



Divide or Conquer

How Great Teams Turn Conflict Into Strength



THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Conflict is inevitable. But whether it makes or breaks your team depends only on the strength of the relationships within it.

Ever been on a team where people can't get along to save their lives? These relationships are corrosive not just to the people involved but to the entire group — and their results.

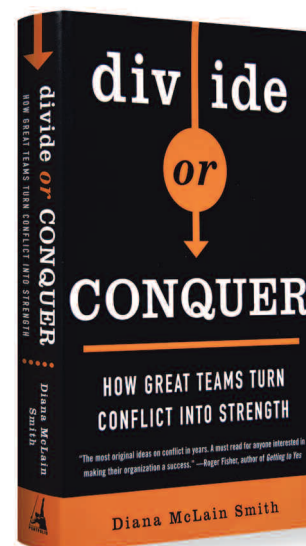
This summary offers a new way to think about teams: not as a bunch of individuals, but as the sum of their relationships. Great teams don't assume everyone will get along. They *anticipate* conflict, and use it to strengthen their relationships. In contrast, dysfunctional teams avoid or work around conflicts, which only ends up harming their relationships and their ability to get things done.

Every team is only as strong as its weakest relationship. When teams neglect key relationships, they do so at their own peril.

Relationships are not a matter of personal chemistry too mysterious to decode or too difficult to change. This summary shows that it's possible both to understand how relationships work and to change their course — before it's too late.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to use a powerful, step-by-step approach to building a team that's flexible and strong enough to master its toughest challenges.
- How to use practical and profound ideas and tools that have been tested and honed in the real world for years.
- How to inspire your team or a new employee who needs to start building relationships.
- What it takes to succeed together.



by Diana McLain Smith

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: DIVIDE OR CONQUER

by Diana McLain Smith

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Introduction

Every team is only as strong as its weakest relationships. How well and how quickly teams make decisions, inspire innovation, tackle performance problems or learn from mistakes depends on the strength of relationships within a team. Some relationships give teams the courage to face tough truths and make bold changes.

A team's performance, even a firm's, turns on the quality of its most important relationships.

Relationships

A relationship is the way in which two or more people or organizations regard and behave toward each other.

Relationships are such an integral part of everyday life they're like the air we breathe. Until something unpleasant or unexpected happens, we give them little notice; even then, we're often at a loss as to what to do. We can spot difficulties easily enough and feel their effects even more easily, but few among us can pinpoint their cause and still fewer know what to do about it. Like a firm's culture, relationships are part of the informal side of organizational life — the soft stuff that's hard to see, grasp or change.

Research shows two things: first, that relationships have an informal structure that can be mapped and changed, and second, that relationships may be the single most underutilized lever for transforming the performance of teams and organizations.

Organizational Fault Lines

This is especially true for relationships that operate along *organizational fault lines* — interfaces where coordination is as essential as it is difficult: research and marketing at Merck; manufacturing and design at Herman Miller; the president and the faculty at Harvard; business units competing in the marketplace; executive and

legislative branches at the federal and state levels; and top management and middle management everywhere.

At each interface, interests collide and conflicts erupt. Whether people can put these conflicts to work — so they create value rather than destroy it — depends on the nature and the quality of their relationships.

Ideas and Tools

Given the right tools, it's possible to build relationships flexible and strong enough to sustain stellar performance in teams — both over time and under pressure. This summary helps by giving you ideas and tools for *understanding relationships*, *transforming relationships* and *making change practical*.

Because two-person relationships are the DNA that shapes how a team operates and evolves, the summary's three parts focus on these basic building blocks. The first part explores how relationships work and develop; the second, how you can change them over time; and the third, how to make that change practical. ●

PART I: UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS

The Life and Death of a Relationship

More than 20 years have passed since Steve Jobs and John Sculley's much publicized breakup at Apple. Yet it still serves as a cautionary tale. In two short years, their celebrated camaraderie turned into an antagonism so great it escalated hostilities between divisions, put the firm at risk of a takeover and sent Steve Jobs into a 12-year exile, from which the firm has only recently recovered. How these leaders went from soul mates to adversaries in such a short time shows how relationships, even those touted as a perfect match, can self-destruct under pressure, leaving a firm to pay the formidable price of a failed relationship.



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When the Jobs and Sculley relationship fell apart, most people chalked it up to personalities: Jobs was too volatile, Sculley too cautious. Others cited circumstances: Mounting competitive pressures put otherwise kindred spirits at odds. Still others said their chemistry wasn't right: Sculley was way too corporate, Jobs too iconoclastic. While each explanation holds merit, all overlook the most intriguing and instructive aspect of what happened: the way their relationship developed over time.

