

BOOK REVIEW

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Doris Kearns Goodwin. (2005). *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 880 pages.

During most years, more than a dozen books are written about Abraham Lincoln, and by many accounts, one could find well over 10,000 titles that focus on our sixteenth president. Even so, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, by Doris Kearns Goodwin, is highly regarded for offering a unique perspective. While the more familiar Lincoln as moral beacon features prominently in her treatise, we are introduced to Lincoln as pragmatic political strategist, management team leader, and relationship builder.

These perspectives are particularly appealing to those of us in the fields of human resources, organizational psychology, and behavior. Her choice to include “team” in the book’s title, for example, suggests that she sought to direct readers toward the way events in her narrative are connected to contemporary challenges of organizational life. After all, in Lincoln’s day, the term was more likely to refer to a collection of horses attached to a carriage. Moreover, in an interview during the National Public Radio program *Fresh Air*, she noted that her book could be characterized as a study of emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, this award-winning book is an historical analysis. It is worth enjoying as such but also as an example of the fact that history’s greatest lessons can be lessons in management.

One reason *Team of Rivals* offers a unique perspective is because we learn about Lincoln in the context of and in relation to other key individuals who were shaping the political landscape of his day. This story also is about other prominent leaders in the fledgling Republican Party, who, like Lincoln, struggled to oppose the evils of slavery and preserve the sovereignty of the U.S. government. To use language from the behavioral sciences, Goodwin has taken a systems view. Here we see Lincoln, not as a solitary operator but as someone keenly aware of his environment, fully engaged with people and circumstances, both responding to and shaping them. Through this dynamic and comparative lens we are provided with a more clear, contrasting image of how Lincoln’s skills, personality, empathy, and, yes, his political ambition enabled him to both rise above others and at the same time bring out the best in them.

In addition to Lincoln, the book focuses on his three key rivals for the 1860 Republican Party presidential nomination, William H. Seward of New York, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, and Missouri’s Edwin Bates. Lincoln brought all three of these men into his cabinet, along with others—chiefly, Gideon Welles, Montgomery Blair, and, from the Democratic Party, Edwin Stanton. Goodwin stresses that Lincoln’s willingness to embrace so many of his adversaries as his clos-

est advisors was unprecedented and it is from this point that she derives the book's title.

The initial chapters introduce us to the four key individuals: Lincoln, of course, along with Seward, Chase, and Bates. I personally enjoyed learning about these other three men whose names were familiar but about whom I knew very little. Some readers may find these historical summaries tedious, but they are important to one of the key points that Goodwin is trying to make—that they all were highly ambitious men, driven by strong values and convictions, as well as by the pure desire to leave a profound personal impact on history. As she writes, “For many ambitious young men in the nineteenth century, politics proved the chosen arena for advancement” (p. ??) <ZAQ:1>.

This section of the book offers opportunities to reflect upon the various ways personal needs for power and influence take shape and drive our actions. We are first introduced to Bates, initially drawn into politics by the slavery debate that accompanied discussions of Missouri statehood. By 1860, he is perhaps the least driven by political ambition. Goodwin helps us to see how his wavering ambitions undermined his capacity to sustain the network of relationships necessary to rise in power. Seward, introduced next, once remarked, “Politics was the most important and engrossing business of the country,” and Goodwin certainly portrays him as a man who lived by those words. A moving orator, this former governor and senator from New York was the arguable front-runner going into the 1860 convention.

Salmon Chase also displayed a potent blend of personal conviction and driving ambition. His zealous commitment to the antislavery movement was intertwined with his strong religious beliefs and his “passion for personal advancement.” If there is an individual antagonist in this narrative (other than John Wilkes Booth), it would arguably be Chase. While growing to respect Lincoln, he never relents in the pursuit of his personal ambitions and, until his eventual dismissal, is the cabinet member that Lincoln spends the most time “managing.”

Goodwin's analysis of Chase also helps to highlight the importance of interpersonal skills when it comes to translating power into influence. She writes, for example, that “Chase, unlike Seward and Lincoln, did not make friends easily...” (p. ?) <ZAQ:1> and proceeds to quote a newspaper reporter of the day who described him as someone who was “profoundly versed in man but profoundly ignorant of men” (p. ?) <ZAQ:1>. To put it in more contemporary terms, he might be described as being of considerable intellect but lacking in emotional intelligence.

The need for power and influence are presented as central to Lincoln's character. Like the others, he was driven by strong convictions about slavery and also by the need to make a personal difference. Goodwin supports the view that “chance, positioning and managerial strategy” all contributed to Lincoln's victory, but she argues most strongly for his own role in securing his nomination. According to Goodwin, Lincoln understood, for example, how to turn his weaknesses into strengths. He was well known by 1860 but did not possess the prominence or stature of his rivals. In recognition of this fact, she notes that he chose to hold his name back from consideration as long as possible and to “give no offense to others.” His careful approach helped bring the nominating convention to Illinois and to eventually gain him supporters.

She further points out that his capacity to cautiously read mood and temperament served him in other ways. Most Americans understand Lincoln as a great orator, but Goodwin gives us the opportunity to explore his skill in greater detail. She writes that “his speeches possessed unmatched power, conviction, clarity and moral strength. At the same time his native caution and precision with language . . . gave Lincoln great advantages over his rivals” (p. ?) <ZAQ:1>. In looking at Goodwin's analysis through the lens of organizational psychology, one could also argue that she is offering applied examples of the emotional intelligence facet of self-regulation and/or the ability to self-monitor. Regardless of the terminology, it is clear that even in his own time, at least some of his supporters tied his capacity to communicate

back to his character. She quotes the editors of the *Chicago Press and Tribune* who wrote, "His avoidance of extremes (in his speeches) . . . is the natural consequence of an equable nature and mental constitution that is never off its balance" (p. ??) <ZAQ;1>.

