



*From the desk of David Simpson*

February 2021

**“Be sure you put your feet in the right place and then stand firm.”**

- Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12, 1809 – April 15, 1865) 16<sup>th</sup> President of the US

Numerous studies confirm that many executives – in fact, up to 70% - have difficulty with the tough stuff – delivering bad news, holding direct reports accountable or making cuts, standing firm, etc. And the research lines up well with our own internal findings. When we reviewed the average psychological results of a large sample of senior executives that we have assessed over the years, our data identified that their ability to express positive statements was over 100% (106% actually) higher than their willingness to express ones which were perceived as negative or critical. Words typically used by those struggling with the problem include: “I am being considerate of others” or “I want to be seen as fair.” There are some predictable reasons why the problem is so widespread. One is that people migrate to psychological comfort under pressure. And as demands increase, their need to avoid amplifies even further. What constitutes pressure? Well, look no further than today’s business environment. Things are changing so quickly that a leader cannot wait for events to stabilize before making tough decisions. And making those decisions in what can sometimes feel like a fog can leave any leader wondering what she/he will be dealing with when that very fog lifts. Added to the mix is ever-changing demands of both customers and technology shifts that are forever moving the “goalposts.” And to complicate things even further, leaders must deal with a heightened “rear view” mirror syndrome these days – so many more opinion makers and others are eager to criticize a leader’s every move. And to complicate matters further, leaders can struggle with determining what to IGNORE. Consider that total world knowledge was doubling every 100 years in 1900. By 1945, it was doubling every 25 years. Today, that number is 13 months. And we are hurtling towards world knowledge doubling every 12 hours! To be effective, a leader must be able to make the tough calls under difficult circumstances, be prepared to adjust, clean up the mess and move on.

Born exactly 212 years ago this month, Lincoln knew something about “standing firm,” not the least of which was holding fast on the Emancipation Proclamation.

Perform better!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Simpson". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "D" and a cursive "Simpson".