

EXCERPTS:

LINCOLN, LEADERSHIP AND GETTYSBURG

Defining Moments of Greatness

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Prologue

"If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it."

This sentence is the opening line of Abraham Lincoln's "A House Divided" speech, delivered before the Republican State Convention of Illinois at Springfield on June 17, 1858...

Many speeches were to follow this one, of course, and many had preceded it. Throughout those that history has marked as monumental and worthy of remembrance, we discover threads of greatness woven through enduring principle.

The battle of Gettysburg and the Gettysburg Address should be viewed as defining moments of greatness for President Abraham Lincoln, his leadership, and the Union he sought to preserve. Because it is true that Gettysburg, the place, the battle, and the address have played such important roles in our history, we should explore what composes this impressive juxtaposition of incidents and ideas...

These immortal lines speak volumes to those who desire to learn from Lincoln and live in freedom. Understand why this speech yet breathes long after it was composed and presented and one is better prepared to enjoy and preserve the free country that is the United States of America...

A major facet of leadership emerges here: great leadership frames defining moments as it seeks to explain cause and effect. One of the reasons the address still lives is that it continues to inspire others to lead as Lincoln did, regardless of circumstances.

Chapter 1: The Leader's View of History

Fourscore and seven years ago...

Gentle rhythms and compelling cadences marked the words of the Gettysburg Address, molding beauty with intentionality and thoughtful expression. Many orators of Lincoln's day, including politicians whom he influenced and those who impacted him, employed flowery, lofty expressions in their efforts to impress and sway their listeners. In fact, Lincoln himself often utilized similar techniques in many of his early political speeches.

Lincoln did it simpler at Gettysburg. Somehow in this short address, the president expressed his central and important themes quicker and more effectively. Maybe it was his humble upbringing, focused reading and studying, and impeccable logic that created unique mixtures of commonality and brilliance in this communication. Whatever the case, Lincoln's remarkable wisdom crafted what some would term a communication art form not surpassed since.

Was it effective? Yes. People remembered and acted upon what they heard, as future generations continue to do today.

Look again at that opening. Lincoln could have easily said "eighty-seven years ago," but the effect he created with "*fourscore and seven*" was elevating and inspirational. He set his content apart with phrases designed to make his audience contemplate their history.

Combining eloquent language with down to earth expression, he helped his audience recognize that, while he was a learned man, he had come *from* them. He could speak *to* them because he was one *of* them. The lesson is this: leaders who communicate effectively identify with their audience...

Leaders set frameworks of understanding into which followers position themselves. Effective leaders help their followers frame choices against revealed and lasting truth.

Leaders don't change history—they learn from it. Then they teach the lessons of history to those who follow. Leaders possessing long-term views glean knowledge and wisdom from events and people who have lived before, educating from their experiences.

Chapter 2: Strong Foundations

...our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Lincoln thought highly of the Declaration of Independence. As the newly elected president traveling to Washington, D.C. for his inauguration, he spoke in Philadelphia at Independence Hall on February 22, 1861: *"I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence."*

Lincoln referred to a profound principle: *"...something in that Declaration giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in that Declaration of Independence."*

He aligned with that document's sustainable, protecting, life-giving truths. He based his conclusions about the resilience of the United States squarely on the immovable principles it contained...

The proposition Lincoln quoted in the speech, "...that all men are created equal..." rested on an inviolate principle. It is this: all human beings possess identical God-given attributes. One is the equality of every individual.

Leaders build for their day and others' futures by resting thoughts and actions upon solid principles like this one. At a time when the phrase "all men are created equal" was sorely tried, tested, and often denied, Lincoln refused these objections. He remained true to the immovable truth of equality. The importance of this proposition included the acknowledgement that adherence to this or any foundational principle may indeed include tough choices and ultimate sacrifice...

