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Essential Empathy

by James M. Decker

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 a lawyer, farmer, and mayor in Stamford, Texas, and the creator of the forthcoming "West of 98" podcast and website. He may be contacted through Facebook at [facebook.com/james.decker](https://www.facebook.com/james.decker).

ECCHD Board meeting minutes told

July 20, 2020

The East Coke County Hospital District Board of Directors met for a regular meeting on Monday, July 20, 2020, at 5 pm, in the council room at Bronte City Hall. Vice-President Everett Bedford presided over the meeting. Other board members present were Lanette Fletcher and Gina McCutchen. Chief Financial Officer Johnny Mathis and

Business Office Manager Fran Sonnenberg were also present. Board members Howard Baker and Jerita Taylor, as well as Administrator Daisy Toms, were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 5 pm by Vice-President Everett Bedford.

A quorum was established. Prayer was led by Johnny Mathis.

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

Forgiven Ministries

117 W. Main, Bronte

Russ Frasier, Pastor

Sun. 10 am

Tuesday 6 pm Table Time

St. James Catholic Church

215 N. Washington, Bronte

(325) 365-2687

Rev. Yesu Mulakaleti, Jr., Pastor

Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am

4C Cowboy Church

Texas Theater, Downtown Bronte

Interim Pastor Robert Lemmond

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

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

6th & Houston, Robert Lee

Rev. Irving Smith, Pastor

Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School

10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study

Tennyson

Tennyson Baptist Church

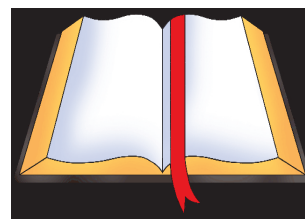
Hwy 277 • Tennyson

(325) 473-2040

Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School

11:00 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6:00 pm Prayer Meeting



Please Pray for our Communities, Our County, Our State and Our Country



And Don't Forget to Pray for Rain!