

Great Wizard or Good Witch?

Two Models for Professional Counselors

William Watson Purkey

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Sterling Gerber

Eastern Washington University

Digital Conversion by
Daniel E. Shaw, Ph.D.
danshaw@nova.edu

Abstract

Frank L. Baum's story, The Wizard of Oz, is used as an analogy for illustrating the similarity between the adventures of Dorothy and her companions and clients seeking answers to their problems of living. Their experiences with a great wizard and a good witch are translated into dynamics of effective and less effective therapy.

Introduction

The Wizard of Oz, written by Frank L. Baum in 1900, was developed into one of the best-loved movies of all time. It is entertainingly fetching for the child in all of us. Its underlying structure reflects dynamics encountered in many of life's adventures and thus provides a charming metaphor for the profession of counseling.

Dorothy, like most people at some time in their lives, is faced with a very stressful problem (in her case, losing something she loves). When Miss Gulch attempts to take Toto to be destroyed, Toto flees his captress and Dorothy runs away with him. On her flight she encounters Professor Marvel, who surreptitiously reframes concern from Dorothy and Toto to Auntie Em.

In the process of trying to remedy her weak strategy of running away, Dorothy is caught up in the unanticipated forces that foil many of us in our well-meaning attempts to set things right. As with Dorothy, many clients awake to the realization, "I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" (1939 MGM Film).

The Search For Help

Faced with a serious problem, clients tend to survey their stock of solutions and test out the one which seems to hold the most promise. When it does not work and nothing changes (good-case scenario) clients tend to try it again with more gusto. Sometimes a seemingly good choice results in chaos (bad-case scenario) and it is necessary to abandon that choice, only to be faced with the realization that it was chosen because it seemed to be the best choice.

When the client realizes best responses are not working it often happens that the search begins for a wizard. The client needs someone who possesses magical powers, who can intervene from the land beyond one's best effort. It is informative to follow the adventures of Dorothy and see how well the Wizard of Oz lives up to the expectations he so willingly permitted others to bestow upon him.

As is often the case with clients, Dorothy, 'the small and weak,' picks up some fellow sufferers along her path. These beings believe themselves to be casualties of creation, victims of mistreatment by others, and of faulty programming (similar to many clients who look outside themselves for forces to blame for their conditions).

The first fellow sufferer is a scarecrow, a miscreant being who credits his difficulties to a congenital

deficiency; that is, the absence of a brain. He reminds us that “I can’t tell you anything, I haven’t got a brain.” Yet adds “It is a terrible thing to call someone a fool.” He is clumsy and trips over almost anything, yet he is gentle, kind, optimistic, and quickly becomes Dorothy’s Pet Friend.

Second, she is joined by a tin woodsman whom she found standing in the woods with uplifted axe, rusted so badly that he could not move. His problem was that, although he could be very polite, he had no heart. He once was a man of flesh and blood, but he was hurt so often that he gradually had all the parts of his body replaced with tin. And, alas, the heart was left out. If only someone would do something for him, he might be able really to care about people instead of merely appearing to be polite. Obviously a person who believes he is made by others to be a victim also believes that he must rely on others to make him whole and happy.

Dorothy’s last companion is a lion whose attempts to frighten her and her two companions are foiled by Dorothy. He discloses his malady in the words, “I’m a *cowardly* lion, that’s what I am. I have no courage! I’m supposed to be king of the jungle, but I’m scared all the time!” How awful it is to carry such a limiting attribution, to be lost in an imposed cognitive structure.

Dorothy and her friends the Scarecrow, Lion, and Tinman, having exhausted their own best efforts, seek out a greater power, the Great and Terrible Wizard, to find resolution for their pressing life problems. None had been to a wizard before, and none knew much about how wizards work.

The Great Wizard

It was difficult for the traveling friends to gain access to the Great and Terrible Wizard. Obviously anyone as good as the Wizard must be protected by doormen or receptionists or secretaries, and barriers must be created so that only the most persistent and needful clients are given an audience. Otherwise, the Wizard’s time would be wasted on the less deserving. “Nobody, no way, no how could see the Great and Terrible Wizard!” (His office hours were from 10:45 until a quarter till eleven.)

Dorothy and her companions persevere and finally are received by the Wizard. He at first claims to be all knowing and all powerful. Later, as his facade comes down, he is shown to be disappointingly fallible: an opportunist who allowed others to support him in their delusion of his higher powers.

How like the Wizard are some counselors. They see themselves rising in some mystical metamorphosis beyond the realm of mere mortal to the status of wizardry. They create an image of importance by hiding behind procedures and policies, techniques and skills. “Silence!” boomed the voice of Oz. “I do the asking here! I know why you have come!” They sound all knowing and wise, yet admit, in conferences of their peers, that many of their clients would get better about as quickly without their interventions. Like the Great and Terrible Wizard, when their facade drops, they are disappointingly fallible. As Dorothy said to him, “It’s all a--a fake! You’re nothing but a humbug fooling the people!” “That’s correct, young lady,” said the Wizard quietly.

Fortunately, there is a character in The Wizard of Oz that exhibits the qualities of a “good counselor.” She is Glinda, the good witch of the North.

