transform.

Johns uses a hypothetical character, Pia, exploring how her professional journey liberates her from transactional management. Her story illuminates how inner strength comes from who Pia is—her being—and not what she does. Pia's story further illustrates how leadership can be exhausting and how it requires moral courage and attention to self-care. She demonstrates the value of honesty, vulnerability, and acknowledging and working through internal conflict, which helps to ensure that her behavior is aligned with her words. As Pia learns to lead herself, she develops a deeper understanding of how to lead others. This chapter illustrates that understanding the self is the most essential learning of a leader.

For the most part this book energized and validated my experience with leadership in health care by encouraging me to deepen my theoretical and scholarly sources as a way to inform my leadership journey and to create my own vision for leadership. While many books on leadership use narratives and case studies to clarify concepts and ideas, what differentiates this book from the rest is the sheer volume, breadth, and depth of stories that are shared.

Another distinguishing feature, and what Johns is most noted for, is his poetic and precise interpretations that fully engage the reader. Hence, this book will be of particular interest to aspiring leaders who value a contemplative approach to renewing and redirecting their own leadership journeys. However, for those not drawn to long narratives or stories, this text can be used as a reference book. For example, having this text available when working through a particular leadership challenge provides the reader with the insights and nuances needed to transcend and persevere on one's own journey.

How will leaders know if they are responding in accordance with their espoused leadership values? According to Johns, the key is reflection—reflecting on one's leadership performance in a way that he or she sees the tension between desirable leadership practice and the way he or she actually practices. Aspiring leaders must appreciate and resolve the tension between an understanding of their current reality and their vision of leadership.

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