



RSE-TASC *reporter*

LONG ISLAND REGIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION—TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SUPPORT CENTER

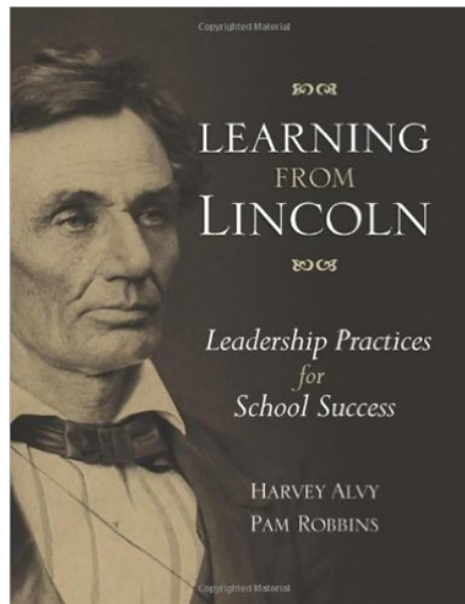
Book Review: *Learning From Lincoln: Leadership Practices for School Success*

Reviewer: Laurance E. Anderson, RSE-TASC Non District Specialist

One of the many professional tasks associated with my work as the Non-Public-School “Specialist” for Long Island, is to make sure I keep up with reading endeavors that link to a key RSE-TASC professional goal to “continuously improve as leaders.” In my role it’s important that I engage in ongoing serious study of best practices, vetted research, and evidence-based methodologies. I recently heard of “Learning From Lincoln” from my immediate supervisor, Vincent Leone, and thus set out to capture the core elements to share the most meaningful contents of the book with those in my regional cohort.

Contemporary American educators who specialize in managerial, supervisory, and evaluative functions would be well advised to consider the strategies and problem-solving techniques utilized by Abraham Lincoln back in the 19th century. Although Lincoln only lived to age 56, he was an extraordinary leader and a true master of multiple attributes. He was a visionary, erstwhile diplomat, an expert at timing, brilliant at “situational competence” and a leader for the ages. Indeed, his leadership style and patience combined with his outstanding decision-making and stress/chaos management skills would have made him an ideal candidate for demanding school administrative positions. Superintendent search

committees would have indeed been intrigued with his candidacy!



The authors, Robbins & Alvy, have written a marvelous text that draws parallels between Lincoln’s stellar legacy, in essence his “Life and Work”...and “Implications for School Leaders.” Each of the ten chapters in the book presents a thematic trump card that highlights his effectiveness and resolve to succeed-despite seemingly insurmountable odds on occasion- and how modern day school leaders might emulate his example. Likewise, Alvy and Robbins provide their readers with a most interesting chapter summary exercise in which readers are urged to “Reflect on History and the Moment:...with a focus on “Implications for the Future.” Helpful prompts are provided at the end of each

chapter to assist school leaders in answering pivotal questions related to their work and the central theme of the chapter (e.g. “What personal leadership attributes do I possess that will help galvanize collective action toward the accomplishment of the vision?”) So what exactly was Lincoln’s approach to troubleshooting, dynamic leadership, cultivating a following and instituting change? This can be summarized by a brief look at each chapter:

Implementing and Sustaining a Mission and Vision with Focused and Profound Clarity

During the Civil War years in particular, Lincoln excelled in both thinking “on a macro, large scale level related to national interests and on a local, micro scale level related to individual opportunity”(p.8). His goal was not only to win a war but making sure he could keep the “country and nation together”(p.11). The school principal or district superintendent is certainly encouraged to “first understand, articulate and write out a personal vision” (p.15)...as a prelude to coherently preparing to share a unified vision and mission. The authors provide a fine matrix wherein a school leader can summarize personal leadership attributes and how these correlate to accomplishing vital outcomes while providing an in-depth analysis of personal/professional strengths and challenges.

