

Learning, Leadership & *The Way of Oz*

Bob Smith
Provost & Senior Vice President
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, TX

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Akin to many in the Americas, you may love the movie or the original book portraying the story of the Wizard of Oz. Or, perhaps you have read one or more of the thirteen Oz sequels written by L. Frank Baum (1856-1919). But surprisingly, relatively few Oz enthusiasts recognize the lessons for learning and leadership that emanates from the story's content along with the history, life, and times of the story's intriguing author—a man, who in his lifetime became an actor, breeder of rare chickens, director, entrepreneur, gardener, lyricist, merchant, movie producer, philatelist, photographer, playwright, printer and newspaper publisher, salesman, theater manager, window dresser, and, of course, celebrated author. Enter *The Way of Oz: A Guide for Wisdom, Heart, and Courage* and its roadmap for traveling life's yellow brick road.

In *The Way of Oz*, the Oz characters provide metaphors for learning, caring, serving, focusing on the future, and humility. The associations include: the Scarecrow for wisdom and learning, the Tin Woodman for heart or loving, the Cowardly Lion for courage and service, Dorothy for leadership and a focus on the future, and the Wizard for humility and related virtues. For the purposes of this short essay, we focus primarily on the Scarecrow and Dorothy whose character traits blend aptly with those of student scholars. At end, we'll see how wisdom and learning and a focus on the future relate to the other characters and elements in our mutual journey down the yellow brick road of life.

Lessons from the Scarecrow

Learning can be envisioned through an expansion of Miles's aphorism: *Where you stand is where you sit*. In other words, your position on policies and perspectives relate to your role or position in an institution, organization, or corporation. To encompass all aspects of learning, the Miles's aphorism in *The Way of Oz* is expanded: Where you stand is not only shaped by where you sit, but also where and how you experience travel, what you read, what you write, how you

communicate, and how you integrate your learning efforts with other personal and professional elements of your life.

Knowing the landscape—broadly defined—influences the concept of “where you stand” economically, geographically, personally, professionally, and socially. Stated differently, your understanding of the landscape is shaped by activities in your professional and personal lives. For student scholars, volunteer work, service-learning and study abroad experiences can be integral parts of an early emerging “landscape.”

As you expand the “where you stand” aphorism to include reading, writing, and communicating you may direct your efforts to maximize benefits. Borrowing from an English professor and provost at St. John’s University (New York)—Blaise Opulente—we may consider one of his “prescriptions for an informed life” regarding the reading of seminal books (*e.g.*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, Plato’s *Republic*)—initially and repeatedly—but as recommended in *The Way of Oz*—informed by modern masterpieces (*e.g.*, Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Wilson’s *Consilience*)—particularly to reconcile traditional beliefs with advances in scientific and multicultural understanding. Also, the reading dictum takes on new life with the suggestion that thoughtful reading—embellished by systems for note taking and the orderly retrieval of information—leads to ideas for writing and communicating.

Learning comes not only from thoughtful reading but also writing to organize thinking and communicating through writing and speaking—to share and test ideas, to seek the views of others, and experience life through human relationships, reflection, and international understanding. These thoughts are particularly relevant for the student scholar.

Lessons from Dorothy

Dorothy in *The Way of Oz* is the leadership person—the character with a *focus on the future*—who brings out the best in others through understanding, heart, and her own courage. And, with Dorothy’s savvy about personal and institutional planning, diversity, sustainability, scientific understanding, and personal responsibility—she is a character who makes significant differences in the lives of others—men, women and creatures (including Toto) alike!

Through *The Way of Oz*, we learn about Dorothy’s approach to personal planning, involving integrated learning and scholarship, personal environmental scanning, and selective volunteerism—all while drawing on the wisdom of teachers and mentors, and connecting learning and wisdom through caring and service.

Our 21st Century Dorothy also understands institution planning and its components: vision, mission, environmental context, goals and objectives, group oversight and shared understanding, and benchmarking integrated with periodic reporting and results-driven revisions of plans.

In *The Way of Oz*, Dorothy brings out the best in colleagues and institutions through her understanding of the mosaic model of diversity and the power of science to help develop policy

and actions related to sustainability. She is also wise in her understanding, not only in portraying science accurately, but also to using science and technology to advance her career. These thoughts are critical to the student scholar.

On the “personal responsibility front,” Dorothy of *The Way of Oz* is empowered by determination, persistence, priority consciousness, critical thinking, and complex reasoning. She is also able to manage life’s time—systematically and sensibly.

In summary, *The Way of Oz* approach to learning and leadership, involving landscape understanding, reading, writing, communicating and participating in active learning, fortified by planning, an understanding of diversity, science and sustainability, and personal responsibility—prepares one for a life of personal and professional fulfillment. And, seeing the coherence among *The Way of Oz* principles and their positive effects on the lives of others provides a powerful model for living, loving, and serving. These elements of *The Way of Oz* and the new book of the same name—enriched by the intriguing graphic characters created by Dusty Higgins and video content portraying students, teachers, and staff engaged in learning and serving of all types—can make significant differences in the lives of seekers and student scholars of our world community. Many have found—in these thoughts—the true magic of *The Way of Oz*. Perhaps they offer some new perspectives for student scholars as we all travel the yellow brick road of life.

To learn more about the Way of Oz, go to thewayofoz.com or consider reading *The Way of Oz: A Guide to Wisdom, Heart, and Courage*, which was published in September 2012 by TTU Press (ttupress.org)