Abraham Lincoln:
His leadership qualities and their relevance to today's business leadership

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Abstract

It has been almost 150 years since the great civil war was fought in the United States and in this bloody civil war which killed more than 600,000 soldiers Abraham Lincoln emerged as a statesman who preserved the Union and abolished slavery. Lincoln’s journey from a country lawyer in Illinois to the greatest U.S. presidents has been well documented. However, there is not a lot of literature around his distinctive leadership qualities and how they shaped the future of America. Lincoln was not the primary choice of the Republican Party as a nominee in the Presidential election of 1860. In fact he was the fourth choice. In spite of this, his supporters managed to nominate him as the party’s candidate and he won the election. Lincoln’s generosity and kind heartedness are legendary. With these traits he changed the hearts of many of his political enemies some of whom eventually helped elect him to the Presidency. His Presidency faced some of the biggest crises the US has ever seen and through his leadership the country was able to stay united in extremely delicate circumstances. He achieved seemingly impossible feats in the four years of his Presidency. This work explores the qualities which made him a great leader and how they can help today’s business leaders surmount the massive problems they face.
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1. Introduction

We are facing a leadership crisis in America today both in government and business. According to a study done by the Harvard Kennedy School’s Center for Public Leadership in 2012, 69% Americans believe that we have a leadership crisis in this country. Only two sectors received more than above average confidence rating in this study – Military and Medical. All other sectors especially Government and Business received below average confidence rating. The political turmoil in Washington DC justifies this lack of confidence in the Federal government. The financial crisis of 2007-2008 worsened the confidence people had in their business leaders. Greed and dishonesty pushed bankers to make risky investments in dodgy mortgage backed securities which eventually brought down the entire financial system. Around the same time the auto industry in Detroit was on the verge of bankruptcy. The federal government had to bail out both by using tax payer money. This further enraged Americans who saw them footing the bill for excesses of Wall Street and Detroit. Even after the bailouts many financial and insurance companies who received federal money were seen giving big bonuses to their top executives. We saw corporate America breaking every rule of sensible leadership. In light of this reality, it is interesting to study what Abraham Lincoln did when faced with a crisis which was even bigger and which threatened to asunder the Union. There are important lessons which today’s business leadership can learn from Abraham Lincoln. He faced successive early defeats in the Civil war and yet was able to retain the confidence of the American people through his leadership and finally won the war. When he died, he was one of the most popular leaders in the country and enjoyed unprecedented confidence of the people.

1.1 Motivation

Many business leaders have recently been indicted or convicted and sent to prison under criminal charges like insider trading, bribery, faking financial figures etc. For e.g. Rajat Gupta the former
Managing Director of Mckinsey and Company was convicted on insider trading charges in June 2012 and sentenced to 2 years in prison. A former Boeing executive Deon Anderson was indicted on bribery charges by a federal grand jury in October 2013. Ramalinga Raju, the former founder and Chairman of Satyam Computer Services was arrested and sent to jail for faking financial figures of the company reported to investors over several years. In addition to problems of dishonesty and greed, the business world is also plagued by problems like tax dodging, ill treatment of employees and lack of long term strategy. Another huge problem has been the disappearance of kindness and generosity from the workplace. In an environment of cut throat competition, business executives are rarely seen to be kind or generous. In fact these qualities in a leader are perceived as a weakness. In view of these problems lessons from Lincoln’s behavior when faced with similar problems could provide a good guidance to today’s business leaders who are in search of answers.

1.2 Research questions and approach
With the above motivation, this thesis attempts to answer the following questions

1. What are Lincoln’s key leadership qualities and how are they relevant to today’s business leaders?
2. What do the current employees and managers think about these qualities and their relevance to their professional life?

This thesis is primarily based on the extraction of Lincoln’s key leadership qualities through literature review and the survey of 64 professionals many of whom are mid-level managers and senior level executives. The questions posed in this survey were articulated by me with the help of my thesis advisor Professor Shalom Saar. Further details of the survey analysis can be found under section 3, “Survey analysis”.
1.3 Thesis structure
This thesis extracts Lincoln’s key leadership qualities and describes them in detail. It then delves into their relevance to today’s business leadership. The survey analysis follows and the thesis ends with a conclusion about how today’s business leaders can use these qualities to run their businesses better.

The overall outline is as follows:

✓ The thesis begins with an introduction to the topic and the motivation for this work.

✓ It then delves into 34 leadership qualities embodied by Lincoln and describes them in detail. It also talks about how they are relevant to today’s business leadership.

✓ A detailed survey analysis is done based on responses from 64 professionals on the relevance of these qualities to their professional life.

✓ The thesis concludes with key findings of how these qualities can be of help to today’s business executives.
2. Literature review and leadership qualities of Lincoln
I started my analysis by reviewing a number of books on the life of Lincoln. Many of these were winners of the prestigious Lincoln prize. These books talk in detail about Lincoln’s life from his childhood till the day he was assassinated. It was mesmerizing to read about the rise of humble country boy from Kentucky who reached the topmost office in America and eventually became the greatest President America has ever seen. It was his leadership abilities and an acute sense of understanding what motivates people that helped him rise to the highest position. I extracted 34 unique leadership abilities of Lincoln through my research. Following is a detailed description of these qualities.

2.1 Pragmatic
Lincoln was a pragmatic leader. He understood the ideals which radicals in the republican stood for like abolition of slavery and equality of races. However, he was aware of the resistance these ideas will face if introduced suddenly in the American society. Thus he always took a pragmatic route on the question of slavery. He was in not in favor of extending slavery in the new territories but was okay to let it continue in the Southern states where he believed it will eventually die. Throughout the civil war, Lincoln stayed open to options of ending the war but remained steadfast on the core principles for which the war was being fought. Lincoln whole heartedly believed in the rights granted to citizens in the American Constitution but was pragmatic enough to suspend the writ of habeas corpus when treachery threatened the Union. In contemporary politics, one such proponent of political pragmatism was Henry Kissinger. His opening up of US relations with China was a prime example of this pragmatism. Kissinger won the Nobel peace prize for his efforts in bringing the Vietnam War to a close.

2.2 Flexible
One of Lincoln’s famous quotes was “My policy is to have no policy”. This indicates Lincoln’s flexible nature which allowed him to explore different solutions to a problem without sticking to dogma. Lincoln always believed in continuing the negotiation process and had faith that rationality would prevail over zealousness in most of the cases. This however did not mean that he wasn’t a man of principles. He
established few core principles of his administration like no extension of slavery in the new territories and opposition to disunion and built solutions to problems around these principles without sacrificing them.