Only by understanding how relationships form, develop and die can you see *why* people form ill-fated matches, *why* certain personalities clash, and *why* some relationships break down so quickly and completely under pressure. And only by understanding how relationships form, develop and die do you stand a chance of altering the course a relationship takes. By looking closely at how the Jobs–Sculley relationship developed over the course of three stages, we can extract timeless lessons about the life and death of a relationship — and its impact on the firm.

Stage 1: How a Relationship Forms

We all bring to relationships our own characteristic ways of interacting with others, given our *behavioral repertoires*. Built out of experiences, these repertoires are organized around key themes, such as power, conflict, control or success.

When people first meet, their themes intersect to give rise to distinctive patterns of interaction. Acting like DNA, these themes shape the way a relationship's patterns of interaction evolve over time, defining the formal and informal sides of a relationship. One strand of DNA defining the relationship between Sculley and Jobs was a shared preoccupation with power, leading each of them to see in the other a form of power he coveted.

Stage 2: How a Relationship Develops

In the second stage of development, people renegotiate their formal and informal roles, as initial impressions give way to more stable interpretations and people come to know each other for “who they really are.”

These more stable interpretations — called *frames* — inform people's negotiations about who should do what and turn early patterns of interaction into more stable informal structures.

Those who pay attention to how the informal side of a relationship develops during this stage understand that what they see is what they'll get, giving them room to maneuver if they don't like what they get. Those who ignore the informal side, as Sculley and Jobs did, believe that what they see is the only way it is, leaving them disillusioned and trapped.

Stage 3: How a Relationship Dies

By the time the Jobs–Sculley relationship broke down, their degrees of freedom were so constrained that they could only imagine one solution: Get rid of the other.

When people ignore the informal side of their relationships, they're more apt to create ones that leave them little choice. By the second stage of their relationship, Jobs and Sculley had created a structure that significantly reduced their degree of freedom; by the third stage, that structure had eliminated their freedom altogether.

Formal and Informal Relationships

All relationships develop at formal and informal levels. At a formal level people define and redefine their formal roles, including responsibilities, decision rights and rewards. At an informal level, people define and redefine their informal roles: the emotional responsibilities they'll assume and assign, the interpersonal rights they'll claim and relinquish, and the psychological rewards they'll want to give and get.

All relationships develop over a series of stages, as people adapt to each other and the circumstances around them. Some adaptations are better than others. Jobs' and Sculley's adaptations generated vicious cycles that gave rise to structures that reduced their degrees of freedom until they had none left. In two action-packed years, they moved from idolizing to demonizing each other, acting in ways that brought out the worst in both of them. By the time they discussed their troubles, their views were so entrenched they were impervious to change, making it impossible for them to create a different future. In the end, they *had* to call it quits.

It need not be this way. With the right tools, it's possible to see, map and change the informal side of a relationship so it grows stronger, not weaker, over time. ●

The Anatomy of a Relationship

Once a relationship gets into trouble, it can be awfully hard to get out. We're so riveted on the other person — on divining his motives or on avoiding his impact — that we don't take a close look at what we ourselves are doing to create a relationship neither of us wants.

Unaware, we wait for others to make life easier for us, while we make it harder for them to make it easier for us. In the end, like Sculley and Jobs, we're left with little choice: Either end the relationship or settle for one that doesn't work.

To change the course of a relationship, people need to slow down and look at what they're actually feeling, thinking and doing with each other, so they can see that

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they're not nearly as helpless as they think they are.

An Informal Structure

Underlying all relationships is an informal structure. This structure includes four interlocking elements: actions, frames, contexts and repertoires.

If our interlocking frames and actions are the engine that drives a relationship, our social contexts — along with behavioral repertoires — provide the fuel that keeps that engine running. These four elements combine to give a relationship its distinctive character, one we intuitively recognize but have difficulty seeing or changing.

The Anatomy Framework

All relationships have an informal structure made up of four interlocking elements:

1. Actions and Reactions. Actions refer to what someone actually says and does, while reactions refer to what someone actually thinks and feels in response to what the other person says and does, each person's actions making the other person's reactions more explicable.

2. Frames. These are the interpretations embedded in our reactions, making some actions seem obvious, others impractical.

3. Social Contexts. These provide the contextual backdrop — formal roles, time constraints, historical events — against which some triggering event occurs, prompting the need to respond.

