

THE OBSERVER/ENTERPRISE

Published Weekly

The Observer/Enterprise, LLC
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 www.ObserverEnterprise.com

Periodical Rate Postage paid at Robert Lee, Texas

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to
 Observer/Enterprise
 PO Box 1329, Robert Lee, Texas 76945

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Per Year in Coke County ... \$30.00
 Per Year Elsewhere in Texas ... \$35.00
 Per Year Outside of Texas ... \$37.00



Essential Empathy Redux

By James M. Decker

Last week, I shared my top 12 books of 2020. One such book was "Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln." I penned this essay in 2020 as I finished reading "Team of Rivals." As a follow-up to my books discussion, I think it merits further discussion about the power of Lincoln's empathy.

The story of Abraham Lincoln is well traveled. We all know about his tough upbringing in frontier poverty. We know about his self-made success as a lawyer. We know about his triumph over personal and professional loss, culminating in his election as President of the United States in 1860 and ending with his eventual assassination. Our country regards Lincoln as one of our greatest Presidents (perhaps the greatest). On the surface level, we talk much about what he did - abolish slavery and preserve the Union - without talking enough about HOW he did it or WHY he was able to accomplish it.

The HOW and the WHY become apparent with any deep reading in to Lincoln's life. It all boils down to a single word: empathy. Lincoln had a remarkable talent for understanding the feelings of other people, from his friends and subordinates to his rivals and enemies. This was undoubtedly an innate skill, but Lincoln also placed great importance on using empathy as a leadership tool and applied it over and over, even to the detriment of his own ego.

Lincoln's empathy is most evident in the acclaimed book "Team of Rivals" by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. This book details the story of Lincoln and the members of his Cabinet, three of whom had bitterly contested him in the 1860 Republican primary (Attorney

General Edward Bates, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, and Secretary of State William H. Seward). These men had lost to Lincoln at their highest level of public achievement (and in some cases, deeply resented Lincoln), but Lincoln sought their advice and counsel to lead America through its darkest hour.

Empathy is disarming. A person can become filled with hatred for a rival or an enemy. They treat them as the "others" with whom they have nothing in common. Lines of communication are lost. We fail to appreciate or even acknowledge one another's humanity. Eventually, we turn the "others" into an ogre that is the cause of all sorts of problems, real and imagined. And yet, when your supposed enemy or rival is actively working to understand your feelings and the decisions that come from those feelings, it becomes much more difficult to maintain that hatred.

Empathy is encouraging and uplifting. When Lincoln's subordinates made mistakes (sometimes critical and deeply damaging mistakes), Lincoln publicly supported and encouraged them. He often volunteered his own judgment as the source of the mistake. There are also numerous accounts of Lincoln taking dangerous visits to battlefields, which changed the mindset of

dispirited, beleaguered soldiers. Lincoln's empathy strengthened the resolve of those who were affected by it.

Perhaps most importantly, empathy has the power to change hearts and minds. Long before he waded into the vicious debates over slavery, Lincoln was involved in the angry national debate over temperance (abstinence from alcohol). Lincoln advised temperance advocates to avoid "thundering tones of anathema and denunciation," because it would only be met with more of the same. In short, Lincoln knew that if you yell at people, they will simply yell right back and you will not accomplish a thing. Lincoln knew that, no matter how honorable, right, or just that your cause might be, condemning an opponent would only cause him to close his mind and heart. Without empathy - understanding a person's feelings and beliefs - you can never win their heart. Lincoln wrote that the heart was "the great high road to reason." To win a person's mind, you must first win their heart.

How important is that need to win hearts and minds? If a person truly cares about leading in an effective manner, it is absolutely crucial. Lincoln knew it was his most important responsibility. He wrote that "with public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts or pronounces decisions."

Lincoln said it better than I could possibly say it. It is one thing for an elected official to take an important action. It is an entirely different, better thing for an elected official to take the same action at the behest of the people.

As you know, I've been writing lately about the need for better leadership in America. Without

question, an absolutely essential component of that better leadership is empathy. If leaders do not have empathy for their people, it might be time for new leaders.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the "West of 98" website and forthcoming podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com.

Robert Lee City Council meeting minutes told

The Robert Lee City Council met in regular session on Monday, December 14, 2020, at 6:30 pm at City Hall. Those present included Mayor Jason Moran, Council Members Becca McGuire, Tracy Grantham, and Jonathan Torres (via Zoom). Council Member Daniel Jasso was absent.

Call to order was held, quorum was determined and the meeting, and the meeting declared open at 6:52 pm. Prayer was offered and the pledge was recited. The newly elected mayor was recognized.