2.3 Great Communicator
Lincoln was a great communicator. He possessed a treasure trove of anecdotes and stories which he was able to use effectively to communicate with people. Many times instead of directly making a point which could be abrasive, he told a story which effectively communicated the same point but took off the edge. Human mind is attuned to stories. We grow up listening to stories and are more likely to understand a concept if communicated using a story. Lincoln used this fact to his advantage. He had a reputation of establishing a personal connection with his listeners and seemed to speak individually to each one of them. He avoided technical and highfalutin language and stuck to simple anecdotes to explain his points. He once told his law partner William Herndon: “Billy, don’t shoot too high – aim low and the common people will understand you. They are the ones you want to reach”. This is the same philosophy he applied to politics and hence was successful in touching the heart of the common American. He always preached the importance of learning the art of extemporaneous speaking to young lawyers. Lincoln had the gift of communicating massively complex issues using wit, simplicity and power of persuasion. An example of such an orator in contemporary politics is President Bill Clinton who uses simple language to convey complex ideas and touches the heart of his listeners. When Lee Iacocca was bringing Chrysler back from the dead in the 1980s, he spent a lot of time communicating with all the stakeholders who included banks, suppliers, unions, workers, US government, senators and congressman. It was only through continuous and effective communication that he was able to get a loan guarantee of a billion dollars from the US government which eventually saved Chrysler.
2.4 Honest and ethical
Lincoln was famous for his honesty. He had a reputation of being honest and was popularly known as “Honest Abe”. Even the people who doubted his leadership and criticized his presidency conceded that he was a man of integrity and meant well. In today’s cut throat business environment where profit means everything, honesty and ethics are the first to be sacrificed. This has gotten many big corporations into trouble and has destroyed many others like Enron and Arthur Andersen. Lincoln in his early years in New Salem struck up a partnership with one William Berry and bought a general store. This store was not profitable and eventually landed both the partners in debt. Lincoln’s partner died leaving him with all the debt. Legally Lincoln was obliged to pay only half of the debt. However, Lincoln made sure that he paid the entire debt even though it took him several years to repay. He also kept precise financial records and receipts while working as a postmaster. Lincoln’s advice to young lawyers was to be honest in all their dealings. He wanted them to choose a different profession if they couldn’t be honest while being a lawyer. He never overcharged his clients. In one case when a client paid him twenty five dollars, he returned ten dollars with a note that fifteen were sufficient for his work. During the uprising of the Sioux Indians, Lincoln pardoned more than 90% of men condemned to death which eventually cost his party the election. He, however, refused to hang men for votes. Lincoln refused to permit the army butcher to send him the choicest cut of steak of the cattle he butchered at the Washington monument. Even though it was a small matter, Lincoln knew that his actions in small matters reflected his character. In light of the recent indictments of businessmen for insider trading and falsified statements, this quality assumes superlative importance in the business world. A Deloitte and Touche 2007 ethics workplace survey finds that 77% of working adults cite the behavior of bosses or senior management as one of the top factors for setting the tone for ethical behavior at the workplace.
2.5 Knowing when to speak and when to keep silent
Lincoln knew when to stay silent since there were times when the situation was so precarious during the Civil War that any statement made by him would have been misconstrued. This was especially true when he was a President in waiting and President Buchanan’s administration was in its last days. There was a lot of pressure on Lincoln to make a statement on secession which he deftly avoided. Lincoln had the perfect sense of when to remain silent and when to respond. This allowed him to maintain a delicate balance between conservatives and radicals, war democrats and peace democrats. Lincoln had a habit of writing severe responses to criticism leveled against him but not sending them. Thus he was able to express his frustrations on paper but managed to avoid insult to the sender by filing his response instead of sending it. This would be a great learning for today’s business executives who are quick to insult their reports in public over mistakes.

2.6 Ambitious
Ambition is the fire which drives great leaders and Lincoln was no exception. He was ambitious as a young man and always strove to improve his condition. His sole ambition was to gain respect among his fellow men and this ambition eventually took him to the Presidency. Lincoln had ambitions for himself as well as the nation. He wanted America to fulfill its promise of being the “land of the free” and continue to be a place where a man with humble beginnings like himself could rise to be the President of United States. It was his ambition for America which led to his supporting internal improvements like building of railroads and canals. He thought that America could prosper only via internal improvements which would lead to exchange of food, water and other resources between states. Lincoln realized the hypocrisy of slavery where the declaration of independence declared all men equal but the US constitution still supported subjugation of men. He understood that with this hypocrisy, America could not fulfill her ambition of being the beacon of liberty and justice. However, Lincoln’s fierce ambition never overcame his kind heartedness and generosity. At the end of his first term Lincoln was tired but it was his ambition to finish the war and return the country to peace and prosperity that kept him going to
seek a second term. Some of the well-known contemporary business leaders like Michael Dell, Steve Jobs and Sam Walton have been extremely ambitious. It was their ambition which propelled them to the top and led to creation of innovative and successful companies.

2.7 Quick learner
Lincoln was a very quick learner. He had very less administrative experience when he became president but made up for this inexperience by being a very quick learner. He had no administrative experience or training. He was a one term congressman before he became President and had to learn administration while being on the job. If he hadn’t been a quick learner, the Union would have quickly sundered and a civil war lost. His abilities to learn and adapt quickly were illustrated even in his law practice where he learned quickly under his senior partner Stephen T. Logan and soon became an established lawyer in Springfield. Lincoln even learnt war strategy by reading books and advised his generals. In the ever changing business environment, this is a great quality to be had by business executives. This is especially true in hiring employees. This is one quality which hiring managers should actively seek in their new hires.

2.8 Careful and thorough
Lincoln was an extremely careful and thorough man. He spent a long time preparing for his cases as a lawyer and assumed that the court was not aware of any of the precedents. Similar care was seen when he prepared his speeches. Many of his important speeches were prepared after months of thorough research and he didn’t deliver them until he had reviewed and re-reviewed his drafts. He tended to avoid extemporaneous speeches since any such speech could be misconstrued (especially during his Presidency). Lincoln also spoke at a slower pace to make sure that he was not committing any mistake. Lincoln had a habit of working hard to master a subject on which he had any weakness. For example he was for protective tariff but did not have a well-reasoned explanation for his support. When he realized this, he read two books, one of which was pro-tariff and one was for free trade. He took over 11 pages
of notes and developed a well-reasoned justification for his support of tariff. During the 1858 Illinois senate election against Stephen Douglas, in absence of any secretarial staff or a campaign manager, Lincoln managed his entire campaign on his own. He took special efforts for fundraising and getting pro-Republican articles printed in the prominent newspapers of Illinois. Business executives pay a heavy price for not being careful and thorough. Yahoo board hired Scott Thompson as its CEO without thoroughly vetting him and were later forced to oust him when it turned out that he had padded his resume.