Leadership's legacies last beyond what is expedient. They rest upon enduring principle, not endless opinion... principle-based leaders decide and dwell in practices composed of far more than surface, people-pleasing proclamations along with their accompanying unfulfilled promises. Shallow pledges may win elections. Upon more thorough investigation, however, they do not endure the supreme tests and testimonies of time.

Chapter 3: Crises

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

Crises cannot be shunned. While conflict should be avoided if possible, it must never be ignored to the degree of replacing conviction with complacency, freedom with bondage, or commitment with apathy.

Crises are tests. They come with amazing frequency. Some are anticipated, but many appear without warning...

Negative circumstances and malicious events, as bad as they may be, bear opportunities for creating and implementing positive and effective solutions—a good leader know this. He or she searches for lasting resolutions. A great leader encourages his or her followers to do the same.

Methods chosen to solve problems are decisions birthed from values and borne on desired behaviors...

Motives precede movements, creeds come before deeds, decisions pre-exist functions.

There is no substitute for an earnest desire for positive outcomes to difficult problems. This desire, however, does not always produce this result. Leaders remain aware that negatives sometimes accompany the best intentioned efforts, and they prepare for this eventuality.

If you are the leader, consider where you choose to wage your battles. The wise leader recognizes that conflicts will be fought; the effective leader chooses where problems should be dealt with.

Because challenges can't and won't be denied, the better leader faces them with knowledge, wisdom, and courage. Fortitude emerges from the values that bind the leader and the followers to their cause. Victory may well be within their grasp when factors within their control are brought to bear on the problems that must be solved.

Chapter 4: Sacrifice

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Leaders who appreciate enduring principles understand the importance of remembrance and dedication. They consecrate times, places, and people who have given for the benefit of others. They honor and respect the individuals who have defended what they know is just and true.

This setting-apart cherishes the past, provisions the present, and frames the future. Memories of events and people are preserved as treasures. These memories create the curriculum and compose the classrooms for those who desire to learn what sacrifice really means.

Lincoln's remarks were heard by people who had witnessed the battle. Scars from its calamity of death were still fresh in the minds of many of his listeners. They remembered. So should we. History teaches contemporary and future generations the awesome responsibilities that accompany acts of remembering.

One responsibility is to embrace and emulate tenets of exemplary leadership. We can learn much from studying Lincoln's approach to difficult circumstances...

Great leadership confronts negatives with positive principles and practices. The stronger the conflict, the more resilient the dedication must be to pursue right action, regardless of cost.

Leaders understand this maxim: Truths worthy of belief and sacrifice are rehearsed and applied despite pain and adverse circumstances. Core principles and practices affect all they touch in every era and location.

Enduring leaders know that criticism doesn't make or mold character. Destructive commentary and conflict reveal a leader's inborn strengths held in reserve. Positive contributions originating from adherence to right values come to the forefront when the needs become known and the timing is right.

Chapter 5: Limits

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

Leaders recognize their limits. They understand what is and what is not within their control. They appreciate and willingly submit to “a larger sense.”

Appropriately responding to limits raises an important distinction between superior and inferior leadership. Leaders who know and understand their limits reveal higher degrees of maturity and wisdom as they deal with the challenges they face. How they handle what they don’t know is as important as how they handle what they do know.

Lincoln realized that his understanding of the Gettysburg battle could not equate to that of a soldier who had struggled or died on that field. He was wise to recognize that there were some shoes he could not fill.

History would show that Lincoln’s words would live alongside the memories of fallen soldiers and the honors rightly bestowed upon them. Learn and embrace this truth: Lasting legacies are born and flourish when right communication, core principles, and concrete actions cooperate...

Viewpoints of one generation teach lessons from the past and assist leaders to apply principles in the present. The confines and perspectives of *now* carry limits for everyone. Yet, they also beget motives for adopting values-driven duties that will affect the people and events of tomorrow...

