

What Makes A Successful Leader?-- Lessons Learned From The Wizard of OZ

Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, Inc.



I suspect that all of you have seen the “Wizard of Oz” one time or another. There are some great leadership lessons to be learned from this classic movie.

The most powerful leaders in “Oz” are the witches and wizards. Kind of like our modern day politicians.

Dorothy is a new arrival in the land of Oz. She is a frightened, inexperienced girl who finds herself in a strange new place. Everyone is a stranger. Nothing looks familiar or is like anything she has experienced before. The Munchkins assume she is a witch. So right away she is tapped to be a leader.

After all, anyone who travels in a flying house and kills the powerful wicked Witch of the East must also be a powerful witch too. Or at least a member of the local sisterhood.

But is she a good witch or a bad witch? Even Glinda, the good witch of the North first assumes she is a witch. But why? Because she looks and acts like one.

Dorothy needs help; however, there is no one around whom she can rely on but herself. So Dorothy eventually is forced to become a leader. Why? Because no one else is willing to take on the job. The situation is similar to that of being a men's club president.

Dorothy has a vision of what she wants: She wants to go home. At first, no one will follow her. Why? Because she is in Munchkin Land and the Munchkins do not share her vision or care about her goals or objectives. They can only offer limited help. They say, "Follow the Yellow Brick Road!" To do so she must begin the journey alone with only her little dog for comfort and support.

So, with some help, Dorothy formulates a plan to achieve her goal: She will travel to the Emerald City and ask the Wizard of Oz to send her home.

Dorothy does not sit around and wait. She starts to work immediately.

Along the way she must review her plans and adjust them to fit changing circumstances. She also sets a series of smaller goals, each of which will lead to the successful completion of her larger goal.

Dorothy begins to form what will become a successful committee of five. They are the most unlikely committee you can imagine. They are outcasts of Oz. None of them have had any experience. They have limited resources and no budget to do anything. But they are all willing to work. As a consequence, Dorothy becomes the chair with three unique committeemen: individuals with unique abilities, qualities and skills: Intelligence, a loving kindly caring heart, and courage. They will all contribute their unique blend of talents to achieve their ultimate goal. They just do not know that yet. Of course, there is her little dog Toto too.

Each member of her committee has their own goals. But, through Dorothy's leadership skills, she is able to enlist their help. They all follow her lead.

As she follows the path towards achieving her ultimate goal, she and her committee periodically evaluate their plans and adapt to changing circumstances. Nevertheless, she never loses sight of her main goal, and persists until she succeeds.

There are, of course, other leaders in the Land of Oz. Some, like the Wicked Witch of the West, lead through the ruthless use of fear and of raw power. Her goal appeared merely to be to dominate and control others. It inspires no loyalty. As a result, her followers, who were only too willing to abandon their leader at the first opportunity, have no path to follow when their leader is gone.

Then there is the Wizard of Oz himself. He uses smoke and mirrors to create the illusion of power to maintain his position. When he is shown to be a fraud, he loses much of his power. However, his perceptions and people skills enable him to maintain his leadership position. He is able to recognize what people want and give it to them. He allows people to achieve their goals, by letting them know what success looks like and giving them rewards to recognize their achievements. Therefore, people are still willing to follow him as their leader, at least for a while. Then, just when success for Dorothy seems at hand, he moves from town and retires.

The most successful leader turns out to be Dorothy. Let's review her method.

- She set goals that inspired her followers
- She formed a hardworking, loyal committee and helped them develop the skills necessary to achieve her goals
 - They worked well together
 - Their skills complemented one another
 - They shared the same vision and values
- She was able to train new leaders
 - She departs Oz (finishes her term of office, in a manner of speaking) leaving behind well trained and capable leaders
 - Her committeemen, based on the experience, training and confidence gained working through their work on the committee with Dorothy, become the new leaders of Emerald City.

In short, Dorothy was a SMARTY.

- All of her major and her minor goals were SMARTY; that is, they were--
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Attainable
 - Realistic
 - Time-bound
 - Hers

You too can be a successful leader.

You can do it!

Be positive and you will do it!

There are no real deep dark secrets about leadership. Just like Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz," you have had the answers from the very beginning; you just did not know it.

So what is it you already know?

Start off with the basics!

In order to have a successful organization you need a vision. You need a plan. You need to set SMARTY goals. Find people who can help. Do not reject anyone willing to follow you and join your cause merely because they lack experience or have an ungainly appearance. As you achieve your goals, both you and your organization will mature and grow. The journey itself will be part of the reward. Working this way you make your vision become a reality.

Dr. Seuss wrote a book with the message: "Oh, the things you can think of if only you try!"