4. Behavioral Repertoires. These are the largely unconscious *experiential knowledge* and *interpretive strategies* that define the range of responses people have at their disposal for framing and acting in different social contexts, once triggered by some event. People's behavioral repertoires both shape and are shaped by their *social contexts*. Together the two govern the way people frame situations, leading them to react and act toward each other in some ways and not others. ●

The Key to Resilience

When people focus on relationships, *they assume responsibility not just for themselves but for the relationships they together create and for the impact those relationships have on their firm*. Far from diluting responsibility, then, a relational perspective actually takes excuses off the table. Instead, people together take responsibility for building relationships resilient enough to weather the troubles they'll face.

The best way to avoid waiting games — where each person waits for the other to calm down and see things his way — is for people to *help each other shift perspective, so they can regain their collective cool*. While shifting per-

spectives won't make feelings go away, it will make it easier for people to use their emotions to think things through together.

Reflect and Reframe

To shift perspective, it helps to reflect and reframe, first alone, then together. Over time these two cooling strategies build a relationship's cool system by adding maps to that system that are tightly connected to the hot buttons triggered by stressful events. Once developed, that system makes it a lot easier to handle even the hottest topics and the most tumultuous troubles.

Taking a relational perspective goes against the grain of an either/or world, in which there are good guys and bad guys, evil empires and mighty kingdoms. ●

PART II: TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS

Disrupt Patterns of Interaction

When a relationship critical to a firm's success could put that success at risk, it may be time for a change. Fifteen years into their relationship, Dan Gavin and Stu Fine suspected their time had come. For two years, the firm's top leadership had been transforming their company from a professional-services firm into a group of businesses that combined these services with innovative new products.

CEO Gavin was now looking to Stu, the firm's marketing expert, to launch the firm's first product business. As one of the firm's most respected thought leaders, Stu had driven much of the firm's innovation, and he welcomed the chance to ensure that those innovations took root. At the same time, Dan and Stu both recognized that this new challenge would put a lot more pressure on their relationship. Dan knew he'd have to rely more heavily on Stu. Whether their relationship was up to these tasks, neither could say for sure.

Three Steps

To find out, they took three steps with the help of an expert:

Step 1: Assess the Relationship. When assessing a relationship, it helps to take stock of a relationship's assets and liabilities relative to the pressures that the relationship is likely to face. This way people not only anticipate what might cause them difficulty under pressure, they also identify the assets they can use to deal with any difficulties that do arise.

Step 2: Map Patterns of Interaction. This second step zeros in on interactions that shed light on the concerns Dan and Stu raised in their assessment. To take this step, use a tool called the Ladder of Reflection to do

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Mapping the Pattern

Mapping is a technique that helps you understand patterns of interaction that produce outcomes that neither person in a relationship consciously wants or intends. A map portrays in graphic form *how each person's actions help to elicit reactions that produce the next step in a sequence that makes up the interaction*. This helps people see how their actions and reactions interlock to form an identifiable pattern, allowing them to step outside the pattern, see how it works and imagine how it might work differently.

three things: Capture key interactions, describe them in concrete terms and map the patterns underlying them.

Step 3: Design Action Experiments. To change patterns, you have to throw a monkey wrench into the works by thinking — and then acting — outside the pattern. It's best not to take this step until you've mapped the pattern that concerns you. Go back and look at the interlocking actions and reactions depicted in the map, and ask the question: *What actions can I take to make it hard for the other person to react the way he or she does?* Usually this question will require you to invent actions that are “counterintuitive” — actions that lie outside of your intuitive way of seeing and doing things. The perspective of a skilled third party often helps.

As straightforward as these steps may seem, people face a funny kind of paradox before taking even the first one: *They know each other so well, they no longer know each other at all*. All they see are the caricatures in their heads — he's so sensitive, she's so competitive. The very efficiency these caricatures give, they also take away, because they make a person's underlying complexity — sure to emerge under stress — harder to understand or to handle. That's why, early on, the single most important thing people can do is *slow down and take a closer look at each other and at how their relationship works*. This helps people figure out where their relationship is up to the challenges it will face, and where it's not. ●

Reframe How You See Each Other

All too often and much to our dismay, frustrating patterns of interaction persist despite our efforts to change them. The reason is simple: We give short shrift to the interpretations that keep them going. Left to their own devices, these interpretations have a nasty habit of getting stuck in one gear. No matter what someone does, we see

him or her the same way. Soon, our emotional reactions get caught in a rut, and our interactions start spinning their wheels. From this point on, we're trapped.