Leaders who build legacy recognize their limits and honor the greatness that has preceded them. They consecrate the payments of former generations as they provide a context for current contributions. These leaders diligently prepare their followers for future successes that will exceed what today’s leaders are capable of providing.

Effects endure beyond the events that give them life. Learn their truths. History’s lessons shape the minds and means of generations.

Chapter 6: Unfinished Work

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us —

Responsibilities rest upon the living. They must complete what those who have died cannot. Those alive today possess obligations to build upon the legacies passed down from their ancestors and, in light of these legacies, to construct transferable inheritances of their own...

Every generation should consider the contributions of those who have gone before. Each generation lives with the results of a past generation's decisions, good or bad. Choices remain for a current population to learn from its past, build upon it, and pass along something better to those who will come after...

Each generation must work to guarantee freedom's rights and privileges, making them available to the people of tomorrow... There is work to do for all who take up the mantles of their teachers and leaders. There are great tasks remaining. What one generation may not complete, the next must strive to fulfill...

People who think and act this way are trendsetters. They emulate the examples of Lincoln and other superior leaders who have made positive and indelible marks on history. These people make a difference.

Here is another central truth: The admirable works of one generation are finished well when their leaders prepare those who follow to succeed at greater levels than the current generation...

Examples of purposeful dedication today become the permanent history lessons of tomorrow. It's an important truth.

The mandate for us, the living, is to take seriously what we learn, value, and offer. We want to finish the tasks remaining before us. We want those who follow us to be inspired by our contributions. We want them to complete our unfinished work and accomplish more than we could possibly imagine or provide.

Chapter 7: Increased Devotion

...that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—

A perspective on where a person fits into the bigger picture may dictate how their contributions will be fulfilled...

At times of immense importance or within moments of fearful and unknown consequences, followers may literally move forward blindly, bound to obedience and duty. Trusting, they may endure epochal travail simply because a proven leader says, "Go."

Respect and admiration for leadership, as well as cause, country, and duty, may indeed compel men and women to willingly sacrifice all they have. Here's the lesson: People act out of desire when they are convinced of the truth of the leader's words, his or her character, and the viability of the cause the leader represents. Followers comply when they are sure what and whom they are obeying are right...

Leadership bears tremendous responsibility when it requests or requires followers to perform acts that define sacrifice. Degrees of devotion are carefully considered, and they should be.

Lincoln's use of the phrase *increased devotion* causes us to look closer at what he meant. There is a difference between devotion and *increased* devotion.

Devotion is dedicated motion toward an agreed, desired, and cooperative end. *Increased* devotion connotes a higher level of chosen obligation. It goes beyond what is expected. Increased devotion comprises extended commitment to bear any losses required to achieve a more enduring result for an even greater good...

Lincoln believed that the deaths of honored soldiers would be validated in the lives of future generations. He desired that the legacies of the fallen would endure beyond the conflicts of his day. He was convinced that America was worth saving for all time. Foresight and devotion like this are characteristics of strong and effective leadership.

Chapter 8: Sovereignty

...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—

The times come when people would simply like to start over, erase the sins of the past, correct gross errors in judgment, and rid their environments of pervasive injustices. They want a new birth...

Exemplary leaders view new-start opportunities with both humility and determination. It takes a humble person to realize that changes must occur within a broken system, especially one they have led. It takes a determined leader to initiate and complete the necessary improvements.

Great leaders comprehend that what they don't know exceeds what they do know. These leaders are humble enough to learn and determined enough to educate, act, and design destinies.

Leadership submits when it recognizes that needs for improvements exist. Leadership perseveres when it determines a course of action is right...

Lincoln was submissive to God. There is absolutely no doubt of this fact...

This president admitted he did not understand God's designs fully. Who does? However, Lincoln knew he was part of them...

The phrase *new birth of freedom* is profound. Lincoln knew that the nation was in peril at the time of this speech. He humbled himself before God as he earnestly hoped, strongly desired, and worked diligently for this country to survive...

