

“Leadership in Turbulent Times”
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Lincoln:

What appeared a gift, he (Lincoln) argued was, in his case, a developed talent. Early on, Abraham revealed a keystone attribute essential to success in any field—the motivation and will power to develop every talent he possessed to the fullest. Lincoln understood early on that concrete examples and stories provided the best vehicle for teaching. If he was the hub of his young circle’s entertainment, he was also their foremost contrarian, willing to face their disapproval rather than abandon what he considered right.

Lincoln made things happen instead of waiting for them to happen. He came to trust that he was going to be something, his cousin Sophie Hanks related, slowly crating what one leadership scholar calls A vision of an alternate future. Lincoln told a neighbor he did not intend to delve, grub, shuck corn, split rails and the like. I’ll study and get ready then the change will come.

When he was ignorant on any subject, no matter how simple it might make him appear, he was always willing to acknowledge it. Lincoln pledged that if his opinions on any subject turned out to be erroneous, he stood ready to renounce them. With this commitment, he revealed early on a quality that would characterize his leadership for the rest of his life—a willingness to acknowledge errors and learn from his mistakes. The destiny he sought was not simple craving for individual fame and distinction; his ambitions were, first and always, linked with the people. A finely developed sense of timing—knowing when to wait and when to act—would remain in Lincoln’s repertoire of leadership the rest of his life.

Lincoln hoped that those born in the lower ranks would rise as far as their talents and discipline might take them, and the promise of the American dream would be realized. Scholars who have studied the development of leaders have situated resilience, the ability to sustain ambition in the face of frustration, at the heart of potential leadership growth. Lincoln had more than his share of frustration and failure. Lincoln’s speeches in a dozen different cities, reporters noted, were replete with good sense, sound reasoning, and irresistible argument, and spoken with the perfect command of manner and matter which so eminently distinguishes the western orators.

What fired in Lincoln this furious and fertile time of self-improvement? The answer lay in his readiness to gaze in the mirror and soberly scrutinize himself. To fulfill what he believed to be his destiny, a different kind of sustained effort and discipline was required, a willingness to confront weakness and imperfection, reflect upon failure, and examine the kind of leader he wanted to be. Once fixing his mind on any

subject, nothing could interfere with or disturb him. Lincoln treated everyone, high or low, without a trace of affectation, with the same tenderhearted patience, the same generous and helpful kindness and empathy that had drawn the protective affection of the settlers of New Salem to him when the 23 year old first appeared on the banks of the Sangamon River.

Henry Clay possessed an unsurpassed eloquence, which proceeded not from an elegant arrangement of words and sentences, but from great sincerity and thorough conviction. Time and again, Clay resisted extremes of opinion.

What persuaded and changed minds was the sincerity, clarity and conviction, and passion of the story Lincoln told. Mr. Lincoln's eloquence was of the higher type, which produced conviction in others because of the conviction of the speaker himself. The way Lincoln had learned to use language, the collective story he told, and the depth of his conviction marked a turning point in his reputation as both man and a leader. Lincoln said, "If we could first know *where* we are and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do and *how* to do it." Said of Lincoln, his knowledge of the subject is profound, his logic unanswerable, his style inimitable. Lincoln never allowed his ambition to consume his kindheartedness. Lincoln told his secretary John Hay, "We must settle this question now, whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose."

I am a patient man, Lincoln a member of a group with whom he was negotiating, but it may as well be understood once and for all that I shall not surrender this game leaving any available card unplayed. Despite the cacophony of ideas and contending voices, Lincoln remained fixed on his course of action. One political partner with Lincoln said to him, you have given to every proposition which has been made a kind and candid consideration and you have no expressed the conclusion to which you have arrived, clearly and distinctly. In a certain matter, Lincoln agreed that danger lay in a direction being considered, but added that the difficulty was as great not to act as to act. In the end, it was Lincoln's character—his consistent sensitivity, patience, prudence, and empathy—that inspired and transformed every member of his official family.

All through his life, the honor and weight of his word had been ballast to his character, the "chief gem" of his pride. Ever since, as a family man, friend and lawyer, and politician, he had reflected carefully before setting forth his opinion and making promises. Abolitionist Fredrick Douglas said of Lincoln, he may be slow, but he is not the man to reconsider, retract and contradict words and purposes solemnly proclaimed over his official signature. If he has taught us nothing else, he has taught us to confide in his word. Lincoln said, that he never in his life felt more certain that he was doing right than in signing the Emancipation Proclamation. An acute sense of timing, one journalist observed, was the secret to Lincoln's gifted leadership. For Lincoln, wrestling with thought was no figure of speech; it was an exhaustive mental combat from which he emerged with confidence and clarity.

