LINCOLN'S LEADERSHIP

Lincoln was an extremely social individual—social in the sense of being interested in and able to understand people. He spent much of his time in social intercourse. As a president he not only met with soldiers in the frontlines; he also visited hospitals, attended funerals, sat during regular working sessions of Congress. He constantly sought firsthand information. He could break with etiquette and enter other members' cabinets to witness the proceedings, and he actively sought to meet with his cabinet members in between official meetings. He was probably the most accessible president the nation has ever had. Add to this that he was most often pleasant, encouraging, and humorous.

The president was eager to recognize the sharpest minds and the most dependable collaborators. He chose his people according to their objective skills, rather than their loyalty to him. And he worked closely with them, eager to improve their relationship. For every failed relationship, like those of McClellan or Salmon Chase, there were two or more successes.

Even with those with whom he parted ways, the president was rarely vindictive. He could show a high degree of flexibility with insubordination; not indifference and passivity, however. Salmon Chase, who had offered his resignations four times, is a good case in point. Lincoln finally accepted his pro forma resignation, much to his surprise. Later, however, he nominated Sen. William P. Fessenden, one of Chase's strongest supporters, to be the new secretary of the treasury. And he soon appointed Chase to be the new chief justice of the Supreme Court. He was the one administering the oath of office to Lincoln on the occasion of the second inaugural.

Throughout his days in office, Lincoln offered his subordinates encouragement, support, and ways to get to know each other. However, he did not lack a clear sense of boundaries, and gave clear messages of how far they could or could not go. He had little care for preserving harmony if it meant sacrificing principles. He was very clear once an infraction touched something he deeply cared about. He did this while preserving dignity and, possibly, deepening mutual respect. Examples of this survive in the detailed letters he wrote to his subordinates, in which he could be very diplomatic but also candid. To General Joseph Hooker, after complimenting him, he wrote: "And yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which, I am not quite satisfied with you." And he added exactly what he expected of him. The general recalled being deeply impressed by the honesty and told a newspaperman it was "just such a letter as a father might write to

his son."[1] On the other hand he never quarreled over insignificant matters and would know how to avoid conflict when not absolutely necessary. Overall he had a penetrating understanding of human nature, allied to an ability to forgive.

Lincoln was a master in garnering persuasion; he knew the art of creative compromise, which would meet most parties' needs. He had already shown it at age twenty-seven, when he was able to mastermind the transfer of the Illinois state capital from Vandalia to Springfield, through clever bargaining. His already quoted speech at the Temperance Society shows what persuasion meant to him: "When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, *persuasion,* kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted." Following these mental habits, it was very normal for the president to consult frequently with members of his cabinet and avoid doing anything concerning a department without consulting with its heads. He knew the value of making requests versus giving orders, and using suggestions and recommendations. And most of those who collaborated with Lincoln had the feeling of being special to him.

The president also showed great resilience under stress and criticism. He would most often ignore the attacks, especially when they expressed petty concerns. He wrote on April 11, 1865, "As a general rule, I abstain from reading the reports of attacks upon myself, wishing not to be provoked by that to which I can not properly offer an answer."[2] He could view unjust criticism with amusement, rather than anger. To Stephen Douglas's accusations in 1858 he replied, "When a man hears himself somewhat misrepresented, it provokes him—at least, I find it so with myself; but when the misrepresentation becomes very gross and palpable, it is more apt to amuse him." However, he reacted if the attacks could impact public perception of his views and principles, as he expressed in a speech in 1859: "I have found that it is not entirely safe, when one is misrepresented under his very nose, to allow the misrepresentation to go uncontradicted." He spent a lot of time and consideration on how to react most appropriately. To master his emotions and understand a complex situation, Lincoln used to draft letters to the people with whom he was upset, which he often would not send. He could thus better understand the situation, and in the end weigh the pros and cons of sending them. In the process of writing, he could reach greater clarity.

Lincoln had no doubt understood in his youth the importance of balancing passion with reason. He had acquired a great degree of mastery over his emotions. He most often recognized credit where it was due and was ready to assume responsibility when things went wrong. This supported his subordinates and encouraged them to take risks and innovate.

