Learning From Lincoln: Leadership Lessons for School Success

An Interactive Keynote Address

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with

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Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address

Fellow-Countrymen:
At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came. One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war.
To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully.

The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away.
Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Our Inspiration…

• The mystery of Lincoln: What qualities—inner strength—drove Lincoln to reach such heights?

• “His life and work evoke possibility, humility, hope, and moral leadership.” (p. 2)

• “Lincoln’s leadership helped a nation continue a journey toward equality—a journey that has not yet been completed.” (p. 2)
~Our Approach~

Leadership attributes are often intangible. We sought to make these attributes tangible by invoking an example from history and illustrating its timeless application in the 21st century.

Credibility

A foundational underpinning of leadership is credibility... personal example

People need to believe in us as leaders and must believe in the ideas that we represent in order to be motivated to implement and sustain change initiatives.
Lincoln’s Remarks to a Group of Ohio Soldiers on August 22, 1864

“...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 living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father’s child has…”

Reflective Interaction

How does personal example play an important part in your daily work?

or

Consider a colleague with whom you have worked who exemplifies credibility or one who does not.

What are the key qualities, practices, or behaviors that contribute to “credibility”? 
“Despite the difficulty of coming to consensus on how we can measure successful leadership, there is almost universal agreement that success in carrying out the mission and vision of an endeavor- a cause- should be the primary gauge of successful leadership.”


Chapter One:
Implementing and Sustaining a Mission and Vision with Focused and Profound Clarity

“By itself, preservation of the Union was an empty concept to Lincoln, unless the union remained dedicated – or could forcibly be rededicated – to its founding principle that all men are created equal.”

(Striner, Father Abraham, 2006)
Robert Moton, the son of slaves, eloquently described Lincoln’s achievement:

“The claim of greatness for Abraham Lincoln lies in this, that amid doubt and distrust, against the counsel of his chosen advisors, in the hour of the nation’s utter peril, he put his trust in God and spoke the word that gave freedom to a race, and vindicated the honor of a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

(Ferguson, 2007, p. 266)

The Ten Leadership Qualities and Practices

- Implementing and Sustaining a Mission and Vision with Focused and Profound Clarity
- Communicating Ideas Effectively with Precise and Straightforward Language
- Building a Diverse and Competent Team to Successfully Address the Mission
- Engendering Trust, Loyalty, and Respect through Humility, Humor, and Personal Example
- Leading and Serving with Emotional Intelligence and Empathy
The Ten Leadership Qualities and Practices

• Exercising Situational Competence and Responding Appropriately to Implement Effective Change
• Rising Beyond Personal And Professional Trials Through Tenacity, Persistence, Resilience, and Courage
• Exercising Purposeful Visibility
• Demonstrating Personal Growth and Enhanced Competence as a Lifetime Learner, Willing to Reflect on and Expand Ideas
• Believing That Hope Can Become a Reality

A Matrix of Critical Ingredients for School Success

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Perhaps the best historical example of a mission statement, with a rationale and an aligned vision clearly noted is the Gettysburg Address.

At Gettysburg…

“…that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” (Nov. 19, 1863)
The mission:

The vision:

Successful school leaders possess a strong sense of responsibility and a deep and unwavering commitment to carrying out a shared **mission and vision** aligned with deeply held values and beliefs that focus on

– Equity
– Social Justice
– Democracy
– Creating those conditions under which profound levels of human learning can flourish
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## The Good with the Bad
Impact of Vision on Life Paths

- Confronting reality with clarity
- Using vision to impact the lives of many
- Changing self concept/sense of worth

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School Leaders May Ponder…

• What do I want to perpetuate in our schools not merely for today but for all time to come?

• Though, as leader, my “temporary residence” may be the schoolhouse or the central office, what do I want future leaders who occupy the space to do or say to continue the work I have begun?

Chapter Two:
Communicating Ideas Effectively with Precise and Straightforward Language

Effective leaders are able to articulate their most important ideas with clarity.

Using language that emotionally connects with an audience helps develop meaning.

Meaning is critical to school change.
Lincoln’s Learning Journey

Lincoln experimented with language and intentional communication strategies to improve his speaking and writing abilities

- Reading aloud
- Writing as a way of ordering thoughts
- Asking for feedback

Lincoln’s extraordinary ability to communicate with eloquence is characterized by:

- Crisp, concise writing
- An ability to use everyday language understood by the most and least educated
- A desire to receive feedback and refine his works
- Mastering the primary communication media of his age – the telegraph and the newspaper
- Patience to listen to all sides and make effective decisions.

(Alvy and Robbins, 2010, p. 21)
Lincoln wrote this letter on Dec. 23, 1862 after hearing about how a grieving daughter was suffering terribly following the loss of her father in the war:

“Dear Fanny,

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave Father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it.

I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not now realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear Father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer, and holier sort than you have known before. Please present my kind regards to your afflicted mother.