Create a New Pattern

As long as Dan sees Stu's blocking as irrational, and Stu sees Dan's lecturing as an effort to impose his will, they'll continue to re-enact the same push-block pattern day in and day out. While new actions might disrupt the pattern briefly, the only way they can create a significantly new pattern is by transforming the way the two see each other. In this second stage, Dan and Stu do just that by taking three steps:

- **Step 1: Freeze Frame.** Bring each person's frames into the foreground. See how, under stress, their frames are pulling them back into old patterns and preventing new ones from emerging.
- **Step 2: Invent New Frames.** Help each other invent frames that will create a new pattern. The best frames are those that make it easier for both of you to be at your best. Come up with things that you can say to yourself in the heat of the moment to bring the new frame to mind.
- **Step 3: Design Frame Experiments.** *Frame experiments* are experiments designed to create experiences that alter their frames, allowing new patterns to emerge.

To complete these steps successfully, Dan and Stu will have to tackle the central paradox of this second stage: *They will have to act as if they believe to be true those interpretations they “know” to be false*. People will shift frames only if they believe it's warranted, and they will believe it's warranted only if they see evidence to that effect. It's not enough, then, simply to imagine a different way of seeing. People must try — through their actions — to *create* experiences that make a new way of seeing come true.

That's why each step in this stage is designed to build just enough confidence for Dan and Stu to *act* — not merely think — outside the box. Only by seeing things differently will they be able to create a new pattern.

Results

By the end of this stage, Dan and Stu's frame experiments have led them to reframe how they see themselves in relation to each other. Stu now sees that when Dan starts debating and lecturing, he's usually feeling helpless and anxious, prompting him to help Dan rather than freeze or block. This leads Dan to revise his view that Stu needs a lot of protection, and it opens up the possibility of getting emotional support from Stu. This relaxes Dan and makes it easier for him to talk about his anxieties directly, which makes them less mystifying and troubling for Stu.

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These experiences — experiences they couldn't create within the confines of their old frames — give rise to new ways of seeing and set in motion a more virtuous cycle of interaction. ●

Revise What You 'Know' to Be True

Dan and Stu came by their quirks honestly: They learned them. Over the years, they converted one experience after another into knowledge about how to handle different people and situations. When they first met, they drew on this experiential knowledge to set the structural foundation of their relationship. Now it is only by restructuring that knowledge that they can reset it.

This brings us to the third and last paradox of change: *To move forward, they must go back and revisit the knowledge they bring to their relationship.* They did this by taking three steps:

Step 1: Revisit Past Events. To revisit past events and capture their experiential knowledge, identify the historical events that most remind you of the relationship. Write down what happened in those earlier moments and what you took or learned from them. Put aside what you wrote for 24 hours. Go back and read what you wrote; then extract from your account any stories, propositions, values and practical strategies you see. Explore how the knowledge you've built out of past experience is affecting your development and your relationships, including this one. If you think your past is jeopardizing your success or the success of key relationships, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Restructure Outdated Knowledge. Reset the basis of your relationship by restructuring the experiential knowledge you bring to it. Consider two questions: Where is your experiential knowledge breaking down, and how can you restructure it so that it better fits your current circumstances and abilities?

Step 3: Return to the Future. This step addresses the question of sustainability under pressure by turning our attention back to the future. Here we consolidate the gains we've made, define new objectives, anticipate new challenges and set the terms of a new relationship.

By revisiting historical events in the context of the relationship, each person is able to create new knowledge out of current events. By the end of this stage, you will be able to use this knowledge to accelerate your growth and the growth of the organization. ●