In documenting the formation and management of his cabinet, Goodwin provides numerous examples of how the same traits and principles that got him into office helped him to transform his rivals into a focused team. In doing so, she offers even more compelling examples of how constructs important to our field (e.g., conflict management, power and influence, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking) were all on display.

Common themes transcend Goodwin's accounts of how Lincoln brought each of his rivals into his cabinet. His dealings with each man offer examples of how to manage emotional aspects of conflict by expressing genuine appreciation, acknowledging status, and establishing personal connections. I suspect his efforts would impress even the scholars and practitioners of the Harvard Negotiation Project.

For instance, in convincing Seward to accept the post as Secretary of State, Lincoln made certain a second, personal and confidential letter accompanied the official offer. The purpose of the second letter was to ensure Seward that his intentions were genuine and that the offer was not a formality. In describing his efforts to bring Chase on board as Treasury Secretary, Goodwin writes, "Chase was immediately disarmed by Lincoln's warm expression of thanks for Chase's support during his failed Senate campaign against Douglas" (p. ??) <ZAQ;1>. In tending the Attorney General's office to Bates, Goodwin explains that Lincoln assured Bates that from the time of his nomination, he intended to bring Bates into his cabinet. She writes, "Bates proudly noted in his diary Lincoln told him that he deemed his participation in his administration, "necessary to its complete success" (p. ??) <ZAQ;1>.

Goodwin's book further impresses as she describes the way Lincoln worked with his cabinet in relation to better-known historical events such as the writing of his inaugural

addresses, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and the rotating generalship of the Army of the Potomac. Lesser-known events are also discussed, such as the way Lincoln deftly outmaneuvered Chase, who had conspired with several members of the Senate to try ousting Seward from the cabinet. This event provides yet another example of Lincoln's skill at combining decisiveness with personal tact and individual consideration. Goodwin concludes this account by writing, "For Lincoln, the most serious governmental crisis of his presidency had ended in victory. He had treated the senators with dignity and respect and, in the process, had protected the integrity and autonomy of his cabinet" (p. ??) <ZAQ;1>.

Even her discussion of Lincoln's death is striking for what it says about the transforming bonds of affection he established with most of his cabinet members. For days afterward, Stanton, she reports, was known to break into tears at even the mention of Lincoln's name. She also writes that news of Lincoln's death was withheld from Seward, who also had been critically wounded by assassins. His doctors feared he could not sustain the shock. She quotes Lincoln's secretary, John Hay, in describing the depth of the relationship that developed between these two men, "The history of governments affords few instances of an official connection hallowed by a friendship so absolute and sincere as that which existed between these two magnanimous spirits. . . ." (pp. ??) <ZAQ;1>.

While it is appropriate to conclude from Goodwin's book that Lincoln built a sense of unity and cohesion, she also documents Lincoln's capacity to constructively nurture disagreement. In stressing this point, she writes, "They had fiercely opposed one another and often contested their chief on important questions, but, as Seward later remarked, 'a Cabinet which should agree at once on every question would be no better or safer than one counselor.'" (p. ??) <ZAQ;1>.

This book has been universally praised by Lincoln scholars and more casual readers alike. Some reviewers, however, remarked that her analysis is one-sided and too interpretive. Whether or not this is wholly the case is a de-

bate worthy of historians. One might argue that Goodwin downplays any of his failures with regard to managing and influencing. On the other hand, his difficulties with George McClellan are given considerable attention, and the overall point of her book was to focus on how he *built* a cabinet/team. Others would likely have given greater attention to Lincoln as a depressive personality and to the role his melancholy played in his presidency. Goodwin explicitly argues that he was not clinically depressed, and I, at least, was convinced by her arguments.

Still others might argue that the monumental crisis of confronting civil war would be enough to bring even the most loosely connected adversaries together as a unified body. There is certainly some truth to this point, but Goodwin's account helps us to appreciate the ways Lincoln was able to elevate others' commitment even when, for example, the prosecution of the war was faltering and it would have been easy to splinter. In demonstrating the unique nature of Lincoln's leadership, one might go further by comparing his participative yet decisive approach to the overcontrolling and secretive style of his southern counterpart, Jefferson Davis, whose own cabinet was regarded as a highly divided group. In addition, the presidents immediately preceding and following Lincoln (Buchanan and Johnson) failed to establish anywhere near the same levels of unity and commitment among their cabinets.

Lincoln's accomplishments were of such an awesome magnitude that it seems trite to

reduce them to a series of management principles. That is certainly not the intention of this review. At the same time, there is much to be reinforced if not learned outright by considering how concepts from our profession apply to his life and presidency. Goodwin has provided a substantial resource for doing so. If anything, her book helps to reinforce how complex managing organizational relationships can be.

A colleague once remarked to me that statistics are most compelling to other statisticians. When it comes to convincing broader audiences of the impact behavioral variables have on outcomes and performance, he argued, we need to be more vivid and dramatic. It is hard for me to imagine any story better suited to that task than the one documented in *Team of Rivals*.

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