Communicating Ideas Effectively with Precise and Straightforward Language

President Lincoln had many gifts, including the innate ability to “use

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everyday language with exquisite precision to inspire and articulate the national mission and vision to each segment of society”(p.21). In much the same way, the effective educator with supervisory responsibilities must be able to style-shift and satisfactorily communicate with each stakeholder group he/she comes in contact with, notably students, faculty & staff, board members, local residents, administrative colleagues and media representatives. The ability to speak and write with “crisp and concise”(p.21) language will go a long way in influencing many constituents. The use of a well-placed metaphor and seeking and using feedback from key individuals and groups will likely yield wonderful dividends over time. This technique combined with showing respect for the opinions of others and providing prompt, sincere responses to inquiries &/or controversies will help build support and trust.

Building a Diverse and Competent Team to Successfully Address the Mission

“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”(p.40). Apparently, Lincoln looked deeply at the strengths possessed by others and spent little time and energy focusing on their shortcomings in order to accomplish large, complex goals. The 21st century school leader is well advised to consider a similar mindset to try and surround themselves with a talent-laden pool of support players who engage in a shared purpose and cohesive action plan to realize best outcomes.

Engendering Trust, Loyalty, and Respect Through Humility, Humor, and Personal Example

“The research on leadership is clear: personal example is the most powerful human resource available to lead an organization”(p.56). In this regard, Lincoln was truly a genius and astoundingly astute! President Lincoln was a superb storyteller and specialist in providing well-timed anecdotes and humorous vignettes. His objective was to get others to think more deeply about issues and potential solutions while minimizing any embarrassment or awkward perceptions or reactions in the process. The school supervisor in 2016 is cautioned to “build and sustain trust over time” that comes from predictability-reliability-and reciprocity variables (p.66). In other words, leadership research emphasizes that leaders must have a high level of “emotional intelligence” that underscores an ability to avoid the “Five Fatal Flaws” as outlined by Zenger & Folkman (2002):

- A. Inability to learn from mistakes
- B. Lack of core interpersonal skills and competencies
- C. Lack of openness to new or different ideas
- D. Lack of accountability
- E. Lack of initiative

Leading and Serving with Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

Abraham Lincoln was known to be “strong-willed without being willful, righteous without being self-righteous, and moral without being moralistic” (p.73). He was adept at relating to “everyman” since he had come from a lifestyle that was devoid of privilege, glamour, or excess. His perspectives as detailed in three famous documents-The 2nd Inaugural Address, The Temperance Address, and a letter sent to a Ms. McCullough-spoke volumes about his “extraordinary insights into human nature, empathy, and the importance of hope”(p.74). Likewise, Mr. Lincoln was famous

for his ability to exercise restraint, especially when he was particularly annoyed or dissatisfied with someone’s actions. When agitated he would draft a “heated letter and then not send it” (p.80). Indeed, a prominent Civil War historian, Shelby Foote, noted that “Lincoln was his own psychiatrist” (p.80).

The modern day school administrator also needs to be well-versed in Burt Swersey’s (1998) “Five Secrets of Success” including: Rapport, Empathy, Persuasion, Cooperation and Consensus Building. A leader needs to practice or rehearse these behavioral tendencies and “must rely on internal resourcefulness as well as technical skills in their work”(p.83). Whether you do things innately or learn to cultivate the skills it is imperative that managers are cognizant of “The Five Domains of Emotional Intelligence” - Self-Awareness; Self-Regulation; Motivation; Empathy; and Social Skills (Goleman, 1998). Again, the authors of this text provide the reader with a simple but useful tool (*see figure 1 on page 4*) to introspectively engage in a current assessment of practices and how best the leader might model the particular behavior.

