YOU'VE HAD IT ALL ALONG

What the Wizard of Oz can teach us about navigating change, finding wholeness, and moving forward.

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At first glance, The Wizard of Oz is a story about a girl trying to find her way home.

Dorothy lands in an unfamiliar place and is told to follow the yellow brick road. Along the way, she meets a Scarecrow who wants a brain, a Tin Man who wants a heart, and a Lion who wants courage. Together, they travel to see a powerful wizard who they believe can give them what they are missing.

But that is not really what happens.

The Scarecrow solves problems throughout the journey. The Tin Man repeatedly demonstrates compassion. The Lion keeps moving forward despite being afraid. Dorothy spends the entire story wearing the shoes that can take her home.

They travel all the way to Oz searching for qualities they already possess.

Perhaps that is why the story continues to resonate. It is colourful and playful, but underneath the flying monkeys, ruby slippers, and yellow brick road are some deeply human questions.

What happens when life carries us somewhere we did not expect to go? What do we believe we need before we can move forward? Who helps us remember who we are? And what if some of the things we are searching for have been within us all along?

WE ARE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

Sooner or later, each of us has a moment when we realize we are not in Kansas anymore.

Something has changed. The familiar rules no longer seem to apply. A career shifts, a relationship ends, an injury changes what our body can do, a loss reorganizes our life, or an opportunity takes us somewhere we have never been before.

Sometimes the change is chosen. Sometimes a tornado drops it on top of us.

Our first instinct may be to recreate the world we knew. We want the old routines, the old certainty, and the version of ourselves that knew what to do. We keep applying familiar strategies, even when the environment has changed.

But performance is contextual. What helped you thrive in one season may not be what you need in the next. A strategy that worked under familiar conditions may not work when the demands, resources, relationships, or stakes are different.

The first task is to acknowledge where you are.

What has changed? What has been lost? What remains within your control? What does this new environment require from you? What parts of your old approach still serve you, and what might need to evolve?

This does not require pretending that every disruption is a gift. Some changes are painful, unfair, and unwanted. We do not have to rush past the impact and immediately search for a silver lining.

But once we acknowledge the reality of where we are, we can begin participating in what happens next.

Dorothy does not have a complete map. She knows only that she needs to begin walking.

Often, that is where we begin too.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO FEEL WHOLE?

The characters Dorothy meets are convinced that something essential is missing.

The Scarecrow believes he cannot think. The Tin Man believes he cannot feel. The Lion believes he cannot be brave. Each has reduced their identity to what they believe they lack.

Human beings do this remarkably well.

We decide that we will be enough when we become more confident, successful, productive, disciplined, or accomplished. We believe we need one more qualification, opportunity, achievement, or sign of approval before we can trust ourselves.

High-performance environments can intensify this. When so much attention is placed on outcomes, it becomes easy to view ourselves through the narrow lens of our most recent result. We stop asking, "Who am I?" and begin asking, "How am I performing?"

But our identity and value are always larger than our performance.

You can perform poorly and remain capable. You can feel afraid and still act courageously. You can be uncertain and still make a thoughtful decision. You can struggle with your mental health and still be strong, valuable, and deeply worthy of belonging.

Wholeness does not mean being unaffected by life. It does not mean remaining calm, confident, and energized always. There will be periods when you feel well and steady, periods when you are hurt or stretched, and periods when you need meaningful help.

Part of being whole is making room for all those states.

Pay attention to what helps you stay well. Know your triggers and the early signs that you are moving away from feeling like yourself. Notice changes in your sleep, patience, concentration, energy, relationships, or desire to escape. Learn what helps you return and recognize when getting back requires support from someone else.

The goal is not to prove that you never struggle. It is to know yourself well enough to recognize what is happening and respond.

Wholeness also comes through connection.

Dorothy would not have reached Oz alone. The people beside her did not remove every obstacle, but they helped her continue. They contributed different strengths, carried hope at different moments, and reflected qualities that each person struggled to see in themselves.

Sometimes we need people who can see us beyond the moment we are in. People who remind us of our strength when we have temporarily lost sight of it.

People who help us laugh, challenge our assumptions, sit beside us in uncertainty, or take the next step with us.

Needing those people does not make us incomplete. Connection is part of how human beings become more fully themselves.

FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

The yellow brick road gives Dorothy a direction, but it does not make the journey predictable.

There are wrong turns, distractions, unexpected companions, frightening moments, and obstacles no one could have planned for. The road provides a next step, not a guarantee.

Many of us want more certainty than life is willing to offer.

We want to know exactly how things will unfold before we commit. We want proof that the opportunity will work, the decision will be right, or the effort will lead to the outcome we want. We stand at the beginning of the road trying to see all the way to Oz.

When we cannot, we interpret uncertainty as danger.

But uncertainty is not evidence that we are on the wrong path. It is often simply evidence that we have not travelled it before.

