



Thoughts from Linda:

Lincoln on Leadership

Donald T. Phillips

1992

There must be no greater leader in American history with as many books and other paraphernalia available today as Abraham Lincoln. A short review of Amazon reveals over 28,000 books currently available, with a wide range of focus. These include the well-known Carl Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, which is now a 2-volume, 344,000-word study to the more eclectic *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, a 2012 American supernatural book by Seth Grahame-Smith which later became a movie. In the 'all things Lincoln arena,' there are also items such as LEGO architectural kits for the Lincoln Memorial, 500-piece puzzles, and even men's "fun patterned dress socks" with President Lincoln fully featured. Clearly, today we can find anything we want to know about this almost mythological of Presidents.

But this was not always the case.

In this 1992 book, you will find the key tenets of his leadership as distilled by the author, Donald Phillips. When he was initially researching the history of Abraham Lincoln in the late 1980s, by his admission, he had difficulty finding information specifically on 'Lincoln the leader.' He tells the story of searching the key resources available at the time, including the well-known Lewis A. Warren Lincoln Library in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, where he could identify only three known articles that even referenced the topic. There were no books by that title available. Thus, the idea for this book was formed, and it subsequently became one of the very first books that focused on the leadership philosophies and skills of our 16th President.

Don Phillips has gone on to write/co-author over 20 books with Norman Brinker, Mike Krzyzewski, Phil Mickelson, Cal Ripken Jr., and Greg Norman, among others. He focuses on leadership and has included this book on Lincoln with two others as part of

his 'leadership trilogy.' They include the books: *The Founding Fathers on Leadership* and *Martin Luther King Jr. on Leadership*.

This book was one of the early books targeting executives and received accolades from familiar leaders of the business world, academia, and the world of sports, as well as governmental leaders of the day, including John Scully, CEO of Apple, Frank Rhodes, President of Cornell University, Norman Augustine, CEO of Martin Marietta, Reuben Mark, Chairman of Colgate-Palmolive, Frank Popoff, President & CEO of Dow Chemical and Lou Holtz, University of Notre Dame, among many others.

He takes you on a journey of Lincoln's exceptional attributes and behaviors in the Presidency, with examples of his brilliant, nuanced approach to leadership. You will better understand what Carl Sandburg meant when he described Lincoln's personality as "50% velvet and 50% iron."

The book contains fifteen chapters, organized into four sections: People, Character, Endeavor, and Communication. After each chapter, Phillips distills the key elements in a pithy set of "Lincoln Principles," illustrated in the chapters. For example, in the first chapter on 'People' entitled: *Get Out of the Office and Circulate Among the Troops*, he shares these "Lincoln Principles":

- Explain yourself in writing and offer advice on how to solve problems.
- It is important that the people know you come among them without fear.
- Seek casual contact with your subordinates. It is as meaningful as a formal gathering, if not more so.
- Don't often decline to see people who call on you.
- Take public opinion baths.
- Be the very embodiment of good temper and affability.
- Remember, everyone likes a compliment.
- If your subordinates can stand it, so can you. Set a good example.
- You must seek and require access to reliable and up-to-date information.

The 1990s welcomed the phrase 'management by walking around' (from Tom Peter's book, *In Search of Excellence*), sometimes referred to as "MBWA," and Lincoln was the master of this practice, as the first chapter will describe. His penchant for personal connection was so strong that Lincoln was difficult to keep in the White House, preferring to learn by direct contact. You will even see a chart of the number of days spent in the White House, by month, during his tenure. Early in his Presidency and during the first stages of the Civil War, which began April 12th, 1861, he was active

outside the White House for almost the entire year. In the following years (1862-1864), he was also frequently in the field. His lowest activity level happened after the death of one son, Willie, in February 1862 and noticeably again in January 1864 when Lincoln was ill and recovering from a form of smallpox called Varioloid.

I especially appreciated the 11th Chapter: *Keep Searching Until You Find Your Grant*. This chapter shows how Lincoln personally took charge in the void of leadership, formulating much of the war policy himself early in the effort. He spent time drawing up war plans in the War Department offices and directed tactics in the field. During his tenure, Lincoln completely reorganized and redirected the Armed Forces and increased its size. By the time the war ended, the 16,000-man force that began the war had risen to an army of over 500,000 men. He is well known as the most autodidactic of American Presidents, having taught himself for most of his life through books, including beginning his own schooling at age nine and up to and including learning the law. Along the way, he was also the only President ever to hold his own patent. So, this curiosity and aptitude for self-learning served him quite well as he took the reins of power at this critical juncture in our country's history.

He searched for appropriate leadership on the battlefield. He went through nine attempts until he found the right combination of strategic ability and will to succeed in Ulysses S. Grant. The book includes many of his letters to these early Generals and clearly expresses his growing frustration. He appointed George McClellan General-in-Chief of the Army in October of 1861 and, on paper, he appeared to be an excellent choice. In the end, however, the negatives far overshadowed this man's positives. Lincoln took matters into his own hands by issuing something he invented called General War Order #1 on February 22nd, 1862, to push McClellan into action, to no avail. After several months of inaction, Lincoln reorganized responsibilities, freeing up McClellan for more action. On April 9th, 1862, Lincoln wrote to McClellan in a letter reflecting his strength of purpose and deft touch, "And, once more, let me tell you, it is indispensable to you that you strike a blow...I am powerless to help you in this...I beg to assure you that I have never written you or spoken to you, in greater kindness of feeling than now, nor with a fuller purpose to sustain you, so far as in my most anxious judgment, I consistently can. ***But you must act!***"

The book contains excerpts of his speeches, stories, and letters. To mention one quote from a speech, I'll turn to the last chapter, *Preach a Vision and Continually Reaffirm It*.

It offers a great insight into what he did throughout his four years of consistently expressing his vision for the United States of America. He kept his message clear and

simple to understand, emphasizing equality, freedom, and the uniqueness of the American experiment.

In the election of 1864, he offered these words to the 166th Ohio Regiment, who were battle-weary and eager for the entire experience to be over.

"It is not merely for today, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained...the nation is worth fighting for..."

This small book is a great read and reminds us all of the good fortune we experienced as a country to have this man at this time in our history in this particular role. The book focuses on his temperament and his many talents.

As the last sentence notes, "Abraham Lincoln was the essence of leadership."

I heartily recommend this book for your own reading and remembering--of what this uniquely gifted human being looked like and how he approached leadership in the toughest of times. I am grateful for the wisdom he possessed and the many leadership lessons and basic humanity he so capably taught to all generations.