2.9 Maintained a balance of power and influence
One of the highlights of Lincoln’s leadership was his exceptional ability to keep a balance between warring factions. He maintained a delicate balance between the conservatives and radicals in his party and used good ideas from both factions to preserve the union and eradicate slavery. He could not be seen as a pro-radical or a pro-conservative since it could have tilted the balance of the Republican Party and eventually the civil war. He kept this balance even in his cabinet by selecting equal number of old Whigs and Democrats to achieve equilibrium of power and influence in the government. During the cabinet crisis of 1862, Lincoln saved his Secretary of State William Seward from attacks by the senate and his own cabinet (specifically Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase). A huge majority of senators convinced of a discord within the cabinet by Chase confronted Lincoln demanding the resignation of Seward. Lincoln however shrewdly asked Chase about the discord in front of the senators. Chase could not lie in front of the President and thus lost the confidence of the senators and eventually offered his resignation. The president however wanted to maintain the balance of power in his cabinet and used Chase’s resignation to reject the resignations of both Seward and Chase. Thus he averted the cabinet crisis and still managed to maintain a balance of radicals and conservatives in his cabinet. Chief executives of companies need to maintain such a delicate balance. Apple of 1990s was an example of such a company which lost its control to its Marketing department. As a result Apple no longer created
innovative products and lost market share. It needed Steve Jobs to come back and shift the balance back to Product design and innovation to bring the company back on track.

2.10 Remembered names
One of the distinct qualities of great leaders is that they remember names. For e.g. Napoleon remembered the name of almost everyone he met. Same was true of Lincoln. He remembered the names of almost everyone he met while roaming around Illinois as a lawyer. This helped him a great deal when he was selected as a state senator and also as a congressman. Dale Carnegie said “a person is more interested in his or her own name than in all the other names on earth put together”. Thus when a leader remembers the name of a common man or an employee it means a lot to that person and it establishes an immediate connection.

2.11 Consensus seeker
Lincoln made sure that he never seemed like a dictator or a tyrant. During the Civil War, Lincoln amassed a lot of power under his war powers but it was used mostly to execute the war successfully rather than dictate his will. Lincoln did not believe even in parental tyranny believing love to be the only chain which bound children to their parents. Most of Lincoln’s decisions were made after a discussion with his cabinet with Lincoln taking the final decision even though it could have been someone else’s suggestion. Lincoln had a habit of giving his cabinet members a day or two to mull over important issues of the day and then he would ask them to pen their thoughts. This would give him a good window into their minds and help him reach a decision. Lincoln believed in making the right decision even though it may not have been his idea. Dictatorial business leaders could be successful in rare cases but in most cases they drive away talent, muzzle innovation and sink their companies.

2.12 Effective Change Manager
Lincoln was extremely nimble on core issues which dogged the union and realized that the landscape was changing quickly. He didn’t start out as an anti-slavery man but was able to read the mood of the
North which was quickly turning against slavery. He was able to study the subject and change his opinions on slavery. He was then able to find constitutional basis to ban slavery and emancipate the slaves. Lincoln’s ability to manage the changing landscape deftly saved the United States from being divided into two parts. Among contemporary leaders, Lee Iacocca was a great change manager. When he joined Chrysler he realized that the place was in shambles. The quality of the cars was poor and owner loyalty was down. Chrysler was losing a lot of money due the fire sales held at the end of each month. Iacocca made several changes after joining Chrysler. He stopped the practice of fire sales and made the dealers accountable by asking them to hold inventories. He got Chrysler out of the used car business and hired a new advertising firm to renew the vigor in marketing. He laid off many white and blue collared workers and brought the costs under control. It was his effective change management which saved Chrysler.

2.13 Empathy
Lincoln was able to empathize with his supporters as well as opponents. Lincoln had sympathy even for the southern slaveholders whom he thought were in a difficult position of completely changing their way of life due to abolition of slavery. Lincoln understood that both North and South were equally responsible for the reprehensible institution of slavery. He often remarked that Southerners wouldn’t institute slavery if it was new to them but now that it was entrenched, it would take some time to get rid of it. Lincoln understood that people were a product of their circumstances and were trapped and motivated by their environments. As a result he understood what drove people and was able to foresee reactions to his decisions. Among recent world leaders, Mahatma Gandhi was a prime example of a leader who brought all Indians together through his empathy. After returning from South Africa, when he saw the poverty in India he chose to give up his suit and started wearing a single “dhoti” or loincloth. He spun his own cloth, grew his own food and started living like the common peasant in India. It was his empathy which endeared him to the Indians and brought them together to fight the British rule.
Empathy is one of the most valuable qualities for a business executive especially when you are laying off an employee. An empathetic boss will make the experience less painful for an employee as compared to a non-empathetic boss. An employee who has left the company with less hurt is less likely to damage the company or its reputation in the future. A study by McAfee and Purdue University’s Center for Education and Research in Information Assurance and Security indicates a growing trend among displaced employees turning to cybercrime using their corporate data access. These employees may have cost businesses as much as $1 trillion globally.

2.14 Ability to bounce back from failures
Lincoln had the unique ability of bouncing back from failures. Before being nominated for the presidency under the Republican Party ticket he was defeated twice in the senate races of 1854 and 1858. Before becoming President of the United States, the only experience at the federal level that he had was being a one term congressman. Also, during his administration he suffered several setbacks due to Union defeats and was still able to bounce back by adopting new tactics and changing the generals. Lee Iacocca is an example of a contemporary leader who was very good at bouncing back from setbacks. In the recession of early 1950s, he was demoted due to drastic falls in sales at Ford. Iacocca however, doubled his efforts and kept working hard. Soon he got his old position back and when things got better, was even promoted. When Iacocca was fired from Ford, instead of sulking, he went on to head Chrysler which was in deep trouble. He saved Chrysler from bankruptcy and made it profitable again.