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[1] Donald T. Phillips, *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times*, 45–46.
[2] Public address of April 11, 1865, quoted in Donald T. Phillips, *Lincoln on Leadership*, 69.

Lincoln was a bundle of apparent polarities and contradictions; he was a master of paradox. He was greatly flexible while also a model of consistency. The president did in fact show his flexible approach quite candidly: "My policy is to have no policy; I shall not surrender this game leaving any available card unplayed." And, in pure Mercurial fashion he was always open for a change of mind: "I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views."[3]

Most of all the president showed great resilience and perseverance. Lincoln rarely, if ever, gave up after failures. After losing to Stephen Douglas he wrote: "The fight must go on. The cause of civil liberty must not be surrendered at the end of one or even hundred defeats."[4] And in order to achieve very ambitious goals, Lincoln knew how to set up realistic, attainable small steps. Thus during the war he concentrated on the destruction of Lee's army rather than the capture of the Confederate capital.

In the long search for the ideal general, Lincoln took on the work with the army very methodically. His first step was to completely reorganize and redirect the armed forces from 16,000 men to over half a million men at the end of the war. Lincoln went through quite a few generals before arriving at Ulysses Grant. However, even when they were inept, he learned everything he could in terms of strategy from them. When he needed to build, organize, and train the army, he selected George McClellan, who was perfect for this job, but would not fight. When McClellan failed him, Lincoln moved him to command just the Army of the Potomac. Seeing the need for urgency, he did not hesitate to step in when his subordinate tarried. Thus he personally directed the assault on Norfolk before its capture.

Lincoln had great care in preventing operations from coming to a standstill, while preserving the dignity of individuals. When a general was not performing, he would remove some responsibility and authority from him. If the pattern continued, he would remove the individual out of the decision-making, by having him report to another superior. In this way Lincoln had to accept disappointment from quite a few generals. When he finally found the man he could trust in Ulysses Grant, he gave him full responsibility. Even after he delegated most authority to Grant, Lincoln never ceased to follow closely military operations and exert his personal influence when he felt it necessary. The selection and testing of his generals was in fact an enduring task for the president (See box).

[3] Letter to Horace Greeley of August 22, 1862.
[4] Letter to Henry Asbury of November 19, 1858.

Lincoln and His Generals

President Lincoln took to heart his role of commander-in-chief; all the more so because the army lacked for a long spell a true general-in-chief. During that time Lincoln took on the role. The following is the sequence of choices directly taken by Lincoln himself.

1861: The army was under the command of 75-year-old General Winfield Scott. Lincoln personally oversaw the re-organization of the Armed Forces. He agreed with the general on the importance of securing the Mississippi River and of blockading the southern harbors.

March 1861: He appointed Irvin C. McDowell as commanding general and relieved Scott of most of his duties, while still consulting with him.

July 1861: Realizing the need for an organizer able to rebuild and train the army, he appointed General George B. McClellan, first to the Army of the Potomac, then as general-in-chief.

March 1862: He relieved McClellan of his command and confined him to the Army of the Potomac, appointing General Henry W. Walleck as head of the Department of the Mississippi and General John C. Fremont of the Mountain Department. During this time he took initiative from the hands of General McClellan to personally orchestrate the attack and capture of Norfolk, Virginia.

July 1862: Walleck is named general-in-chief, McClellan having to report to him. Walleck did not show capacity and initiative. Lincoln appointed John A. McClernand to the Department of the Mississippi, William S. Rosecrans to the Mountain Department, and General Nathaniel P. Banks to the newly formed Department of the Gulf. All generals reported to Lincoln and took orders from him.

November 1862: He appointed Ambrose E. Burnside as commander of the Army of the Potomac. Burnside was relieved of his task only two months later and replaced by General Joe Hooker, who would himself be replaced by General George G. Meade by June 1863.

February 1863: General Ulysses S. Grant takes charge of the Department of the Mississippi.