The story of how he was able to recognize, align, harness, and creatively shape this swelling movement toward the acceptance, incorporation, and empowerment yielded by emancipation provides a demonstration of the rare stuff of transformational leadership. He cares for us, one soldier said to another, he makes us fight, but he cares. To sound out conditions for peace without demanding the end of slavery Lincoln considered “utter ruination.” He would rather face electoral defeat than renounce emancipation. The word firmness is insufficient to connote the iron will with which Lincoln not stood his ground. Lincoln died at 56 years of age. Kindness, empathy, humor, humility, passion, and ambition all marked him from the start. Kindness, empathy, humor, humility, passion and ambition all marked him from the start. Lincoln was 56 when he was shot.

Theodore Roosevelt:

He distinguished two kinds of success. The first was that of men assigned extraordinary gifts at birth. The second and more common type was dependent on a man’s ability to develop ordinary qualities to an extraordinary degree through ambition and the application of hard, sustained work. He suggested that it is more useful to study this second type, for with determination anyone can, if he chooses, find out how to win a similar success himself.

However dissimilar their upbringings, books became for both Lincoln and T Roosevelt the greatest of companions. Every day for the rest of their lives, both men set aside time for reading, snatching moments while waiting for meals, between visitors, or lying in bed before sleep. The precocious Teedie (as he was called), one biographer noted, displayed not only a purposeful, determined personality, but also an almost ruthless single-mindedness where his interests were concerned.

In the few statements he made, Roosevelt proclaimed that he was “Owned by no man” and would enter the legislature “Untrammelled and Unpledged.” He would obey no boss and serve no clique. Roosevelt told a reporter that when he made up his mind to do a thing he acted. T. Roosevelt said that success was having work worth doing and doing it well. T Roosevelt settled into bed. He never woke up. He was sixty years old. A blood clot had reached his lungs and stopped his heart.

Franklin Roosevelt:

He had always loved to talk, but now he learned to listen, and to listen intently, his head nodding in a welcoming way, with an air of sympathetic identification, an attentive posture and manner that would become a lifelong characteristic. Oliver Wendell Holmes opined, Franklin was a 2nd class intellect, but a 1st class temperament. Generations of historians have agreed with Homes, pointing to Roosevelt’s self-assured, congenial, optimistic temperament as the keystone to his leadership success. The first hint of a signature component of what would characterize Franklin’s fundamental style—the ability to make decisions without hesitating or looking back, coupled with a propensity to keep the process of determination hidden from view. Once he made a decision, he rarely second-

guessed himself. The idea of breaking precedent captivated Franklin, as it would again and again in the years ahead. Franklin had been a quick study in learning the art of compromise in order to get things accomplished. Franklin insisted that when something had to be done, there was always a way to do it, whether it involved bypassing regulations, cutting through red tape, or breaking precedent. Of all the strengths Franklin displayed during the campaign, none was of greater significance than his ability to assemble and sustain a remarkably talented and staunchly loyal team that would remain together in the years ahead. It was that vision. F Roosevelt's uncanny ability to keep his head above the water of administrative problems, to see the whole picture and keep his eye on the objectives of highest importance. On the morning of April 12, 1945 his color seemed exceptionally good. He looked smiling and happy and ready for anything. Suddenly then, his head slumped forward and he collapsed from the cerebral hemorrhage , never to regain consciousness.

Lyndon Johnson:

But opposite the bright and beaming side of the moon was an equally dark side—an insecurity that would plague LBJ for the rest of his life. When he failed to fulfill his mother's ambitions for him she withdrew her love and affection. He failed to understand when to ease up and was often blind to the collateral cost of his own compulsive energies. He could get people to do things they would under ordinary circumstances never think of doing.

LBJ could never unwind. All his life, he would continue to work at this same compulsive pace, as if victory and success might somehow reclaim the steady love and affection he had been denied as a child. Lady Bird softened the often inconsiderate harshness of LBJ's compulsive pace. There was a swiftness with which LBJ made life-altering decisions. LBJ had no hobbies and had developed no ways to relax. LBJ ate, drank and slept politics. At the core of LBJ's success in the senate was his celebrated ability to read character, to gauge the desires, needs, hopes and ambitions of every individual with whom he interacted.

Time is the most valuable thing you have; be sure you spend it well had been favorite, oft-repeated adage of LJB. After the assassination of JFK, LBJ as the new president was inclined by temperament to act quickly. LBJ firmly believed in acting wisely, acting vigorously and acting speedily.

In a conversation with Richard Russell the leader of the southern opposition to the "Civil Rights Act, Russell said to LBJ, well Mr. President you may very well do that. But if you do, I promise you'll not only lose the election, but you'll lose the South forever. LBJ responded, Dick, you may be right. But if that's the price I've got to pay, I'm going to gladly do it. *"Stronger than an Army is an idea whose time has come"* ~ Victor Hugo. Russell said of LBJ support of the Civil Right Acts, I expect to support the President just as strongly when I think he is right as I intend to oppose him when I think he is wrong. What convinces is conviction. Though rarely voiced, LBJ's regrets over Vietnam were turned over in his mind every day. LBJ said that the

plight of being black in a white society remained the chief unaddressed problem of our nation.