Lincoln on Leadership

Meeting 10 September 2007
Lincoln on Leadership

• *Lincoln on Leadership – Executive Strategies for Tough Times*
  – by Donald T. Phillips
  – 1992 Warner Books publication
  – At least 23 reprints
  – Has been translated into seven other languages
  – “Clinton’s private bible about how to govern – TIME”
  – Author claims there were no books on Lincoln’s leadership or management philosophy
Testimonials

• “Lucid…..compelling ….a book not to be missed by anyone who manages people and problems”

• “A wonderfully refreshing and interesting way to get across several critical – and timeless – leadership messages”
  John Scully, Chairman and CEO, Apple Computer Inc.

• “This expert, detailed record of [Lincoln’s] leadership qualities not only illustrates the past, it might also help light the way to the future”
  Mario M. Cuomo, Governor of New York and co-author of Lincoln on Democracy.
Lincoln

• Only ten days before Lincoln took the oath of office the Confederate States seceded.
• On taking office, Lincoln was viewed by his own advisors as nothing more than a gawky, second-rate country lawyer with no leadership experience
• “Lincoln went on to become the honored and revered president in history”
Leadership

• “Leader” – a primary shoot of a plant through which the organism lives and thrives
• “Leader’s ability to embody and communicate the company’s vision”
• Aspirations, values/motivations of both leader and followers
• People can relate to concrete illustrations
  – Lincoln gives tangible examples
Four parts

I. People
II. Character
III. Endeavour
IV. Communication
People & Character

I. People

• Get out of the office and circulate among the troops
• Build strong alliances
• Persuade rather than coerce

II. Character

• Honesty and integrity are the best policies
• Never act out of vengeance or spite
• Have the courage to handle unjust criticism
• Be a master of paradox
III. Endeavour

• Exercise a strong hand – Be decisive
• Lead by being led
• Set goals and be results-oriented
• Keep searching until you find your “Grant”
• Encourage innovation

IV. Communication

• Master the art of public speaking
• Influence people through conversation and storytelling
• Preach vision and continually reaffirm it
Lincoln describing Gen. John C. Fremont (Dept of the West):

- "He is losing the confidence and respect of men near him, whose support any man in his position must have to be successful.
- "His cardinal mistake is that he isolates himself, and allows nobody to see him; and by which he does not know what is going on in the very matter he is dealing with".

- With this description, says the author, Lincoln revealed the cornerstone of his own personal leadership philosophy, an approach that would become part of a revolution in modern leadership thinking 100 years later when it was dubbed ‘MBWA’ by Peters & Waterman in ‘In Search of Excellence’.
Management by Wandering Around

Phillips demonstrates how much Lincoln was in part out of the office with a graph:

Figure 1: Lincoln’s practice of MBWA during the course of his presidency.
(Total # of days per month tabulated from entries in Lincoln Day by Day, ed. by Earl S. Miers.)
Influence by storytelling

Lincoln used
  – Storytelling
  – Anecdotes
  – Homour
  – Word pictures
  – Quotations

to get a point across and be adopted by his audience – persuade rather than coerce.
Be a Master of Paradox

Take the following statements made between March 1861 and July 1862:

- Take *time* and think *well* upon a subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time
- Delay is ruining us
- *Time* is everything. Please act in view of this
- Make haste slowly

• Lincoln’s adept handling of paradox was later confirmed by recent leadership studies as an essential skill for all leaders (referring to Tom Peters book *Thriving on Chaos*)
Be proactive rather than reactive

- Allow time to cool off
- Avoid conflict over insignificant matters
  - “A man has not time to spend half his life in quarrels”
- Write letters and never send them
- Leadership could bring out the worst in us
- By being more proactive than reactive we can better focus on the required outcome
Lead by being led

Encouraging subordinates to believe they were doing the leading
  – Played to Licholn’s need for honesty, integrity and human dignity
  – Encouraged innovation and risk-taking

• Lincoln had the enviable quality of being able to listen to people without being threatened himself. He possessed open-mindedness and flexibility.
Accept responsibility when things go wrong

• He tried to let his generals know when they failed he failed too
  – This also encouraged innovation and risk-taking
• Lincoln accepted responsibility for battle losses
  – McClellan at Second Bull Run
• Let generals know when they were right and he was wrong
• Praise when initiative taken
Overview

• Dennett: Each generation has created its own Lincoln

• A chameleon?

• The next book in the series: “Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun”
Discussion

• In your understanding, does the definition of leadership imply agreement of those being lead?

• Do you think of Lincoln as sometimes a paradox? Appearing to agree with different points of view or do you feel he usually stood for clear values?

• Is it your impression from what you know about Lincoln that the author is trying to shoe-horn Lincoln into 1990s management theories?