October 1863: Grant takes command of the armies of the West.

March 1864: He promotes Grant to lieutenant general, giving him command of all the armies.

Similar patterns often happened on the political front, where the president had to deal with a cabinet rendered famous as a "team of rivals." Lincoln showed he was able to determine what was really going on, and he often found creative ways in which to confront and defuse tensions. The president was in the habit of bringing all dissenting parties to the table and pushing them to find a way to make peace. An example: in 1862 Chase led the charge to discredit Seward, whom he wanted to replace. The seasoned senator was being unjustly accused on many accounts by various Republican senators inspired by Chase. Lincoln invited all parties except Seward to a special session of the cabinet, asking them to iron out all differences before they left. The senators did not know the cabinet would be present and vice-versa, placing Chase in the awkward position of not being able to support what the senators would say, without clearly showing his role in leading the dissent. He was thus forced to agree that Seward had acted properly and honestly. With such a strategy Lincoln embarrassed both senators and Chase, exposing the latter as an impostor who could not be trusted. Seward was cleared of all charges, and the next day Lincoln accepted Chase's resignation.

Lincoln and the Fruits of Previous Incarnations

"When a first-class mind is filtered through an inferior one, it becomes unrecognizable. That is why there are so many different Lincolns. We see him through lesser minds," Susan B. Martinez asserts.[5] Recapturing Lincoln's essential being has in fact been the effort of seeing him through many great minds of our nation before attempting a synthesis.

The way in which Lincoln integrated paradoxes and polarities is a sign of a likely previous life initiation, as seems the case with Franklin and Washington. Many historians can but marvel at how the president embodied one quality and its seeming opposite.

Donald T. Phillips, as one of many, finds the sixteenth president "charismatic, yet unassuming; consistent yet flexible; victim of vast amounts of slander, yet very popular with the troops; trusting and compassionate and demanding and tough; risk-taker yet patient and calculating."[6] This compounding of seeming opposites is in fact the essence of initiation when it re-emerges instinctively in the will; it renders the individual able to naturally synthesize polarities. In terms of planetary qualities we could point out how Lincoln embodied each polarity:

- He conducted the Civil War fully, almost relentlessly, out of a Mars gesture. He spoke his mind diplomatically but candidly, and he did not broach insubordination. He knew when to seize an opportunity. On the other hand he discharged his fatherly duties and attended to his

[5] Susan B. Martinez, *The Psychic Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 133.
[6] Donald T. Phillips, *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times*, 79.

friendships in a complete Venus fashion. He was imbued with deep interest in fellow human beings, regardless of their station in life.

- He could coat everything he approached with Mercurial wit. He knew how to avoid conflict. He acted out of Jupiterian wisdom; he knew what was possible and what wasn't, and recognized when it was necessary to wait.
- He had the Saturnian long view that saw centuries ahead. He could see before most of his fellow citizens the implications of political or judicial decisions. However, he respected tradition and precedent within the Moon spirit; he took no liberties with the Constitution. He subordinated his far sight to the necessary limitations of time and space. He balanced desire for change with patient education.
- His generosity of spirit attests to his continuous Sun-like qualities; so do his views about Christ and His deed for the redemption of humanity, or his unwavering trust in the hand of Providence. He knew how to mediate and act with magnanimity. He forgave naturally and rarely, if ever, took revenge.

Through his leadership Lincoln preserved America's cosmopolitan essence. He preserved its spirit and made it possible for America to enter in the right way into the cosmopolitan Michaelic age, characterized by Steiner thus:

> You see, the cosmopolitan views … are simply a reflection of what occurred in the spiritual world. The tendency exists in mankind to wipe out the various differences which were fostered by the blood and the nerve temperament. It is not a tendency of the spiritual worlds to create further differences among mankind, but it is a tendency of the spiritual worlds to pour a cosmopolitan element over mankind.[7]

Or to echo Emerson's final words of his "American Scholar" address: "A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men." He implied that America can grasp everything anew and make it her own through her own forces.

[7] Rudolf Steiner, lecture of February 17, 1918, in Munich.