2.15 Hired people as smart as or smarter than himself
Lincoln’s cabinet consisted of many of his rivals. These were men who had criticized and belittled Lincoln. In spite of this Lincoln hired them for their qualities and their ability to do their job well. Salmon P. Chase continued to plot against Lincoln even after being appointed as the Secretary of Treasury. Lincoln knew and yet tolerated this since Chase was best at what he did. Edwin Stanton had belittled Lincoln many years before Lincoln became president when he was assisting George Harding in the
McCormick reaper case. He continued to attack Lincoln even after he became President. However, Lincoln ignored this when he appointed Stanton as the secretary of war and Stanton turned out to be the best person for the job as he brought the wayward war department under control. Lincoln hired most of his generals based on their ability rather than their political affiliation. Thus he ended up appointing many Democrats as his generals some of whom were politically opposed to him. Lincoln staunchly supported his secretaries especially when they came under immense political pressure to resign due to reverses on the battlefield during the civil war. Ability to hire the best talent available is critical for business success today. Many companies hire average talent and then wonder about the average outcomes that they produce. For e.g. Google calculated that recruiting a top engineer (as compared to an average one) will result in 300 times more productivity and business impact.

2.16 Turned enemies into friends
Lincoln’s ability to forgive his enemies turned many of his opponents into his biggest supporters. One such example was Norman B. Judd who had opposed Lincoln in 1855 but later became his biggest supporters. Same was the case with his rivals like Seward, Stanton and Edward Bates. In the Illinois senate election of 1854, Lincoln was the leading candidate in the first ballot with 45 votes to Lyman Trumbull’s 5 votes. However, as ballots progressed, Lincoln’s support dwindled to 15. At a crucial juncture Lincoln urged his followers to vote for Trumbull to avoid the victory of Governor Joel Matteson. This made Trumbull, a hard core democrat, one of his biggest supporters in later years. Many newspaper editors who regularly castigated Lincoln eventually became his biggest supporters as Lincoln won them over sometimes by his demeanor and sometimes patronage. Once these enemies became friends, they stayed his friends and rarely became opponents again.

2.17 Shrewdness
Lincoln was an extremely shrewd politician. It was his shrewdness that ensured the moving of Illinois’ capital from Vandalia to Springfield. When the bill to move the capital was about to be defeated, Lincoln
introduced an amendment which allowed the General assembly the right to repeal the move in future. This change gave a plausible cause for the assembly members to vote for the bill and the bill was passed with a clear majority.

Lincoln ensured that he would be nominated as the Republican Party candidate for US congress by shrewdly coming up with a system of rotating the nominees every two years. This made sure that he got his chance and eventually became an US congressman.

In spite of being a well to do lawyer from Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln cultivated an image of being a common man and a rail splitter with humble beginnings which won him a lot of support among the common people. Lincoln also showed considerable shrewdness when he was able to get politicians like Seward, Bates, Blair and Chase into his cabinet who were great rivals among themselves.

He made sure that the Confederates were the first ones who fired upon the union troops triggering the civil war. This made sure that the public opinion was always on his side.

Even after losing the 1858 senate election to Stephen Douglas, Lincoln made sure that his debates with Douglas were printed and available to the general public in form of a book. This ensured that his thoughts reached the American people and this made him a viable Presidential candidate in the election of 1860. Also the Cooper Union address of 1860 made in front of the influential New York audience (and in the home state of his biggest rival William H. Seward) affirmed his position as a possible presidential candidate and made him popular outside his home state of Illinois. In the Republican National Convention of 1860, Lincoln’s strategy was to be at least the second choice of those who didn’t favor him as their first choice. This ensured that when there was disagreement on the names of the leading candidates, Lincoln was chosen by many of the delegates who resented his rivals.

2.18 Effective in communicating his/her vision
Lincoln was one of the great masters of propaganda of his age. He made sure that his ideas and vision reached maximum number of people. He wielded a great influence among the newspaper editors of the
age (especially the republican leaning newspapers) as he knew that the newspaper editors were the biggest vehicle for propagating his thoughts. He took an active role in getting his debates with Douglas printed and circulated in a 268 page book. This soon became a best seller and made him popular in America. When Lee Iacocca was trying to save Chrysler from bankruptcy, he propagated the idea of “equality of sacrifice” in which he believed that every stakeholder in Chrysler will have to sacrifice for the greater good of Chrysler. To this effect he himself reduced his salary to $1 for a year.

2.19 Careful with words
Great leaders are always careful with their words. Lincoln was extremely careful with how he responded to adverse comments or situations. He had a habit of drafting a harsh reply but never sending it. He employed this technique with his cabinet members as well as his generals. Using this technique he was able to express his frustration and yet not hurt his colleagues with harsh words. On the flip side, he effectively used words to inspire his generals and the common public. His speeches are now a part of history and still continue to inspire Americans and people around the world. The Gettysburg address which completed 150 years this year is one of the most memorable speeches in American history and continues to inspire millions of Americans even today. The recent case of the AOL CEO publicly firing one of his employees is a good example of why leaders needs to be careful with their words when uttered in public. AOL CEO Tim Armstrong had to publicly apologize for firing his creative director on a conference call. If the same thing had been done privately it wouldn’t even have been noticed. However, a public act of firing tarnished the reputation of the company as well as its CEO.

2.20 Accessible to the people
Lincoln was always accessible to the common people. When he moved into the White house, he opened it up to the common public. Anyone could come to meet the President and more often than not Lincoln obliged them by meeting them personally. Lincoln personally met hundreds of job seekers after inauguration which took inordinate amounts of his time but also built an image of a chief executive who
was accessible to the people. The ordinary citizens showered Lincoln with gifts and referred to him as “Father”. He was famous for the patience and humanity with which he treated those who visited him. Ordinary Americans felt for the first time that they had their true representative in the White house.

CEOs and top executives in companies need to stay accessible to their employees. When employees see their leader among themselves it motivates them. Quicken Loans CEO Bill Emerson has given his personal cell phone number to all his employees who can contact him anytime they want. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg is famous for not having his own office and sitting among the employees. Of the nearly 200,000 CEOs reviewed on Glassdoor.com, Mark Zuckerberg was ranked number 1 with an approval rating of 99.3%.

2.21 Ability to withstand criticism
Lincoln was subjected to huge amount of criticism and ridicule during and after his election as the President. He was regularly referred to as a “buffoon”, an “ape” and with other such derisive terms. He was mercilessly lampooned and viciously libeled in the press and in private. His wife wasn’t spared either. She was called a traitor as her part of her family was fighting for the confederates. Such unfair attacks failed to buckle Lincoln who believed in “malice towards none, with charity for all”. Lincoln even appointed some of his detractors to his cabinet and on other government posts. Among contemporary leaders Jeff Bezos has been criticized for investing all his earnings into growth and not being able to show healthy quarterly profits. Despite this criticism, Bezos has continued to invest in the future and the company has benefitted immensely from his vision.