Your sincere friend,

A. Lincoln

(The Collected Works of A. L., Basler, Vol. 6, pp. 16-17)
Lincoln once criticized a particularly verbose lawyer noting, “It’s like the lazy preacher who used to write long sermons and the explanation was, he got to writin’ and was too lazy to stop” (p.33).

(Basler, 1953, Vol II, p. 461)

Lincoln was a storyteller. He used this story to illustrate his steadfast belief in the viability of the union:

“When I was a young man in Illinois,” he said, “I boarded for a time with a deacon of the Presbyterian church. One night I was aroused from my sleep by a rap on the door, and I heard the deacon’s voice exclaiming, ‘Arise Abraham! The day of judgment has come!’ I sprang from my bed and rushed to the window and saw the stars falling in great showers; but looking back of them in the heavens I saw the grand old constellations, with which I was so well acquainted, fixed and true in their places. Gentlemen, the world did not come to an end then, nor will the Union now.”

Reflecting on Story

“...the artful creation and articulation of stories constitutes a fundamental part of the leader’s vocation. Stories speak to both parts of the human mind – its reason and emotion...it is stories of identity – narratives that help individuals think about and feel who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed – that constitute the single most powerful weapon in the leader’s literary arsenal” (p 43).


Chapter Three: Building a Diverse and Competent Team to Successfully Address the Mission

“[Lincoln] also understood something else. He recognized that while each of us must do our part, work as hard as we can, and be as responsible as we can – although we are responsible for our own fates, in the end, there are certain things we cannot do on our own. There are certain things we can only do together. There are certain things only a union can do.”

– President Barack Obama
An Example of Lincoln’s Strategic Practices

Lincoln believed it was best for the nation to bring the most competent, brightest, and experienced leaders on board—especially into his cabinet—regardless of personal ambitions and jealousies.

Diverse partnerships enabled Lincoln to tap into the rich expertise needed to pursue and achieve the national mission and vision.

Lincoln’s Cabinet: Working with Stanton, Chase, and Seward to Serve the Greater Good
“Lincoln’s genius was his ability to draw upon the talents of others, meld together diverse personalities who often did not trust one another, and then listen to their advice, recognizing that it was sometimes wiser than his own.”

Thinking about Lincoln's example, what strategies do you use to meld together diverse personalities to address a common goal?

The Different Faces of Perception
Diverse Perceptions as Assets

• What did team members see?
• How did different perspectives of the image contribute to the group’s perception?
• How can perceptions enhance teamwork?
• How can perceptions deter teamwork or lead to conflict?
• What are some steps we can take to be sure our diversity is embraced in a positive way?

School Leaders May Ponder…

• What is the vision or mission we wish to pursue with the team?
• What are the individual qualities of team members that would serve the team well?
• How might differences in personalities, expertise, or years of experience contribute positively to team functioning and to realizing the vision? How might they pose a challenge? What personality traits or behaviors “push my buttons” as a leader?
Judith Warren Little cautions…

“If working as a community doesn’t carry value added over what teachers are able to accomplish independently, then it won’t be worth the transactional costs, the investment of time, and the competition with what teachers feel that they have to do individually” (Crow, 2008, p. 54).

1860…………….and…………1865…..
“The hope is not that suffering will go away, for with Lincoln it did not ever go away. The hope is that suffering, plainly acknowledged and endured, can fit us for the surprising challenges that await.”

(Joshua Wolf Shenk, *Lincoln’s Melancholy*, p.216)

Striner, in *Father Abraham*, concludes:

“…Lincoln was a rare man indeed; a fervent idealist endowed with a remarkable gift for strategy” (p. 2).“His goals kept expanding as he tested how far he might go in his attempt to change history” (p. 3).
From Lincoln’s Annual Message to Congress on December 1, 1862:

“The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

“The test of leadership comes when difficult decisions need to be made that will profoundly change the ethos of a school, a business, or a nation.”

*(Learning from Lincoln, p. 104)*
Leaders must first and foremost stay focused on the ultimate object of their work – student success, teacher growth, organizational wellness, and excellence.

Believing That Hope Can Become a Reality

“Of all the factors vital to improving schools, none is more essential – or vulnerable – than hope.”

(Evans, *The Human Side of School Change*, 1996)
“School goals related to social justice:
– Closing the achievement gap
– Academic excellence for all
– Educating worthy citizens
– Pressing for gender equity
– Tackling the high school dropout crisis
– Reducing school bullying
– Educating the whole child

must be pursued by school leaders because the goals, the hopes, are worthy, regardless of the hurdles.”

(Learning from Lincoln, p.150)

The Unfinished Work…
The Gettysburg Address

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln - November 19, 1863
A message of hope for the future still echoes from Gettysburg:

“It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us.”

School Leaders May Ponder…

To what will you “be here dedicated”?

Our actions as school leaders influence the optimism, hope, and success of our students.
“Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in.”

– Abraham Lincoln

For additional information or to schedule professional development, please contact:

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