

Leadership thoughts from *Lincoln on Leadership*

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Lincoln on Leadership by Donald T. Phillips has become a widely respected book in both the education and business environment. Phillips writes a compelling book on the sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln, concerning his leadership principles. These principles are relevant to today's leaders as Lincoln was known for truth, honesty, courage, and integrity. The author captures the essence of his leadership and discusses the management technique of "Management by Walking Around" (MBWA). This book is a great read for anyone wanting to learn about leadership or wanting to become a more effective leader. For clarification purposes, the book is divided into four sections: People, Character, Endeavor, and Communication.

Abraham Lincoln is one of the most celebrated presidents in United States history. The author writes Lincoln is "One who is viewed as the greatest leader this nation has ever known or will ever know" (p. 1). From his humble beginnings in Illinois to his accomplishments in office, his life is well documented in countless leadership and history books. Always known for his ability to tell a story and captivate an audience, Lincoln was beloved by many. Lincoln was a president, doing things that his predecessors had never tried and accomplishing more than most presidents ever thought possible. Lincoln was often seen walking the battlefield during the Civil War, and even came under enemy fire during one of his battlefield visits.

"During his four years as president Abraham Lincoln spent most of his time among the troops." (p. 13). In the first section on People, the author highlights Lincoln's belief that investing and believing in people was one of his greatest strengths. This section introduces people to the term Management by Walking Around (MBWA). Lincoln liked walking around the white house, government buildings and even battlefields to get a sense of what was happening. He was diligent about setting a good example since countless people looked to him as a leader. He built alliances with people because he recognized it was the best way to obtain current information and to establish connections in key areas to assist him in his presidency. Lincoln gave more compliments than words of criticism, knowing that giving compliments would establish a better relationship. Lincoln studied human nature and mastered the ability to "read" people because he wanted to persuade rather than coerce them in doing things he believed were right.

Honesty is the basis of section two that focuses on Character. Lincoln, aptly named "Honest Abe", was known for telling the truth even when the truth was not to his advantage. He granted more pardons than any other president, and was recognized for his kindness and compassion. He did not act out of spite against his enemies or people that disagreed with him. Lincoln received un-just criticism in which people tried to slander his name, and ruin his reputation. He had the courage to endure this criticism, while not seeking revenge. Lincoln tried not use force to make a point, even though the Civil War occurred during his presidency, his preference was to solve issues peacefully.

Endeavor, section three, discusses concepts related to this topic. Decisiveness was a necessary trait for Lincoln while in office. Many times people were unwilling to make decisions, and

Lincoln knew that gridlock could cause more long term damage. Lincoln chose subordinates that could lead and he empowered them to make decisions that allowed them to be effective leaders. Chapter 11 titled “Keep Searching Until You Find Your Grant” illustrates Lincoln’s dedication to finding the right person for the job. Lincoln went through several generals before he found the right person to be his commanding general. Finding the right people to execute Lincoln’s plan was a crucial aspect to his leadership style. Lincoln encouraged innovation in his followers, and challenged them to find new ways to accomplish the task.

In section four, Phillips writes about Communication, a term that is used extensively throughout the book. Lincoln had an uncanny ability to communicate to small and large audiences. Physically Lincoln was a tall awkward looking man, who naturally did not grab the audience’s attention. He was constantly perfecting his public speaking abilities, and was a master storyteller to compensate for his awkward appearance. His storytelling abilities let him convey messages to a broad audience and provided them a word picture of his message. He used humor to capture the audience’s attention and keep them entertained. Lincoln’s message was not always well received because many of his ideas were controversial at the time however, humor allowed him to bring levity to these stressful situations as well as keep the audience’s attention. This exceptional ability to share a story helped him influence thousands of people because his message was easily understood.

Lincoln has many attributes leaders can use today. His transformational leadership style was able to change a nation. His strategies and techniques are applicable in any leadership style. There are several principles selected from Phillips’s book to highlight as important leadership skills. Lincoln had a profound ability to personally connect with anyone. Lincoln recognized that one of his assets was meeting with people one on one. He operated with kindness and respect towards everyone letting them know that he cared for them as an individual. Foreign dignitaries, heads of states, and the Union foot soldier felt at ease when talking to Lincoln. He asked about their personal interests, concerns, and life aspirations allowing a person to see Lincoln’s compassion. This compassion made Lincoln effective in relating to a diverse population. There were occasions where people disagreed with his policies and beliefs however they did not say that Lincoln did not empathize with their situation. Connecting with people allows leaders to be more effective because the perception is that they care about the individual. Lincoln’s ability to build trust with the people he encountered not only to gain their confidence, it also allowed him to be a better negotiator. Lincoln discerned that he could not always agree to everyone’s demands because that was not in the best interest of the country. Leadership is about people and the ability to motivate, inspire, and lead them to meet the organization’s objective. Leaders that connect with their people will accomplish more and provide an open culture within the organization. Lincoln had an open door policy as president and willing to meet with anyone, even his enemies. Many leaders have an open door policy in which anyone can stop by and express concerns.