PART III: MAKING CHANGE PRACTICAL

Focus the Change Effort

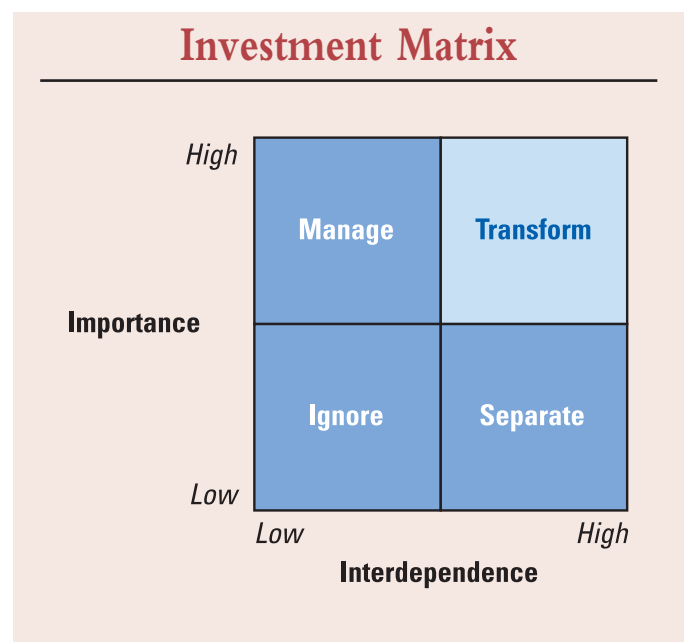
Not all relationships within teams require or deserve the same *amount* of effort, or the same *kind*. To help you decide *which* relationships to invest in and *when*, two tools can help: an Investment Matrix that tells you where to focus your investments, and a Sequencing Matrix that tells you when to invest in which ones. Together these tools give you a way to think strategically and practically about developing greater resilience at the top of your organization.

The Investment Matrix

Just as you can reduce the costs associated with outdated formal systems by upgrading them, so can you reduce the costs of relationships by transforming the informal structures underlying them.

In each case, you replace the outdated, inefficient system with a more effective and efficient one. Only, in the case of relationships, you seek to redesign a relationship's informal structure so it's better able to handle even the most difficult of relationship tasks as well — whether it's recouping when things go wrong or reviving a relationship that's dying.

To make change practical, people need a framework that can help them focus their investments. The matrix groups relationships in terms of their relative importance and interdependence, identifying four segments, each one calling for a different approach.



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Four Approaches

The matrix identifies four different ways of approaching relationships, depending on their degree of importance and interdependence: *ignoring*, *separating*, *managing* or *transforming*. Which approach is the most effective and the most efficient depends on the circumstances.

The basic idea behind the Investment Matrix is simple: *Invest in transforming only those relationships that are both highly important and highly interdependent*. All other relationships can be handled through more conventional approaches.

The Sequencing Matrix

Once you've identified those relationships most in need of investment, you can use the Sequencing Matrix to sequence those investments over time. As the Sequencing Matrix implies, it's best to start with the high-impact relationships that stand the best chance of succeeding.

In terms of impact, you can assess any relationship along two dimensions: *impact on people* and *impact on the business*.

In terms of success, you can assess a relationship along three dimensions: *motivation*, *readiness* and *difficulty*.

Change the Odds of Success

Keep in mind that odds can and should be changed. So while you're focusing on relationships in the first cell of the matrix, you might turn your attention to increasing the odds of success for those in the second cell — for example, by pointing out the changes that people in the first cell are making. Soon after, you might launch some type of programmatic intervention for people in the third cell.

In theory, no one should show up in the fourth cell. But chances are, when pressed to choose among the chosen, some will show up here. If so, you might

reconsider whether these relationships really are worth the investment. ●

Choose the Right Strategy

The FREE model describes a set of three strategies you can use to intervene when two or more people on your team get caught in a conflict that's jeopardizing the quality of substantive discussions *and* the fate of key relationships:

- **Facilitate:** Shift patterns that slow progress without stopping to discuss them.
- **Reflect and Reframe:** See and interrupt patterns that continue to stall progress.
- **Engage:** Transform patterns that repeatedly prevent progress.

By drawing on these three strategies — facilitating, reflecting and reframing, and engaging — people can make changes in their relationships while attending to business. Each strategy varies in terms of its obtrusiveness and impact. To figure out which strategy to use, you must first stop (to gain perspective), then look (to map patterns in your head) and listen (to explore competing views). Only then can you choose wisely and, having chosen wisely, implement well. ●

Motivate Change

Everyone likes what change promises, but few relish what it demands: the time and effort it takes; the sacrifices we have to make; not knowing whether we'll succeed (or, if we succeed, whether we'll like what we get). Change is hard — so hard that many people give up before they even start. Yet as hard as change is, three common mistakes make it even harder: setting unrealistic expectations, failing to anticipate and to help each other overcome predictable barriers, and micromanaging the pace and direction of change. You can counter these mistakes by following these three principles:

- **Setting your sights using dual vision.** Be ambitious and realistic, and set goals that are practically important and personally meaningful.
- **Building resilience while taking stock.** Build confidence by continually assessing progress, and put setbacks, mistakes and failures to work.
- **Putting the fun back in the dysfunctional.** Laugh at the unlaughable and manufacture hope when there's none to be found.

