



# 5 Leadership Lessons from Abraham Lincoln

By [Preston Danforth](#)

*"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved - I do not expect the house to fall - but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."*

- Abraham Lincoln

Credited with freeing the slaves, Abraham Lincoln remains a timeless figure in American history and will forever be known as one of the greatest presidents to ever hold office. These lessons, gleaned by example, will help you develop the character traits to become a successful leader in your community, business or political party.

## 1. Keep Your Friends Close and Your Enemies Closer

*"It has been said that politics is the second oldest profession. I have learned that it bears a striking resemblance to the first."*

- Abraham Lincoln

The book "Team of Rivals" by Doris Kearns Goodwin documents how Lincoln shrewdly brought in many of his potential rivals into his inner circle. He gave them prominent positions in his cabinet, and took their advice into consideration. Although this caused many frustrations for Lincoln as the Civil War progressed, it also prevented these rivals from splintering off and forming a rival pact within the Republican party.

## 2. Be Studious

Lincoln was involved in more than 5,100 cases in Illinois alone during his 23-year legal career, despite never having attended law school due to the fact that he could not afford it. Instead young Abraham traveled from city to city in Illinois, working the legal circuit of the time as an apprentice to other lawyers until he built up his own practice.

He read incessantly, studying case law after case law every night to prepare for his upcoming cases and to hone his craft.

### **3. Be Modest -- Keep a Low Profile**

Politicians have a tendency to become flashy and ostentatious once they reach a certain level of success. Lincoln never forgot his roots, choosing to live in a plain house (when he wasn't living in the White House) and wearing more common suits as opposed to fancy Italian-made fare. Being a man of the people helped Lincoln earn the trust of the citizens of the North.

### **4. Be Available -- Solicit Feedback**

You may be shocked to learn that citizens of Lincoln's era could quite easily obtain the ear of their president. Can you imagine if our current leaders would actually meet, face to face, with every person who wanted to give their feedback on the handling of our foreign wars and other government policies?

Actually hearing the stories and complaints from family members of Union Army soldiers must've surely made an indelible impact on the president. Indeed, he would even meet with constituents while mulling some of the more difficult decisions of his administration, such as the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

### **5. Never Give Up**

Lincoln was defeated over seven times before finally being elected to President of the United States. While he did have some success in between those defeats, it is clear that had Lincoln given up earlier in his career, this nation as we know it may very well not even exist today.

As you face setbacks in life, think of the example of Abraham Lincoln. From humble roots he rose to hold the most powerful position in the land, only to face perhaps the toughest choices a President of this land has ever had to make.

Preston Danforth writes on Leadership, Business and Marketing.

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