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Wizard of Oz Leadership

George Padilla

Assistant Professor

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
United States

Abstract

In 1939, *The Wizard of Oz* premiered and introduced the amazing journey and adventure of a teenage girl in the Land of Oz found somewhere over the rainbow. This story and movie helped develop imagination and creativity in the minds of generations of young children in America and around the world. Amazingly, *The Wizard of Oz* was also a story depicting the qualities of great leaders: vision, mentor, problem-solving, collaboration, data mastery, brain, heart, courage, inspiration, relationships, teamwork, and home.

After almost a century, these same leadership qualities are supported and strengthened by leadership research and literature. If recognized and developed, the *Wizard of Oz Leadership* qualities would help many educational leaders reach the pinnacle of greatness. More importantly, great school leadership would help all educators and students achieve maximum success in our schools because, after all, everyone's "heart's desire" can be found right in their "own (school) . . . yard."

Keywords: Wizard of Oz, leadership, courage, heart, brain, inspiration

Purpose and Rationale

The literature is rife with school leadership models and traits (Bush & Glover, 2014; Green, 2013; Gumas, et al., 2018; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Razik, Swanson, & Razik, 2010). Many models are the result of research, while others may be the result of "Aha" moments when ideas spontaneously gel into an expository configuration or model. While many "Aha" models may be quickly dispensed on the basis of absurdity, on occasion, an "Aha" model is worth sharing professionally. The *Wizard of Oz Leadership* emanated from an "Aha" moment of the latter type that was subsequently supported by a research literature review that included other similar shared past "Aha" moments. The *Wizard of Oz* provides a picturesque conceptualization of the qualities of successful school leadership that many successful, developing, and future leaders have visualized and appreciated. This conceptualization may help better understand and remember effective leadership qualities because remembrance is key to application.

The Wizard of Oz Leadership

The *Wizard of Oz* premiered in 1939 and included an unusual cast of characters in an even more unusual setting, The Land of Oz, located "somewhere over the rainbow" (Fleming, 1939). This comedic, musical classic movie includes and illustrates qualities needed by a great leader: vision, mentor, problem-solving, collaboration, data mastery, brain, heart, courage, inspiration, relationships, teamwork, and home. As will be noted, these same leadership qualities are identified and even defined by many past and recent writers.

Great leaders get nowhere without a vision—an imagined destination, and no quest begins without a destination (Bernhardt, 2017; Bush & Glover, 2014; Cotton, 2003; Dotlich, Cairo, & Rhinesmith (2008); Green, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Marzano, et al., 2005; Miller, 2010; Nicholls, 1994; Razik, Swanson & Razik, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2001; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2016). Dorothy brought vision into the story. She wanted to get to a better place where all her "dreams come true" (Fleming, 1939), where she can accomplish anything and everything. Is this not the vision of great leaders, to reach a place where every child's dreams can come true, and every child's question "Why can't I" (Fleming) is answered "Yes you can!" Great leadership begins with a vision, just as Dorothy's journey did in the *Wizard of Oz*.

After much turmoil and even a tornado, Dorothy reaches her destination and arrives at the Land of Oz, which is filled with wonders and wicked witches too. After making an enemy of the Wicked Witch of the West, Dorothy decides the Land of Oz is not where she wants to be. So, even though her vision remains the same—to fulfill her dreams, Dorothy chooses to get back home. Often, a leader's vision is too grandiose, too far-fetched from reality—just like Dorothy's. Great leaders build their visions on extraordinary reality and not on fantasy. They must adjust their visions guided by time, experience, and world changes (Fullan, 1992; Nanus, 1992).

When Dorothy arrives at the Land of Oz, she is baffled by the new surroundings. The world is different. Luckily, Dorothy finds someone who can help her manage these new surroundings—a mentor, an experienced advisor. Without Glinda, the “good witch” (Fleming, 1939), Dorothy would have been doomed from her first step onto the Land of Oz. Too often, new leaders never become great because of missteps early in their tenure. New leaders and often even great leaders must have a mentor, someone they can talk to and seek guidance (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Daresh, 2004; Dotlich, 2006; Dotlich, Cairo, & Rhinesmith (2008); Hayes, 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Gray, et al., 2007). Every new leader needs a “good witch,” and every great leader should serve as a “good witch” to new leaders.