“To win the Civil War, to retain the Union, and to end slavery demanded moving souls. To move souls a people must feel inspired. Lincoln provided that inspiration.” (p.81)

Demonstrating Personal Growth and Enhanced Competence as a Lifelong Learner, Willing to Reflect on and Expand Ideas

“The Lincoln example is especially inspirational to educators because his desire to gain knowledge and wisdom never faded” (p.134). As the authors suggest, “school leaders make conscious choices about their capacity to grow by the activities in which they choose to engage” (p.142). This is certainly easier said than done, but is the hallmark of successful administrators and those aspiring to lead. Individuals committed to drafting a personalized learning plan and developing SMART goals may monitor their own progress towards the development of effective leadership. Thus, leaders who are categorized as “head learners” in a school organization help to pave the way for all staff members and students when it comes to leading by example. Likewise, leaders that practice “reflective journaling”(p.145) give themselves a chance to synthesize thoughts and brainstorm ideas, a vital task considering the need for extensive documentation and record-keeping that in and of itself is daunting!

Believing That Hope Can Become a Reality

As Robert Evans noted in *The Human Side of School Change*, “of all the factors vital to improving schools, none is more essential-or vulnerable-than hope”(p.149). Say no more! Abraham Lincoln had the extraordinary capacity to project hope and optimism even in the face of despair. The school principal, assistant principal, superintendent or assistant superintendent has the incredibly challenging assignment of being a constant change agent whether it is in a corrective mode (i.e. this needs fixing) or launching mode (i.e. this needs to be initiated) or socialization mode (i.e. this idea needs to be floated to potential beneficiaries). Having the wherewithal to be a dreamer or visionary is no easy task to be sure. Nor is having the fortitude to see that dreams come true and become reality. Lincoln set the tone for school leaders by his social justice mindset that “all men are created equal” (re: The Declaration of Independence). No ifs, ands or buts about that basic premise.



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April

- ◇ Professional Learning Community, Hosted by Larry Anderson [\(CDD, Woodbury\)—4/4/16](#)
facilitated by Mr. Larry Anderson
- ◇ Adolescent Literacy: Transitioning from 'Learning to Read' to 'Reading to Learn' for SWDs [\(Nassau\)—4/12/16](#)
facilitated by Ms. Andrea Lachar
- ◇ Preschool PBIS/Pyramid Model Tier II: In-depth Exploration of Targeted Supports with a Focus on Problem Solving (Part 2 of 2) [\(Nassau\)—4/13/16](#)
facilitated by Ms. Carolyn Candela
- ◇ Self-Determination [\(Western Suffolk\)—4/13/16](#)
facilitated by Mrs. Cathy Pantelides
- ◇ Alternatives to Suspension [\(Nassau\)—4/19/16](#)
facilitated by Mr. Gary Coppolino

May & June

- ◇ Tier 2 and 3 Systems of Support: Developing a Continuum of Intervention to Meet the Behavioral Needs of Students (This is a 2-day training) [\(Western Suffolk\)—5/3, 4/16](#)
facilitated by Ms. Michelle Levy & Mr. Gary Coppolino
- ◇ Cultural Responsiveness and Restorative Practices: (This is a 2-day training) Tools for Addressing Disproportionate Suspensions [\(Eastern Suffolk BOCES—Bixhorn\)—5/5, 6/16](#)
facilitated by NYU's TAC-D & RSE-TASC
- ◇ PBIS NETWORKING FORUM: Tier 2/3: Where are we now? [\(Western Suffolk\)—5/12/16](#)
facilitated by Ms. Michelle Levy & Mr. Gary Coppolino
- ◇ Overview of the Part 200 Regulations [\(Nassau\)—5/31/16](#)
facilitated by Ms. Arlene Crandall
- ◇ Professional Learning Community, Hosted by Larry Anderson [\(SLDC, Glen Cove\)—6/9/16](#)
facilitated by Mr. Larry Anderson

Figure 1

The Five Domains: Assessing Strengths		
Domain	Current Assessment	How I Model This
Self-Awareness		
Self-Regulation		
Motivation		
Empathy		
Social Skills		

Source: *Learning from Lincoln*, p. 86

“All his life Abraham Lincoln was tough-and tender. Maybe even fragile. But he never broke” (p.111).

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