2.22 Earned respect rather than demand it
Lincoln never demanded respect. He earned respect gradually from his subordinates and the American public. When his administration was inaugurated, most of his cabinet members didn’t respect him and considered him to be an ungainly and lowly lawyer from Illinois who got lucky by becoming the President of United States. However, as they grew to know him, their respect for him and his abilities
increased. Lincoln encouraged his friends and party members to send their thoughts in writing to him freely without any fear. When Carl Schurz sent a testy letter to Lincoln about his appointment of democrats as his generals, Lincoln sent him an equally testy reply. However, he later called Schurz and apologized to him. He encouraged him to keep writing freely and increased the respect Schurz had for him. Today too many business executives don’t realize the need of earning respect from their employees rather than demanding it. CEOs like Mark Zuckerberg who get their hands dirty with their colleagues in the day to day grind earn instant respect from their employees. There are many business leaders and CEOs who are feared but not respected.

2.23 Supporter of innovation
Lincoln was a great supporter of innovation. He is the only US President to have a patent on his name. He spent several hours reviewing new innovations and meeting innovators whom he thought could shorten the war using their innovations. He was ready to spend this time even though he knew that 90% of these innovations/inventions would not be fruitful. Among contemporary leaders Lee Iacocca was a great supporter of innovation. He was the key force behind innovative Ford cars like Mustang, Mark III and Escort. He was also a driving force behind best-selling Chrysler cars like the K-car and the T115 minivan. In his book “Innovator’s dilemma” Clayton Christensen talks about how the established companies who don’t innovate get disrupted by newcomers who come up with innovative technologies. This new technologies are usually low performing and low cost and address a niche in the market. However, eventually their performance improves and they unseat the established players in the market.

2.24 Avoided vengeance
Too many leaders today act out of vengeance and eliminate their enemies. Even the great Julius and Augustus Caesar were not immune to this. Lincoln never acted out of vengeance. Even after summarily defeating the South, his reconstruction plan for them was not punitive. He made sure that the northern
will was not forced on Southerners and they had the opportunity to select their own representatives. He favored allowing the Confederate soldiers to return to their homes if they took an oath of loyalty to the Union. He was not in favor of hanging Jefferson Davis or confiscating the Confederate lands or putting the Southern states under martial law. Lincoln strongly believed that a government should never act in revenge as that would lead to blood bath and prove futile. Thus he avoided executing rebel soldiers as a revenge for northern soldiers killed in violation of the laws of war. Sun Tzu the great Chinese military strategist and philosopher says — “To a surrounded enemy you must leave a way of escape”. One such instance of magnanimity was displayed by Bill Gates who helped a struggling Apple Inc. by investing 150 million dollars in 1997. Apple eventually went on to become one of the most successful tech companies in the world.

2.25 Right amount of delegation
Lincoln was able to achieve the just the right amount of delegation. He allowed his cabinet members complete freedom in running their departments and took part in making only the most important decisions. This allowed him to focus on tasks which were his sole responsibility like policy on slavery and at the same time empowered his secretaries. Most business leaders today struggle to achieve this perfect amount of delegation which sometimes leads to micromanagement and irks the subordinates. In a Mckinsey survey of 600 senior executives, they found that only 38% executives said their teams focused on work that truly benefited from a top-team perspective. Only 35% said their top teams allocated the right amounts of time for topics they considered important, such as strategy and people. Lincoln made sure that he was the one who set federal policy and not his generals. When General Fremont proclaimed that slaves of all persons aiding the rebellion will be set free, Lincoln was quick to quash the proclamation as it was issued without his consent. Lincoln had a great skill of making his secretaries and generals feel that they were making the decisions when actually the decision was a result of his quiet influence. Lincoln had a keen sense of when to indulge in details and when to
delegate. At the start of the war, Lincoln tried to learn military strategy and direct and coach his generals. However, when he realized that this was not an effective strategy, he quickly withdrew and allowed his generals to decide on the course of war while keeping the strategic decisions to himself. Lincoln gave all the authorities and responsibilities possible to his generals but when he found a general who was not up to the task he usually reduced his responsibilities and gave him a different role which he could perform in a better way. This strategy of utilizing people to the best of their abilities was unique. This is also a huge lesson to organizations that are quick to lay off employees. There is no conscious effort made to check whether the employee could fit some other role which could be less challenging.

2.26 Fearless
Lincoln was extremely fearless. He was aware of the threat to his life but refused to let this threat deter him from being among the common people. Many of the bold decisions he took during the civil war like suspending the writ of habeas corpus and emancipating the slaves show a fearless streak in his nature. He was almost shot while reviewing the battlefield during the war but this failed to shake him and he continued to visit the troops. Lincoln believed that in a democratic society, the leader should never be screened from common people and should always be available. Lincoln would chide his generals trying to protect him by stationing troops outside his office and at the White house. His fearlessness endeared him to his troops. The great Indian philosopher, economist and political scientist Chanakya said “As soon as fear approaches near, attack and destroy it”. This is especially true for companies who are fighting for their survival. If employees sense fear in their executives, they will quickly lose morale and jump off the sinking ship.

2.27 Great judge of public mood
Lincoln was a master at understanding the public sentiment. He molded his message and actions to align with the public mood and achieved tremendous success. He was great at timing his decisions and
announcements so as to make the maximum impact. He made the emancipation proclamation only after making sure that the public mood supported it and that it would not lead to secession of the border slave states. He was also a master at molding the public opinion in his favor. Before making any major policy change he made sure that the public was prepared to receive the change positively, knew what was coming and clearly understood the reasons behind the decision. In companies decisions made by senior management are likely to succeed only when they have the complete support of majority of their employees.

2.28 Generosity of spirit
Lincoln was extremely generous to his enemies as well as his supporters. He pardoned many young soldiers who would have been hung or shot for desertion, despite of complaints from his generals. He understood the human aspect of war which was terrible and the effect it was having on young soldiers who had never seen death at such close quarters. He allowed many of his generals multiple chances to secure a victory and move ahead before they were replaced.

Lincoln made sure that all the slaves who were freed in the civil war as a part of the emancipation proclamation or as soldiers were not returned to slavery even though some people suggested it as a compromise with the South. Lincoln understood the severe economic impact that abolition of slavery would have on the South and was ready to compensate the South with 400 million dollars if they would end the war and abolish slavery. This was a truly generous offer of a Chief executive who was winning the war.

