

EQ Lessons from President Lincoln

By Inez O. Ng

I don't have to convince anyone that Abraham Lincoln was one of the greatest presidents this country has ever had. While reading several articles about him recently, it suddenly occurred to me Lincoln was such a great leader because he was blessed with emotional intelligence (EQ) decades before the term was even coined. And I firmly believe that his EQ is what enabled him to leave such a lasting impression and legacy behind.

The subject of emotional intelligence is way too broad for me to discuss in detail here. Therefore, I will just illustrate with a few specifics.

In "Primal Leadership" the authors categorized emotional intelligence into four domains:

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness and
- Relationship Management

Under each of these domains there are multiple leadership competencies. Would it surprise you to discover that Lincoln has multiple competencies in every domain? Let me illustrate with just one example from each domain.

Accurate self-assessment is a competency in the Self-Awareness domain that Lincoln exhibited.

"Leaders high in self-awareness typically know their limitations and strengths, and exhibit a sense of humor about themselves."

After Lincoln won the presidency, he appointed all three of his political rivals into his cabinet. To me, that is an excellent example of his competency in self-assessment. Lincoln knew that he was inexperienced and needed the expertise his rivals had to help him. In the article "Master of the Game" by Doris Kearns Goodwin, she documented that when Lincoln was told that Stanton countermanded an order that Lincoln had issued and called him a damn fool, not only was Lincoln not upset about it, but replied that "if Stanton said I was a damn fool, then I must be one, for he is nearly always right." How's that for self-assessment?

So here's the first lesson: do you know your own limitations and strengths? Are you secure enough to enlist the help of others to compensate for your limitations? Who are these resources and how will you enroll them?

Self-control is a competency in the Self-Management domain that Lincoln exhibited.

"Leaders with emotional self-control find ways to manage their disturbing emotions and impulses, and even to channel them in useful ways."

It has been documented in many works written about Lincoln that he exercised incredible self-control. When he was angry at someone, he would write a letter, and not send it until he had calmed down. Often, he never sent the letters at all. That is

because he understood what impact words spoken in anger can have on his relationships with those he needed to depend on.

Learn this lesson from Lincoln. Be aware of your emotions, especially in challenging times, and resist the temptation to react to the situation. Instead, take time to calm down so you can appropriately respond to the situation. You won't burn nearly as many bridges and you will find it much easier to secure cooperation this way.

Empathy is a competency in Social Awareness domain that Lincoln exhibited.

Empathetic leaders "listen attentively and can grasp the other person's perspective."

It is again well documented that Lincoln was a hugely empathetic person. One of his strengths was his ability to understand the perspectives of others. I also believe that it is this competency that enabled him to produce the inspiring speeches that are still quoted today. He understood how others felt and knew how to evoke that strong emotion in people to unite them in a common cause.

Here's lesson number three: check how empathetic you are. Are you consistently attached to your own perspective? Can you understand the other person's perspective? If you have difficulty with this, try asking what makes them think or feel they way they do? What are they seeing that you are not?

Change Catalyst is a competency in Relationship Management domain that Lincoln exhibited.

Leaders with strong change catalyst competency and "be strong advocates for the change even in the face of opposition, making the argument for it compellingly."

Is there any doubt that Lincoln was one of the greatest change catalysts our country has ever had? Can anyone question the magnitude of the opposition to change, or his ability to make a compelling argument for change?

So here's the final lesson: what change (big or small) are you looking for in your organization? How do you become a change catalyst to make it happen? What is the compelling case for change?

The more I read about Abraham Lincoln, the more intrigued I am about both the man, and the natural leader that he was. Just think, if Lincoln can become one of the greatest presidents of the United States with only one year of formal schooling, what can you accomplish with all the resources and information that is available to you now, right at your finger-tips?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Are you struggling with the responsibility of management? Personal Coach Inez Ng has worked with professional seeking a smooth and rapid transition from manager to inspiring leader. While focusing on specific areas, her coaching positively impacts all areas of her clients' lives. Learn more about coaching with Inez at <http://www.RealizationsUnltd.com> Be sure to sign up for her ezine. And don't forget to check out her information packed ebook "Master Email without Breaking a Sweat!" at <http://www.easyemailstrategies.com>

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