When you put these principles into practice, you generate the motivation and energy needed to sustain change over time. ●

Sequencing Matrix

	Higher		
Odds of Success		3	1
		Reconsider Investing	2
	Lower	Lower	Higher
		Impact of Success	

CODA: RELATIONAL SENSIBILITIES

Sensibilities for a Change

No leader operates alone. Not Jack Welch, the much celebrated former CEO of General Electric Co., as he himself points out. Not the iconic leaders of great movements, as the many friends of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have testified. Not even the president of the United States, as historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's account of Abraham Lincoln's wartime Cabinet reveals.

Leading Through Relationships

Every leader, no matter how powerful, leads through relationships. Those leaders who are especially adept at doing so demonstrate a set of highly developed *relational sensibilities*, among them curiosity and courage, humility and hope, appreciation and acknowledgment, nuance and novelty, generosity and generativity, and empathy combined with a sense of accountability. Within these pairs, each sensibility tempers or bolsters the other, serving leaders in much the same way aesthetic sensibilities serve the artist — by significantly enhancing the way they perceive, experience and respond to the world around them.

We can see these sensibilities at work and witness their power in a speech that comes from a very different time and context: Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address. In this address, delivered as the American Civil War came to a close, Lincoln sought to win the peace by tending to the shattered relationship between North and South. Considered by many to be his finest speech, this seven-minute address illustrates well what Doris Kearns Goodwin observed: "In the hands of a truly great politician the qualities we generally associate with decency and morality ... can also be impressive political resources."

Setting the Stage for Peace

In four paragraphs, Lincoln sets out to recast the war and, in recasting it, set the stage for peace. Far more than rhetorical technique is at work here — far more than a masterful politician attuned to his audience's needs and preferences. Behind Lincoln's mastery is a finely honed set of sensibilities. These sensibilities informed the way he put his rhetorical skill to use and determined the political ends toward which he developed his mastery:

- **Curiosity and Courage.** With enough curiosity to ask tough questions and enough courage to face tough answers, Lincoln distinguished himself from all other politicians — in his day and in our own.
- **Hope and Humility.** These two sensibilities — hope and humility — make for mighty strange bedfel-

lows. While one rests on an abiding belief in our ability to create a better future, the other leans on an equally abiding belief in the limitations of human actions.

- **Appreciation and Acknowledgment.** Lincoln knows that the charity he asks for in the end "might be too much to expect of those who encountered such great losses." Even so, he doesn't seek to reassure or comfort. Rather, he invites his audience to come along with him as he recounts events, explains causes and contemplates the war's deeper meaning.

- **Nuance and Novelty.** Nuance (the ability to pick up on subtleties, not just patterns) and novelty (the ability to construe things in a fundamentally new light, not simply rehash old positions) make it possible for leaders to resolve even the most intractable conflicts.

- **Generosity and Generativity.** "I don't like that man," Lincoln once said, then added, "I must get to know him better." In this comment, Lincoln exemplifies two other sensibilities that informed the way he conducted himself in relationships *and* the way he conducted the war: *generosity* (the ability to see the best in others) and *generativity* (the ability to develop and to bring out the best in others).

- **Empathy Combined With Accountability.** In Lincoln's address, empathy and accountability work hand in hand. One moment, he's empathizing with what everyone's up against or with what they're feeling, thinking and intending. The next, he's confronting everyone with the moral and practical consequences of their collective actions. Had Lincoln's empathy been untempered by accountability, he could not have looked at what both sides did to create consequences they later regretted.

Had Lincoln vilified the South or relished in the North's triumph, he still would have won the war, but he could not have set the stage for peace. The power to create a lasting peace in part resides in the softer sensibilities that Lincoln brought to his leadership. With these sensibilities, Lincoln was able to reach across the divide that separated him from his followers, so they could reach across the divide that separated them from each other. In an age when neither geography nor borders can stop the spread of violence, it may be an idea whose time has come. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Divide or Conquer*, you'll also like:

1. ***Bridging the Culture Gap* by Penny Carte and Chris Fox.** Management training experts Carte and Fox show you how to break through barriers of culture, language and set patterns of thinking.
2. ***The Art of Woo* by G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa.** Shell and Moussa develop the concept of "woo," the ability to win people over without coercion, using relationship-based emotionally intelligent persuasion.
3. ***The Change Masters* by Rosabeth Moss Kanter.** Have trouble adapting to organizational change? This summary shows how changes are necessary and can be profitable.