

MOHEG Student Essay Award

We Need Visionaries Such As Abraham Lincoln In
Healthcare Leadership In The Now

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Dear President Lincoln

It is with the highest regard I can give to a fellow man, excitement, deep admiration, and anticipation that I write you this letter. I am completely at loss as to where to begin to talk about the phenomenon that is you. I sincerely wish I had met you in person. I am positive it would have been a life-changing experience for me. You are such a hero it is almost unreal. The strength of your vision of America will probably remain matchless, and while you constantly preached that vision to whoever cared to listen, your reign as president would have been far less colorful and weighty, had you stopped there. Rather, like a powerful force to reckon with, you inspired those around you to action with your principles, your vision, and your leadership. Little wonder, you have been tagged the greatest president the United States was fortunate to have had. Given the overhaul and sometimes, seeming lack of direction that has assailed the healthcare industry in the United States of today, visionaries like you are needed to bring about the much sought-after turnaround in that industry.

I read Doris Goodwin's Ted Talk on your leadership style, watched some excerpts from the movie, 'Lincoln' and read what other people had to say about your person and your leadership style, and I was broken. The foremost thing that stuck out to me is that your leadership style was solidly ingrained in your values and integrity. Liberty and equality were the values that formed the bedrock of your work. Your words were interlaced with those values, but even better, they were resplendent in your actions. You held your core principles closely as you transitioned through some of the most difficult decisions a leader could encounter. Your signature of honesty and humility made you appear even more credible. In this day of self-centeredness, moral bankruptcy, and ethical malaise, and with the difficult transition healthcare is presently trying to navigate nationwide, having the leadership qualities of integrity and personal values that would never be compromised is needful and would go a long way in helping healthcare leaders lead ethically, responsibly, and strategically.

For me, the greatest thing you achieved as a leader and as the president of the United States was your abolishment of slavery single-handedly. I daresay you did it single-handedly because history has it that in the first instance, the thought came from you; then you put it out there for your team to have a buy in. When you saw that they were stalling and it appeared as though they were going to stand in your way, you took the bull by the horns and assertively, you vetoed it. You never let go of your core values in the face of opposition and like a storm, you were unstoppable, but like a gentle breeze, you were humble, kind, and tactful enough to have carried your cabinet along during the implementation. That way, no one felt left out. Slavery was the basest of man's inhumanity to man, a violation of the fundamental human rights of a people, and a slap in the face of the God of heaven. He must have been smiling at you when you did it. The assertiveness and the strength with which you forged ahead and established emancipation in the face of stiff opposition are much needed leadership traits in healthcare in the now.

You were well aware that to accomplish great works, you needed a formidable team, and you gained trust and respect by forging strong relationships and alliances. You surrounded yourself with people that were experts in what they do whom you knew would help you actualize your vision for the country. You knew they were your political rivals, had strong egos, and could challenge your authority any day, but that did not deter you. You figured that was what you needed anyway and coupled with the fact that you had the intelligence, and the self confidence to handle them, you did not feel threatened. They were the best in their fields of endeavor and that was all that mattered. You extricated yourself completely from the picture and like the servant leader you are, you put the good of the country ahead of everything else. I have never encountered such selflessness in a leader of your magnitude, and I can't stop the tears. Such sensitive, inspired, and committed leadership is presently very much called for to help the healthcare industry wade through the bumpy waters of change successfully.

You were not just an intellectual. You also engendered emotional intelligence and yours was unparalleled. With your extraordinary level of emotional intelligence, you were able to navigate through difficult times, inspire people to action, build strong relationships and alliances, and garner support from a supposedly difficult team. You used your emotional intelligence to your advantage and slowly but surely you began to break down the defenses of your cabinet one after the other. Before they knew it, they were all eating from your hand because you had secured their loyalty. Sharing responsibility for the mistakes of others was nothing to you. You learned from your mistakes and you held nothing against anyone. Goodwin's account of your biography says that William Seward who was initially your political rival admitted in a letter to his wife that he had never met anyone as remarkable as you, and this feeling was unanimous amongst other members of the cabinet because they all thought you were almost perfect. I see the exact same scenario playing out in healthcare in contemporary times. Healthcare is unique in that it is a service industry that depends on a large number of experts and highly trained personnel who cannot and should not be pushed around. A good measure of emotional intelligence will therefore go a long way in positioning healthcare leadership for tremendous positive impact. Furthermore, it has been seen that the emotional intelligence concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management contribute to enhance a leader's sense of self and that of others so as to meet organizational targets. It is therefore a vital characteristic much sought after in the 21st century healthcare leader.

Healthcare is currently fraught with challenges ranging from changes in reimbursement to reflect cost control and quality improvement to the existence of a variety of stakeholders with conflicting interests. All of the amazing qualities you possess resonate with these needs and should characterize healthcare leadership nationwide in the 21st century. Thank you so much for your service and for being so original.