Every great story has a great hero and a great villain. The Wicked Witch of the West, Dorothy's nemesis throughout her journey, is the epitome of a great villain. Dorothy was lucky to identify her early in her journey. Do great leaders meet wicked witches along their journey to school success—way too often and sometimes way too many! A school leader will face major obstacles and even personal threats from wicked witches, “I'll get you my pretty and your little dog too!” (Fleming, 1939) Witches with their “beautiful wickedness” (Fleming) will stand in the way of school leaders, and they come in many shapes and forms—problems and challenges created by supervisors, staff members, parents, and community members. Great school leaders must recognize and solve problems effectively (Green, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2012) because, otherwise, they will try to “get you” (Fleming).

Every great leader needs a plan to pursue his/her vision—a road map to the destination of successful schools (Bernhardt, 2017). Dorothy's map to pursue her quest of returning home was the yellow brick road. The Munchkins, certainly unusual community members, help her find the yellow brick road and give her advice on how to follow it—“one step at a time” (Fleming, 1939). The Munchkins become a source of guidance and support for Dorothy as community members often do for school leaders. Great leaders understand they may not know everything needed to create or to follow the map to their destination, so they welcome advice and support from all sources, not just good witches. Great leaders collaborate with stakeholders to maximize their chances of success (Bernhardt, 2017; Fullan, 1992; Green, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Razik, Swanson & Razik, 2010; Ubben, et al., 2016).

Additionally, the road to Dorothy's destination is composed of individual yellow bricks, and she learns she needs to “to follow the yellow brick road” (Fleming, 1939) to reach her goal. Great leaders recognize that to achieve successful schools, they must follow a road constructed of (yellow) bricks of data. These data bricks must be gathered, properly laid out, and analyzed in order to build the road map to successful schools. Great school leaders must masterfully follow the (yellow) brick road (of data) just as Dorothy needed to do to reach her destination—data mastery is key (Bernhardt, 2017; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Marzano, et al., 2005; Razik, Swanson, & Razik, 2010; Ubben et al., 2016).

In her journey, Dorothy meets a scarecrow with a brain that can “unravel any riddle” (Fleming, 1939). What good are a vision, a mentor, relationships, collaboration, and a data map if the leader has no brain? Knowing where you are going, having a mentor to help you, listening to others, and having a map to get you there does not identify, avoid or resolve all problems. A leader must be able to think deeply about all the information and figure out what to do (Dotlich, 2006; Dotlich, Cairo, & Rhinesmith (2008); Lane, 2011; Johnson, 1994; Marzano, et al., 2005; Nicholls, 1994; Sergiovanni, 2001; Woelk, 2018). The journey to a successful school is riddled with so many problems and issues that the leader must use his/her brain to unravel and successfully resolve any and every riddle and “be another Lincoln” (Fleming).

When Dorothy meets the tin man, she learns that a brain is still not enough; to be “human” (Fleming, 1939), you must have a heart. Every great leader striving toward school success must understand that those he/she leads are people too (Cotton, 2003; Dotlich, 2006; Johnson, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Lane, 2011; Nicholls, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992, 2001; Singleton, 2015; Ubben et al., 2016; Woelk, 2018).

They have personal as well as professional needs. A great leader must ensure that both needs are met in order to grow and maintain support from his/her staff. Also, if the school leader has no heart for the students in the school, then s/he will not “register emotion” (Fleming) when working with them. Then, there will be no emotional bonding among the leader, the staff, and students—and maximum school success will also not register. No leader can be an “empty kettle” (Fleming) because a school leader without a heart only manages, does not lead, and fails in the long run.