As an established lawyer, Lincoln never had an air of superiority over the younger lawyers. In fact he acted as a mentor to them and left them with a feeling of personal affection towards him. Generosity towards employees is a rare thing among today’s business executives. Recently the CEO of Lenovo, Yang Yuanqing donated his entire annual bonus worth 3.25 million dollars to his employees.
2.29 Did not compromise on his core values and principles
Lincoln never compromised on his core beliefs and values. After being elected as the President, there was enormous pressure on him to compromise with the South on some of the core principles on which the Republican election platform was based. One such example was extension of slavery in the new territories. Lincoln refused to compromise on these core principles since he realized that once these core principles were sacrificed, his party will break and this would hasten the disunion. He refused to budge to a minority which was bullying the nation into accepting its demands with the threat of secession. Lincoln took time and was cautious in taking up any position. However, once he took a position and committed to a cause he showed singular tenacity in pursuing the cause and never wavered from his support of the cause. Many companies preach values and principles which drive them but very few companies actually stick to the values they preach. Google and Amazon are examples of few companies which have stuck to their core values and principles and their employees love them for this.

2.30 Good hold of strategic imperatives
Lincoln had an excellent hold on the key strategic imperatives of keeping the country together and winning the Civil war. He knew that border slave states that had not seceded were key to the administration’s success in winning the war. It was a number’s game where the North had more population, better technology and greater area under control. Loss of the border slave states would have jeopardized this. Thus he always timed his decisions around slavery in such a way that the union sentiment in the Border States remained strong till the end and they did not secede to the South.

Lincoln smartly avoided a war with England during the “Trent affair” by releasing the Confederate diplomats captured by Captain Wilkes for violating the blockade of ships from the South. Lincoln knew that the North could not afford two wars at the same time and a war with England could scuttle his plans for a reunion with the South. Lincoln was acutely aware of the need to avoid any foreign intervention in the American Civil war which could legitimize the Confederate government and provide
them material and political support. Lincoln knew that a country suffering from Civil war was vulnerable to intervention by foreign powers and took every effort to avoid foreign intervention especially from European powers.

Lincoln usually took time in making his decisions however when time came he took some tough decisions which could have labeled him a dictator like suspending the writ of the habeas corpus. It was a controversial decision but one taken with a strategic view in mind of clipping the wings of the rebellion. Lincoln delegated many of the day to day tasks of administration like taking care of the army, foreign affairs, managing the economic aspects of the war etc. to his able secretaries while maintaining control over the strategic decisions and direction of his government. Lincoln always thought that the confederacy could be brought to its knees by overwhelming them on several fronts at the same time.

Unfortunately until he found Grant he didn’t have a general who could execute this strategy effectively. Among contemporary leaders Lee Iacocca always displayed key strategic sense when he was at Ford as well as when he was trying to revive Chrysler. He kept pushing Henry Ford II towards a smaller more fuel efficient car where the auto market moved during the Iran crisis. While at Chrysler he kept an eye towards the long term when he hired 250 Quality control personnel when Chrysler couldn’t afford them. He kept planning for the next generation cars even when Chrysler was at the brink of bankruptcy.

Another such example is Jeff Bezos who has always followed a long term strategy by investing the money earned into future growth of Amazon instead of short term profits to please investors. To quote Bezos from his letter to his shareholders in 2013 – “As I write this, our recent stock performance has been positive, but we constantly remind ourselves of an important point – as I frequently quote famed investor Benjamin Graham in our employee all-hands meetings – “In the short run, the market is a voting machine but in the long run, it is a weighing machine.” We don’t celebrate a 10% increase in the stock price like we celebrate excellent customer experience. We aren’t 10% smarter when that happens and
conversely aren’t 10% dumber when the stock goes the other way. We want to be weighed, and we’re always working to build a heavier company.”

2.31 Visible leader
During the Civil war Lincoln made several visits to meet the troops and even led the troops in one of the assaults. Thus he was always a visible leader regularly meeting and inspiring the troops. This was not the case with Jefferson Davis who was rarely seen on the battlefield. He made sure that the troops were well provisioned and pardoned many young soldiers for desertion. He was perceived as kind, fair and just by his troops who never lost confidence in him even after his firing of some their favorite generals. Employees appreciate leaders who are visible and are seen actively engaged in the company. CEOs who live in ivory towers are rarely respected and fail to inspire their employees. One of the reasons why Mark Zuckerberg is respected by his employees is that he sits among them and is always visible. A visible leader seems approachable and humble.

2.32 Good sense of humor
Lincoln had an excellent sense of humor and he used this effectively in connecting with people. His humor was never sarcastic or made at someone else’s expense. It was mostly expressed in jokes or anecdotes which were apt for the situation and many times had an implicit message for the listeners. Lincoln was also known to defuse tension in a controversial discussion by telling an anecdote which would lighten the atmosphere. It was his sense of humor which sustained him during the difficult times of his life when the union troops were suffering crushing defeats and the war was stretching the country’s finances. Among contemporary business leaders Gary Knell, the former President and CEO of NPR, advocates the need for a good sense of humor in his job to deal with the pressures at the top.

2.33 High sense of self esteem
Lincoln had an ego – a great sense of self-esteem. All great leaders have egos. However, Lincoln’s ego was secure and not easily wounded. He did not have to defend it. He had a great understanding of his
strengths and weaknesses and didn’t indulge in petty battles which detractors. It was this confidence in him that allowed him to withstand relentless verbal assaults on his looks, his demeanor and his roots. Leaders without an ego can be easily pushed around and will eventually be pushed aside. Lincoln bore several insults to his dignity from his General George McClellan including one where was made to wait for hours by the General at his home without even showing up to meet the President in the end. Lincoln did not expect the general to follow etiquettes and was even ready “to hold McClellan’s horse” if it would win him a victory in the battlefield. Lincoln was more focused on winning the war than slights to his ego by his generals. This is a rare example a Commander in chief who had a secure ego and did not demand respect from his cabinet or his generals. Lincoln was ready to lose an argument if meant the betterment of the Union.

2.34 Alliance builder
Lincoln was a great alliance builder. During the civil war, he built an alliance of the republican radicals, republican conservatives and war democrats and fostered the union cause. He was able to build several alliances through patronage in the way he appointed government officials under his presidency. Every appointment was used to build an alliance with a legislator or a party strongman and these alliances lasted till the end of his life. Lincoln had a unique ability to make each of his friends and advisors feel that they were his closest friend and most trusted advisor. Lincoln made sure that the officials in the new governments being installed in the captured Southern areas were his loyalists, which made sure that his policies were pursued during reconstruction and unionism prevailed while avoiding direct despotic rule over the newly captured Southern areas.
3. Survey Analysis

We surveyed 64 professionals to understand the relevance of Lincoln’s leadership qualities in today’s business world.

3.1 Survey respondent information

Following are some of the key details about the respondents that we surveyed.