Lincoln believed listening was a crucial skill to being an effective leader. Listening to your followers not only provides a leader perspective on the events that are occurring, it also allows them to feel that they have a voice. The ability to express concerns is important to many people because they feel their voice has been heard. Lincoln had an open door policy but what made him different is he took action on the issues that were brought to him. Not every issue a leader is presented can be solved in an open meeting. Leaders need to sympathize with people when they

have an issue and try to find an appropriate solution or delegate the issue to someone who can assist.

Lincoln was willing to make mistakes and take calculated risks. His life was marked with failed elections, businesses, and other personal issues that caused setbacks in his life. Leadership is about learning from your mistakes and not permitting the mistakes define you as a leader. Also, Lincoln allowed his followers to make mistakes because he knew they would learn from them. He was willing to give his subordinates a chance, permitting them to fail in some circumstances. He did not lose confidence in his subordinates because they failed a specific task or objective. His subordinates were encouraged to be innovative and try new things, however trying new things means some of the ideas do not work. He did not dismiss his generals too quickly during the Civil War because he tolerated failures. However he was constantly looking for and ultimately found his Grant. Lincoln tolerated failures because he knew that everything was not going to work all the time. Leaders do not always find their Grant in their first hire, it may take years to develop or find that right person.

Having the right person in the right position let Lincoln delegate many tasks. Most leaders would prefer to do important projects themselves; however it is not physically possible to be everywhere. Delegating was the most efficient way to accomplish everything Lincoln needed to during his presidency. Delegation is a skill many leaders fail to develop because many leaders are type "A" personalities. Leaders are driven individuals, however delegation not only allows them to complete more tasks, it will improve the skills of their subordinates.

Lincoln did not want "yes" men surrounding him. Lincoln knew that his ideas were not always the best solutions to the nation's problems. He needed people to be honest with him giving him advice that might contradict his way of thinking. Effective leaders appreciate when people are agreeable to their ideas because it is reaffirming however, the issue with subordinates agreeing with the leader in every situation is that only one person is coming up with new ideas. While making mistakes is not the plan for many leaders, it does require patience. Lincoln had patience during these failures and setbacks. Patience is not a skill many people naturally have; it takes practice and the ability to see the big picture. Lincoln understood if he made decisions too quickly he might miss key points or the timing would not be right. This was especially pertinent as it pertained to military planning. Picking the correct location, day, and time would give him the advantage and he relied on having all the information before making those decisions. Lincoln was known for his honesty and integrity over his life time. Several books refer to Abraham Lincoln as "Honest Abe". Trust is important in any relationship and the foundation for any great leader. Building trust takes years but can be destroyed by one act. Numerous people will follow someone who makes mistakes, however few will follow someone that is dishonest with them.

Lincoln on Leadership can be beneficial to anyone in leadership or considering a leadership position. Phillips writes about key leadership principles and gives good examples of how to practically use them in various situations including learning how to connect with your subordinates. Additionally, Lincoln strength was connecting with people, and every leadership position requires great interpersonal skills. Humor, storytelling, and personal interaction were just a few methods that he used. These skills, when practiced, can be perfected by others. He

realized if practiced these skills he would become a more effective communicator and have more of a personal connection with people. Many of the issues a leader will face will be in regards to personal conflict. Conflict will always be a component of leadership, and the personal connections that are made will help reduce the tension during these conflicts.

In conclusion, *Lincoln on Leadership* provides a theoretical framework for all leaders to follow. Integrity, courage, and honesty were cornerstones of his character, and these principles made Lincoln an effective leader. The principles that were outlined in this book are useful for any leader no matter the type of organization. Lincoln's legacy will be remembered for years to come with many more books to be written about him. Leaders that are willing to follow his model of leading will have a better understanding of what it takes to be successful in a leadership role.

References

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leadership philosophy and style of Abraham Lincoln. Challenges that Lincoln was faced with are presented as real-life examples, in order to make the book more relatable to modern day leaders. Lincoln's responses to such challenges are used to highlight the strengths in his leadership philosophy. Finally, the author demonstrates how such a style and philosophy in leadership can effectively use lessons from Lincoln's point of view on leadership; they can be trained on what they need to do in order to develop and implement the needed steps to achieve these lessons and improve team performance. The training can also be used to educate the project leadership on how to lead these types of teams and how to adjust their styles of leadership in order to help them. Biography, leadership lessons and quotes from Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States. During this period, Lincoln displayed his exceptional leadership through his war strategy, his political rhetoric and his deft handling of the difficult political issues of the time. The war lasted four years, and ended with the surrender of General Lee and the Confederate armies. After the war, Lincoln spent his time rebuilding the United States and rallying the American people together through his speeches. It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt. Let's have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it. Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.