The Consent Agenda, which included minutes from the November 9, 2020, and November 23, 2020, meetings; Ordinance Enforcement Report; Animal Control Report; Financial Report for October and November; and Municipal Court Report, was discussed. A motion was made by Council Member Becca McGuire to approve the Consent Agenda and she was seconded by Council Member Jonathan Torres. The motion carried with a vote of 3 - 0.

A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Tracy Grantham to approve the proposed 2021 budgets for Economic Development Corporation (EDC) A and B. She was seconded by Council Member Becca McGuire and the motion carried with a vote of 3 - 0.

Discussion was held regarding property bids on three properties. Two of the three properties have addressed and bids were put in for 501 Houston and 821 Houston. A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Tracy Grantham to accept the proposed bids from Jose Rangel and Manuel Saucedo and to table the other bid until more information is acquired. She was seconded by Council Member Becca McGuire and the motion carried with a vote of 3 - 0.

Discussion was held regarding abandoned properties. EDC would like to start taking down dilapidated buildings within the City of Robert Lee. Mayor Jason Moran mentioned that there is a third party that can be contracted with to deal with legal issues to help ease the process. It

Area Churches

Invite You to Worship

Bronte
Bronte Church of Christ
 PO Box 346

118 S. Jefferson • Bronte
 Sun. 10 am & 6 pm, Wed. 7 pm

Central Baptist Church
 324 S. Franklin • Bronte
 (325) 473-4811

Dale Patterson, Pastor
 Sun. 10 am Sunday School
 11 am & 5 pm Worship

First Baptist Church
 424 S. Washington • Bronte
 (325) 473-2331 • Pastor George Cooper

Sunday 9:45 am Sunday School,
 10:55 am Worship, 6 pm Bible
 Study & Worship

Wednesday 6 pm RA's & GA's,
 6:30 pm Youth & Adults

First United Methodist Church
 Corner of Washington & Holmes
 Bronte

(325) 473-3281
 Rev. Stacy Sprinkle, Pastor
 Sun. 10:00 am Sunday School
 11:00 am Worship

St. James Catholic Church
 215 N. Washington, Bronte
 (325) 365-2687

Rev. Yesu Mulakaleti, Jr., Pastor
 Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am

Robert Lee
Bible Baptist Church
 PO Box 938 • 9th & Austin

Sunday 10 am Sunday School, 11 am and
 5 pm Worship, Wed 5 pm Bible Study

Emmanuel Pentecostal
 PO Box 794 • 1004 Hillcrest
 Pastor Brantly Robertson

(972) 841-2009
 Sundays 10 am, Wednesdays 7 pm

First United Methodist Church
 PO Box 144 • 9th & Chadbourne
 Robert Lee • (325) 453-2417

Cyndi Weidner, Pastor
 Sun. 10 am Sunday School
 11 am Worship,
 5 pm Choir Practice

Iglesia Bautista Betel

101 Houston • Robert Lee
 Sun. 9:45 am • Sunday School
 11 am Service • Bible Study Wed. 6 pm

Southside Church of Christ
 PO Box 698 • 8th & Houston
 Robert Lee (325) 453-2176

Recardo Reyes, Preacher
 Sun. 10 am, Sunday School
 11 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Worship
Northside Church of Christ
 PO Box 508

9th & Chadbourne • Robert Lee
 (325) 453-2685, (325) 763-2118 or
 (325) 473-1053

Services: Sun. 10 am
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

601 W. 10th, Robert Lee
 (325) 365-2687

Rev. Yesu Mulakaleti, Pastor
 Saturday Vigil Mass 5 pm
Robert Lee Baptist Church

PO Box 493 • 22 W. 11th
 (325) 453-2724

Chris Walls, Pastor
 Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
 11 am & 7 pm, Worship

Wed. 7 pm, Prayer Meeting
Victory Assembly of God
 (325) 453-2208, PO Box 638

202 E. 6th Street, Robert Lee
 Rev. Rocky Youngblood, Pastor
 Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
 10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study
4C Cowboy Church
 Large Rec Hal, Robert Lee

Robert Lemmond, Pastor
 Sunday, 10:30 am

Coke County
Pecan Baptist
 PO Box 542 • 12 miles West of

Robert Lee on Sterling City Hwy
 (325) 453-2065, Bill Hood, Pastor
 www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com
 Sun. 10 am, Sunday School
 11 am & 7 pm, Worship

Tennyson
Tennyson Baptist Church
 Hwy 277 • Tennyson
 (325) 473-2040


Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
 11:00 am & 6 pm, Worship
 Wed. 6:00 pm Prayer Meeting



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