Freedom is never free. Preserving it includes acts of immense sacrifice. New births of freedom guarantee the longevity of a system of government, demonstrated to be the best the world had ever seen...

When a wise leader recognizes the need for a new birth of freedom that leader chooses humility. When positive changes are desired that leader submits to higher authority. He or she makes choices based on abiding principles. The leader acts on those principles with determination. Results outlast persons, circumstances, and the opinions of any era.

Chapter 9: Government

...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people...

In three small phrases, Lincoln summarized the essence of representative government. A government is representative when it is:

1. *Of the people:* The people create it—it emerges from them and they uphold it.
2. *By the people:* The people mold it—it works through them.
3. *For the people:* The people benefit from it—it works on their behalf.

Make no mistake: Those who are elected represent their constituencies best when they serve the people who placed them in office. The government of a free people exists to benefit those it governs. In this form of rule those who are governed do not exist to serve their government...

Every generation must be vigilant to protect and exercise the liberties designed and declared in their founding documents. Beware of any government or administration that seeks to restrict or redefine the freedoms of its citizenry in violation of the people's shared and agreed values.

Lincoln's conviction, shared by the majority of Americans in the North, was that a Union founded on the propositions of its original documents was worth saving, even through war...

Lincoln correctly understood that good people may possess strong and opposing opinions regarding any issue. Destroying the Union, however, was not an issue worthy of consideration on any front...

A leader firmly remains not dissuaded from right causes no matter the degrees of difficulty. When the decision to uphold a true principle is declared, a great leader shall not be deterred.

Dedicated leaders honor and uphold the highest goals for the greatest good. Preserving a government *of the people, by the people, for the people* certainly represents one of those goals. A nation so committed provisions and protects what it treasures most: the rights and freedoms of its citizens.

Chapter 10: Endurance

...shall not perish from the earth.

When he chose the phrase *shall not perish from the earth* to conclude the Gettysburg Address Lincoln knew that indeed there remained a distinct possibility that the country he had known could cease to exist unless the national authority was restored.

And here's the point: Leaders who understand their purpose, place, and responsibility recognize that consequences are not optional. Results always follow actions, good or bad. These leaders prepare for consequences as well as try to fashion them.

Knowledgeable leaders accept this principle: Effects endure beyond the events that give them life. Those in charge learn the beneficial truths each era teaches. They strive to produce uplifting outcomes and prevent negative results. They recall history's lessons, knowing these shape the minds and means of generations—theirs and those that are to come...

According to Lincoln, this nation should not perish from the earth or shirk from the duties its presence demanded...

Freedom is not guaranteed unless a free people are watchful, willing to pay the necessary price to assure longevity. Perpetuity of a free republic is never an iron clad pledge harbored in isolation, removed from threats and conflicts.

Freedom faces onslaughts. It has to. Freedom-loving people know vigilance is required if a nation "*so conceived and so dedicated*" is to endure...

Freedom-loving men and women do whatever it takes to assure freedom for themselves and those who follow...

Great leaders stand for the right and serve well the people who elect them when they lead them with integrity, honoring the people's desire and trust...

It is we who provide the guarantee of perpetuity...

Conclusions are evidenced in actions. Decisions live in duty.

Epilogue

“Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.”

These are the closing words of Lincoln’s Cooper Union Address, delivered at New York, New York, on February 27, 1860... Lincoln’s words touched the nation and the world, and continue to do so.

For people who desire to embrace a lasting and positive leadership model there are few models, if any, that compare to the one provided by Lincoln. The principles espoused in the Gettysburg Address and evidenced in the life of our sixteenth president provide standards to which developing leaders should aspire...

Patriots are students of history actively engaged in the present, who protect and defend the principles of freedom upon which the country was founded. They embrace responsibility and build on behalf of future generations. They sacrifice to ensure liberty. These citizens are the guarantors of the rights we hold dear. These people assure that the United States of America remains a strong and sovereign land.