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man meet a lion in the dark jungle who “has no courage at all,” “even scares” himself, and really is just a “dande-lion” (Fleming, 1939). Without courage to take action to pursue a vision, to follow where the data road leads, to implement an intelligently collaborated plan, or to live according to heartfelt passion, then all is for naught and failure will result. Leaders without the “vim and verve” (Fleming), or courage, merely fill the position, pretend to lead, and waste other good qualities they might possess (Bush & Glover, 2014; Dotlich, 2006; Dotlich, et al., 2008; Johnson, 1994; Glickman, 2002; Heischman, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Lane, 2011; Miller, 2010; Palanski, et al., 2015; Woelk, 2018). You cannot actively lead without courage; in fact, you cannot even actively follow without courage. The brain and heart guide courage to great leadership, while cowardice blocks successful leadership.

While Dorothy contributes vision, she also provides one other important quality to great leadership—inspiration. It is Dorothy who lifts and encourages the spirits of the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion to move toward achieving their dreams. Without Dorothy’s inspiration, the Scarecrow would have remained dangling on a pole, the Tin Man would have rusted out completely, and the Lion would have been alone in the jungle getting scared by everything, including himself. Inspiration triggers courage in a great leader to follow his/her brain and heart (Gumus, et al., 2018; Heischman, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Marzano, et al., 2005; Nicholls, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992; Singleton, 2015).

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion come together to pursue their dreams, their vision. In this pursuit, they encounter many challenges, including angry apple trees, winged monkeys, dangerous poppies, jitter bugs, and—the most threatening—the wicked witch. However, the leadership qualities each brings become an integrated whole, a team. Through effective teamwork, the scarecrow, tin man, lion, and Dorothy defeat the wicked witch. Together, they achieve their dreams—their vision. It is the relationships that form under a great leader that support the teamwork and efforts to defeat a wicked witch and achieve a vision (Azzara, 2001; Bush & Glover, 2014; Cotton, 2003; Dotlich, 2006; Dotlich, et al., 2008; Green, 2013; Gumus, et al., 2018; Johnson, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Lane, 2011; Marzano, et al., 2005; Nicholls, 1994; Singleton, 2015; Razik, Swanson & Razik, 2010). Great school leaders, with the Wizard of Oz leadership qualities, can unite all stakeholders into one team to overcome all challenges and realize their vision of maximum success for every child and every staff member!

At the end of the story, Dorothy realizes that the dreams she had wished for could have been found at home. She did not need to go “somewhere over the rainbow” to achieve her dreams. This is a very important lesson that great leaders must learn in order to achieve. Too often, school leaders begin to focus on their next job or promotion to make their dreams a reality. Truly great school leaders realize, just as Dorothy did, that their “heart’s desire” can be found in their “own” school “yard” (Fleming). In fact, if as a school leader, your heart’s professional desire cannot be found in your own school, then school success is not at the center of your heart. You invest in your own success, rather than on your school’s success. Instead, treat your school as your home, your staff and community as family, and your students as your own, then you can realize greatness and achieve all your dreams and professional desires right there at school—your home (Lane, 2010)—and not “somewhere over the rainbow.” With your school as your home and at the center of your “heart’s desire,” great relationships will develop and form the milieu for the great success that follows!

Discussion and Implications

Sometimes, “Aha” moments about great leadership come from a most unusual source. *The Wizard of Oz*, originally written over one hundred years ago (Nix, 2015) and first aired almost eighty years ago (Fleming, 1939), identifies and demonstrates qualities of great leadership. Since that time, many writers and research in effective leadership have supported these same qualities, although with synonymic differences, e.g., “guts” vs “courage.” The *Wizard of Oz* provides verbal and graphic meanings of effective school leadership qualities that many Americans have viewed and, therefore, can relate to.

Thus, the *Wizard of Oz* can serve to artistically visualize and help understand effective school leadership qualities supported in the literature.

So, if as a school leader, you follow the Wizard of Oz leadership qualities— vision, mentor, problem-solving, collaboration, data mastery, brain, heart, courage, inspiration, relationships, teamwork, and home—you will lead your school to “somewhere over the rainbow,” and your staff, students, community, and yourself will believe “the dreams that you dare to dream really do . . . come true” (Fleming). And, with great school leadership according to Oz, all educators, staff, parents, community members, and even students will be able to say “There’s no place like” school (Fleming).

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