



BOTTOM LINE NEWS TO USE

Lead Like Lincoln

By Jeff Marsico, Vice President, The Kafarian Group, Inc.

Historically low interest rates and the recent poor economy highlighted the importance of leadership in community banking. History has provided us great leaders to emulate and Abraham Lincoln is perhaps without equal. In my opinion, he demonstrated three critical qualities of leadership.

Vision - Burt Nanus in his book *Visionary Leadership* contends that vision is inherently idealistic and represents a "mental model of a future state of the ... organization." George H.W. Bush brought attention to this key leadership quality when he declared he lacked "the vision thing."

Lincoln was a great visionary. What made his vision great was its singular simplicity; preservation of the Union. Consider his statement from 1862: "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it—if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it—and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that."

Communication - A vision is only introspection without the ability to communicate it and rally stakeholders behind it. But helping others understand the vision is not enough. The purpose of communication is to motivate others to act.

Lincoln was not sowed from the cloth of privilege. He was a simple man that was able to connect with most Americans using simple anecdotes. Presidential historian David Abshire commented: "This genius of Lincoln's words and ideas — derived from the Bible, Shakespeare, Bums, and Bunyon — lent an historic quality to his rhetoric and persona."

Why was Lincoln such a great communicator? His messages were simple and easy to understand. How many speeches, presentations, meetings, and sermons have we endured that we have little to no recollection of? The reason is simple; the message wasn't simple.

You may remember Edward Everett, a great orator of the 19th century. Chances are you don't. At the consecration of the most storied battlefield in our nation's history, Everett delivered a long-forgotten two-hour oration. After him, Lincoln approached the podium and delivered the Gettysburg Address.

Commitment - Having vision and effectively communicating it does nothing in itself. Commitment is the doing. Many leadership experts contend that people follow committed leaders, not a vision. Divorce vision and commitment, and all that you have is an idea... an idea with no disciples.

To preserve the Union, Lincoln shelved the Constitution when the nation that held it as law was in jeopardy. Said in one of Lincoln's memorable anecdotes, "By general law, life and limb must be protected; yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life is never wisely given to save a limb." Putting aside the Constitution to use any indispensable means to preserve the Union demonstrated Lincoln's commitment to his vision.

As time passed and Lincoln's commitment was clear, tenacity and courage infected every level within the Union ranks. At the outset of the war, military commanders were not clear about Lincoln's commitment to preserve the Union. General McClellan exemplified this confusion by not pursuing Lee's army after initial successes in Virginia.

Near the end of the war, Lincoln's commitment was clear as General Sherman was burning Atlanta. Followers witnessing Lincoln's degree of commitment put forth the great effort necessary to achieve success, although the risk of failure was great. Why take the risk? Because a great leader will not yield, will not relent, and will not quit.

Abraham Lincoln was by no means a perfect leader and it was not his flawless leadership that categorizes him as one of history's greatest leaders in times of crisis. Rather, it was how he adapted to the crisis situation by first formulating his vision, then articulating it, and lastly standing by it at all cost. Indeed, for all these reasons, Lincoln was one of history's greatest leaders. ▲

Contact Mr. Marsico at (973) 299-0300 x120.