You do not need to understand the entire journey to take the next useful step. You need to know what matters, recognize what you can control, and choose how you want to show up.

Focus on what is yours to influence. Make the decision that is available now. Stay open to information you will learn along the way. When something does not work, adjust without turning the adjustment into evidence that you have failed.

Courage rarely arrives as a complete absence of fear. More often, it appears as a willingness to act while fear comes with us.

The Lion does not become courageous after he stops feeling afraid. His courage is revealed through the things he does while he is afraid.

That distinction matters.

If you wait to feel completely confident before stepping forward, you may spend a very long time standing still. Confidence is often built after the action, not before it. We make the call, enter the arena, have the conversation, take the shot, or begin again—and then discover that we were able to do it.

The road becomes clearer as we walk it.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR COMPANIONS

Dorothy's companions are not simply colourful additions to the story. They are part of how she gets home.

Every meaningful journey is shaped by the people who travel with us. Some walk beside us for years. Others join us for one season, one challenge, or one important conversation. They may bring knowledge, compassion, courage, humour, challenge, or a perspective we could not access on our own.

It is worth asking who is on your road.

Who helps you think more clearly? Who makes it safer to tell the truth? Who reminds you that your identity is bigger than your results? Who challenges you without making you feel smaller? Who can sit with you in uncertainty without immediately trying to make it disappear?

It is equally important to consider who you are becoming for other people.

Are you someone who helps others recognize their strengths? Can people struggle in your presence without feeling that they have disappointed you? Do you listen for what they need, or assume that everyone needs what you would need? Do you walk beside people, or stand at the destination and tell them to hurry up?

Sometimes leadership looks like providing direction. Sometimes it means helping people recognize that they already possess more intelligence, heart, and courage than they believe.

The strongest teams are not made up of people who need nothing from one another. They are made up of people who know how to share the load, contribute their strengths, and help one another. They are made up of people who know how to share the load, contribute their strengths, and help one another keep moving.

LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

When Dorothy and her friends finally arrive, the great and powerful Wizard is not what they expected.

There is a man behind the curtain.

This may be one of the most useful lessons in the story. We often assume that someone else has all the answers. The leader, coach, expert, physician, teacher, or person further along must know exactly what to do. We give other people certainty and power they may not actually possess.

Good people can guide us. Experts can give us knowledge, tools, and perspective. Leaders can create conditions that help us perform and grow.

But no one else can completely remove uncertainty from our lives. No one can do all our thinking, choosing, or becoming for us.

At some point, we must participate in our own path.

That does not mean doing everything alone. Dorothy needs Glinda, her companions, and the road. Self-leadership is not isolation. It is the willingness to accept help without surrendering responsibility for how we move forward.

The Wizard cannot manufacture a brain, a heart, or courage. What he can do is give each character something symbolic that helps them recognize the evidence that was already there.

Sometimes that is what the best leaders, coaches, therapists, and teammates do. They do not insert strength into us. They help us see, trust, and use the strength we have already demonstrated.

YOU'VE HAD THE POWER ALL ALONG

Dorothy wants someone else to tell her how to get home. She believes the answer exists somewhere outside herself, held by someone more powerful.

All the while, she is wearing the shoes.

There is something both comforting and frustrating

about the idea that we may already possess what we are searching for. If we have always had the power, why does it sometimes feel so difficult to access?

Because possessing a capacity and trusting it are not the same thing.

We may have courage but need an experience that allows us to see it. We may have sound judgment but need to practise using it without immediately deferring to someone else. We may have survived hard things without ever stopping to recognize the qualities that helped us through them.

The journey provides evidence.

Look back at your own road. Where did you continue despite being afraid? When did you solve something, you initially believed was beyond you? When did you care deeply, show up for someone, change direction, ask for help, or begin again?

Those moments are not exceptions to who you are. They are evidence of who you are.

Having the power within you does not mean every outcome is controllable or every obstacle can be overcome through determination. It does not mean you should never need support. It means you are not entering the next chapter empty-handed.

You bring experience, values, relationships, lessons, and strengths developed across every road you have already travelled.

THE ROAD HOME

The Wizard of Oz is not about receiving a brain, a heart, or courage. It is about learning to recognize them.

It is not only about returning to a place called home. It is about understanding what makes us feel grounded, connected, and fully ourselves.

And it is not about finding someone powerful enough to guarantee the journey. It is about discovering that we can move through uncertainty one step at a time, especially when we allow good people to walk beside us.

There will be moments when you look outside yourself for persmission, certainty, or proof that you are ready.

Look at the road you have already travelled.

The journey does not always transform us into someone new. Sometimes it introduces us to the person who was there all along.

Dr. Adrienne Leslie-Toogood is a licensed psychologist and performance consultant with over 30 years of experience helping people thrive under pressure — from Olympic athletes to emergency responders. She is the founder of Toogood Consulting and specializes in building human-first, high-performance cultures.

References

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