3.1.1 Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 - Survey respondent data - Gender

3.1.2 Years of experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 - Survey respondent data - Years of experience

It is interesting to note that 38% of the respondents had less than 8 years of experience while 62% had more than 8 years of experience.
3.1.3 Current or last job
We asked respondents to specify their current or last job that they held. We got response from at least 10 senior managers and 25 mid-level managers. There were 17 who did not fit any of the general categories provided by us. The details of all the respondents are provided in figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current or last job</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CXO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departmental manager</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General manager</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief engineer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer/software developer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly wage worker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 - Survey respondent data - Current or last job

3.1.4 Number of employees reporting to the respondents
We further asked about the number of employees who were reporting to the respondents in their current or last job. This also gave us an idea about the seniority of respondents. We saw that at least 47% of the respondents had 5 or more people reporting to them which qualified them as mid-level managers. We had 10% respondents who had more than 50 people reporting to them which qualified them as senior managers. We had 19% people who had no person reporting to them. Thus we were able to get a good cross section of lower level staff, mid-level
managers and senior managers responding to our survey. The details of all the respondents are provided in figure 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees reporting to you</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 to 50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 100</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4 - Survey respondent data - Number of employees reporting

3.2 Survey
Following was the survey which was sent to the respondents

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1aAdZ3Az9ls1a494cuYBcaWpjdoOW!mXbA7QAu3yHmg/viewform

After collecting basic information from the respondents, we asked them to rate their boss or a senior leader they admired on the 35 qualities from 1 to 5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest). We added one quality as a foil to one of the existing 34 qualities. Specifically, with ‘Strategic’, we added ‘Tactical’. We also asked them to select top ten qualities (among the 35) which they would seek in a leader.

3.3 Survey results
Based on the qualities admired by the respondents in their boss or senior leaders, we divided the results into 3 tiers. The first tier had qualities which were admired by more than 75% of the respondents (rated as 4 or 5). The second tier ranged between 60% to 75% and the third tier was qualities which were admired by less than 60% of the respondents. The results of the three tiers are displayed in figures 5, 6 and 7.
Figure 5 – Tier 1 leadership qualities

Figure 6 - Tier 2 leadership qualities
As seen from the results in figure 5, the top 5 qualities which the respondents admired in their bosses or senior leaders were being a good communicator, being strategic, supporting innovation, being effective in communicating their vision and having a high sense of self-esteem. The tier 1 qualities seem to be more result oriented or having direct visibility (for e.g. being a good communicator, being strategic, supporting innovation, being effective in communicating their vision etc.) as compared to tier 2 and tier 3 qualities which are more of abstract qualities or qualities which would not be immediately visible (like being pragmatic, flexible, ambitious, generous, fearless etc.). Thus respondents favored the more visible leadership qualities in the leaders they admired as compared to the more abstract qualities which would take some time to detect. The tier 1 qualities seem to be more behavioral where tier 2 and tier 3 qualities are more related to the character of the leader. This is a huge lesson for today’s business leaders. People are likely to judge their leaders quickly based on their external behavior as compared to
their deeper character which would not be visible immediately. Thus leaders may need to purposely display some of their qualities to earn respect from their employees and colleagues.

It is interesting to note that more than 50% respondents favored 32 of the 35 qualities seen in the leaders they admired. More than 70% respondents favored 23 of the 35 qualities. This indicates the high relevance of Lincoln’s leadership qualities in today’s business world.

3.3.1 Top ten qualities that respondents admired in their leaders – Men vs Women
We did a comparison of top ten qualities which men admired in their bosses or senior leaders versus the top ten qualities which women admired in their senior leaders. The results are displayed in figure 8.

![Figure 8 - Leadership qualities admired by women vs men](image)

It’s interesting to note that women admired the following qualities in their leaders which men did not rate among one of their top ten qualities

- Alliance builder
• Visible leader
• Good at delegation
• Tactical
• Pragmatic

Similarly men admired the following qualities in their leaders which women did not rate among one of their top ten qualities
• Knowing when to speak and when to keep silent
• Earns respect rather than demand it
• Accessible to employees and peers
• Effective in communicating his/her vision
• Able to bounce back from failure

Thus women seem to admire more of the abstract qualities which are related to the character of a leader while men seem to admire more of the visible qualities which are behavioral. Also interesting to note is that 100% of the women surveyed admired the fact that their leader supported innovation while men rate being a strategic thinker and a good communicator as the top qualities they admired in their leader.

3.3.2 Top ten qualities that respondents admired in their leaders – less than 8 years of experience vs more than 8 years of experience

We also compared top ten qualities which were admired by respondents with less than 8 years of experience in their bosses or senior leaders versus the top ten qualities which were admired by respondents with more than 8 years of experience. The results are displayed in figure 9
Figure 9 - Leadership qualities admired by respondents with less than 8 years of experience vs more than 8 years of experience

Following were the qualities which respondents with less than 8 years of experience admired in their senior leaders which were not seen among the top ten qualities admired in their senior leaders by respondents with more than 8 years of experience:

- Good sense of humor
- Alliance builder
- Sticks to his/her core values and principles
- Able to bounce back from failures

Alternately, following were the qualities which were admired by respondents with more than 8 years of experience which were not admired by respondents with less than 8 years of experience:

- Supports innovation
- Earns respect rather than demand it
- Effective in communicating his/her vision
- Honest and ethical

This difference indicates the differences in preferences between the more experienced respondents and relatively less experienced respondents. The more experienced respondents preferred qualities...
reflective of their seniority like supporting innovation, communicating vision, earning respect of subordinates and being honest and ethical which would seem more attractive to senior leaders in an organization. There were some common qualities which were appreciated by both groups like being a good communicator, being strategic, being a quick learner etc.

3.3.3 Top ten qualities that respondents sought in their leaders

We asked the respondents to choose the top ten qualities which they seek in their leaders. The results are shown in figure 10.

Only 5 of the tier1 qualities appear in this list. These are as follows:

- Communicator
- Effective in communicating vision
- Earns respect rather than demand it
- Strategic
- Supports innovation

Interestingly being honest and ethical appears as the second highest choice among qualities which respondents seek in their leader. Thus majority of the respondents want their leaders to be honest and ethical but haven’t seen this as one of top qualities in the leaders they admire. Again this is an important lesson for business leaders. Their employees will like them to be more honest and ethical and right now they don’t see this as a top quality in the current set of leaders they admire. Another interesting addition in this list is being effective change manager which is a tier 3 quality. Thus many respondents will like their leaders to be effective change managers but they don’t see this quality in the current set of leaders they admire.