The Good Witch

Glinda is important to the story because she is the only major character in Dorothy's fantasy who does not have a prototype back in Kansas. She is a professional counselor who is unencumbered by dual relationships, co dependencies, or by being part of the problem.

In the tale of Dorothy and friends, Glinda the good counselor did possess mystical powers, yet the most impressive attributes were her empathy, warmth and genuine concern and her humility. For example, when Dorothy asks Glinda "Which way is Kansas?" Glinda replies "I don't really know." She may have been infallible; if so, she wore it graciously. As suggested by Carkhuff (1969, 1983) and others, those powers of empathy, warmth and genuineness can be exercised beautifully by counselors who are fallibly mortal.

The real mystery of counseling, which keeps clients coming back and which keeps counselors energized in the process, lies in the fact that out of the interaction of fallible people, impressive changes can occur, lives can be influenced, and satisfaction and joy can be increased. When Glinda first encounters Dorothy, she says to Dorothy: "How do you do? Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" Dorothy replies: "I don't think I'm any kind of witch, I'm Dorothy!" "Oh!" said Glinda "Well, that's nice." She accepts Dorothy unconditionally, and the beneficial relationship begins.

For most counselors the prospect of being a good witch is not nearly so compelling as that of being a great wizard. Yet Glinda, who paradoxically had mystical powers, relied instead on the clients' internal strengths. Glinda said to Dorothy, "To get to a place you've never been, you must go by a road you have never traveled." A more earthy statement might be, "If what you're doing isn't working, do something else."

Like Glinda, good counselors uncover the inherent wisdom in their clients by listening carefully from the very first word spoken (Glinda: "It is always best to start at the beginning.") and by using the refined mirror of paraphrasing and reflecting skills to engineer a joint discovery process with their clients (Gerber, 1986). They establish inviting contexts (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996) wherein their places, people, policies, programs, and processes are immensely user friendly. They do not hide behind discouraging and difficult conditions. They communicate the worth of their clients by the manner with which they encounter them, from very first to final interaction.

Counselors know that skills are not magic. They come from rigorous training and long periods of practice and refinement. Counselors do not go to magic school to learn these skills. They go through counseling programs that devote intensive time to the development of such skills. Their training allows them to master the dynamics of creating an inviting atmosphere and an inviting interaction.

It is interesting to note how similar is Glinda's skillful approach to that of good counseling. For example, when Glinda invites Dorothy to "follow the yellow brick road" which begins at the edge of Munchkinland, Glinda says "Good bye, Dorothy - maybe I'll see you again." Glinda sends the clear message that it is up to Dorothy to take responsibility for her own life. This highest level of respect (Carkhuff, 1969) communicates to the client that he or she is seen as able, valuable, and responsible and can behave accordingly.

The Fallibility of Wizardry

Of much significance is the awareness on the part of counselors that they, like the Wizard, are fallible. A wonderful reminder of the fallibility of magic is offered when the Munchkins are singing that the Witch is dead. There is a line in which they sing, "Undeniably, unreliably dead." There is no guarantee that she will not return, just as there are no guarantees in professional counseling.

It is possible for counselors to get caught up in the apparent importance of their position and in the seeming magic of their skills and then begin to make decisions for their clients. Usually the most proficient practitioners of counseling are most likely to be aware of their fallibility. It is more often the under trained or the neophytes who unwisely cross the boundary of responsibility and make decisions on behalf of their clients.

As counselors set their sights, either from the perspective of counselor educators or as prospective counselors, they should choose models which promise to enhance their effectiveness in serving clients. They should forego the temptation of assuming the accoutrements and false image of power that goes with wizardry and settle for a more modest model of caring and humility, represented by Glinda.

The Dorothies, Scarecrows, Lions, and Tinmen of the world, deserve strong and positive influences toward an internal locus of control and the knowledge to use their power in self-enhancing ways. It is Glinda, the Good Counselor, who values the ability, worth, and self-directing powers of others. ("My dear child, you don't need my help to go home...you've always had the power.") Glinda's lessons are simple: respect yourself trust yourself, direct yourself, believe in yourself. You can make changes in your world.

Whereas it is tempting for students to sing that lilting and captivating melody as they traverse the road of counselor preparation and practice, "We're off to be the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz," they will be better prepared if they silently dedicate themselves to the development of skills and to the image of hard and humble service.

References

- Baum, L. F. (1900). The Wizard of Oz. New York: Bobbs Merrill Publishers.
- Carkhuff, R. R. (1969). Helping and human relations: A primer for lay and professional helpers (Volume I: Selection and Training). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Carkhuff, R. R. (1983). The art of helping (5th ed.). Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press.
- Gerber, S. K. (1986). Responsive therapy: A systematic approach to counseling skills. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- McClelland, D. (1976). Down the yellow brick road: The story of the making of the Wizard of Oz. New York: Pyramid Publications/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Purkey, W. W., & Schmidt, J. J. (1996). Invitational counseling: A self-concept approach to professional practice. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- The Wizard of Oz. (1939). Loew's Copyright. Baltimore, MD: Ottenheimer Publishers.
- The Wizard of Oz. (1939). Hollywood: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Film.