3.3.4 Top ten qualities that respondents sought in their leaders – men vs women

We compared the top ten qualities which men sought in their leaders with the top ten qualities that women sought in their leaders. The results are shown in figure 11

![Figure 11 - Leadership qualities sought in their leaders by women vs men](image-url)
Women sought the following qualities which did not figure in the top ten list for men

- Consensus seeker
- Hires people who are as smart as or even smarter than himself or herself
- Fearless
- Effective change manager

Men sought the following qualities which did not figure in the top ten list for women

- Strategic
- Good at delegation
- Able to bounce back from failure
- Displays empathy

Again we see a trend of women preferring more character based qualities like being fearless, being a consensus seeker etc. while men preferred more behavioral qualities like being good at delegation, displaying empathy etc.

We also compared top ten qualities which men and women admired in their leaders vs the qualities which they sought in their leaders. They are shown in figures 12 and 13
For women we see a great divergence between the top ten qualities they admire in their leaders and the top ten qualities which they seek in their leaders. Following eight qualities were sought by women in their leaders but were not seen in the leaders they admire (as their top ten qualities)

- Honest and ethical
- Earns respect rather than demand it
- Effective in communicating his/her vision
- Consensus seeker
- Hires people who are as smart as or smarter than himself or herself
- Ambitious
- Fearless
- Effective change manager

These are great data points for business leaders who want to lead women effectively. Women are looking for strong character in their leaders and want their leaders to be honest, ethical, fearless, ambitious, consensus seeker and effective change manager.

For men we saw great convergence between the qualities they admired in their top leaders and the qualities which their sought in their leaders. There were only 4 qualities which they sought in their leaders which were not among the top ten qualities which they saw in the leaders they admire. These were
- Honest and ethical
- Ambitious
- Good at delegation
- Display empathy

It is interesting to see that even men sought more character based qualities in their leaders like women while they admire more behavioral qualities.
3.3.5  Top ten qualities that respondents sought in their leaders – respondents with less than 8 years of experience vs respondents with more than 8 years of experience

We compared the top ten qualities which respondents with less than 8 years of experience sought in their leaders with the qualities that respondents with more than 8 years of experience sought in their leaders. The results are shown in figure 14.

We see a great convergence in the top ten qualities sought in their leaders by respondents with less than 8 years of experience and those sought by respondents with more than 8 years of experience. There are only 3 differences. Respondents with less than 8 years of experience sought the following qualities which not in the top ten qualities sought by respondents with more than 8 years of experience:

- Good at delegation
- Displays empathy
- Sticks to his/her core values and principles

This is very telling. Respondents with lesser experience want their senior leaders to delegate properly, understand their emotions and situation and also stick to their core value and principles. On the other
hand respondents with more than 8 years of experience sought the following qualities which were not sought by respondents with less than 8 years of experience

- Accessible to employees and peers
- Able to bounce back from failure
- Effective change manager

These qualities seem to be the ones which senior managers feel that they need to have to be effective leaders. This comparison is a great lesson for senior business leaders who sometimes wonder why they are not being perceived as good leaders by their junior employees in spite of doing all the ‘right’ things.

We also compared top ten qualities which respondents with less than 8 years of experience and respondents with more than 8 years of experience admired in their leaders vs the qualities which they sought in their leaders. They are shown in figures 15 and 16.

![Figure 15 - Leadership qualities admired by respondents with less than 8 years of experience vs the qualities sought by them](image-url)
As seen in figure 15 there is a lot of divergence between the top ten qualities which respondents with less than 8 years of experience admire in their senior leaders and the qualities which they seek in their leaders. There are only 3 qualities in common. Following are the seven qualities which respondents seek in their leaders which are not the top ten qualities which they admired in their senior leader:

- Honest and ethical
- Effective in communicating his/her vision
- Earns respect rather than demand it
- Good at delegation
- Ambitious
- Supports innovation
- Displays empathy

This is a good lesson for senior leaders. Junior employees are seeking the above qualities in their senior leaders but are not actively seeing them in their leaders. They would like their senior leaders to display the above qualities to lead them effectively.
As seen in figure 16 there is a lot of convergence between the top ten qualities which respondents with more than 8 years of experience admire in their senior leaders and the qualities which they seek in their leader. There is only a difference of 3 qualities. This could be because with experience, senior leaders know what to expect from their leaders. Following are the 3 qualities which respondents with more than 8 years’ experience seek in their leaders which are not among the top ten qualities which they admire in their senior leader.

- Ambitious
- Able to bounce back from failure
- Effective change manager

Other than above observations, following were the qualities which always ranked among top ten qualities in almost all categories

- Communicator
- Strategic
  - Effective in communicating his/her vision
- Supports innovation

Thus these are universal leadership qualities which employees of all types will prefer to see in their leaders.
4. Conclusion
Abraham Lincoln was assassinated 148 years ago but still remains the most popular President in US. The primary reason for his popularity is his stellar leadership ability using which he saved the Union and abolished slavery. His lessons in leadership are the critical in addressing the leadership crisis we face today especially in the business world. Many studies have proven that employee happiness is directly related to company performance. Kathryn Carlson from KPA University notes in her article on kpaonline.com:

“Hewitt Associates reported recently that organizations with high levels of engagement (where 65 percent or more of employees are engaged) outperformed the total stock market index even in volatile economic conditions. During 2009, total shareholder return for these companies was 19 percent higher than the average total shareholder return. Companies with low engagement (where less than 40 percent of employees are engaged) had a total shareholder return that was 44 percent lower than the average. The same study highlighted that employee engagement had reached a 15 year low due to pressures of current economic conditions, including an erosion of trust between employees and employers. The Gallup Organization reports that “actively disengaged employees erode an organization’s bottom line while breaking the spirits of colleagues in the process. Within the U.S. workforce, Gallup estimates this cost to be more than $300 billion in lost productivity alone.”

Thus employee satisfaction is key to company success and business leaders who engage effectively with their employees are likely to see better outcomes as compared to leaders who fail to engage with their employees. Lincoln provides an excellent example of how to lead in crisis and how to get the best out of your subordinates and colleagues. This thesis work hopes to act as a guide for business executives who are looking to engage effectively with their employees and customers. Leaders who are good communicators, have a strategic outlook, effectively communicate their vision to the employees and support innovation are most likely to engage their employees effectively and succeed in the
marketplace. Also employees are seeking to see more character in their leaders with traits like honesty, ethics, ambition, good sense of humor and ability to bounce back from failures. Lincoln’s character and his leadership qualities act as a beacon for today’s business leaders who are trying to create better lives for their employees, customers and shareholders.
References


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