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The Way of Oz: A Guide to Wisdom, Heart, and Courage

Robert V. Smith
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The Way of Oz: A Guide to Wisdom, Heart and Courage ostensibly ties life lessons to the beloved characters that inspired the title. Robert Smith offers a meandering road map for life that covers everything from how to behave in the office to travel and safe sex. But while he opines on subjects as wide as the poppy fields in Frank L. Baum's 1939 classic, he fails to adequately link his inspirations closely enough to his own contributions. Consequently, the reader is best served by skipping over the gimmicky premise and getting to the meat of the book.

The first fifty-six pages, a dry account of Frank L. Baum's life, are an unnecessary ploy that does not advance Smith's map for a relevant, well-integrated life. A secondary, and superb, feature, however, is a spectacular reading list that may be culled from his pages and ranges from works by Confucius to Junot Diaz.

"In essence, *The Way of Oz* is intended as a guide and a set of tools for lifelong learning, loving, serving, and leadership," states Smith in his introduction. "It is a guide for personal and professional development, and it represents a highly integrated paradigm that can be useful to people of all ages." Mission accomplished. The five well-presented sections of the book devoted to Smith's suggested way of life include Learning, Loving, Serving, Focus on the Future, and Humility.

The first part discusses the need for people to work longer out of necessity today: "Most will have three or four different careers," believes Smith, making the case for pursuing a broad and deep education that continues throughout one's lifetime. The author also addresses the importance of effective reading skills, both for pleasure and the attainment of life goals. He provides sage advice for job interviewing and speaks about the importance of writing as, "essential to organization and understanding."

The section on loving is resplendent, explaining that love, "in its broadest sense includes the love of others, love of place, love of learning and love of self." Smith excels in describing platonic love along with the basic tenets of Freud and Jung and what caused the rift between the two psychiatrists.

In Focus on the Future, the author covers topics including Diversity, Sustainability, Technology, and Personal Responsibility. He strongly urges the development of personal guiding principals that include dedication to: "quality, consistency with goals, coherence with strengths, contributions to noble cause[s] and cost-benefit assessments."

The final section, on "Humility and Other Virtues," emphasizes honesty, integrity, and the development of a moral compass. Throughout his book Smith refers to the importance of giving back to one's community and the world at large. The potential imapct of social responsibility is a valuable take-away from *The Way of Oz* and makes the reading worthwhile for those interested in making the world a better place.

QR (Quick Response) bar codes accompany the text and lead the reader to online videos, potentially making great use of twenty-first century technology. Unfortunately, they do nothing to enhance or advance the premise of *The Way of Oz*, and are ultimately a distraction.

Robert V. Smith is the chief academic officer at Texas Tech University. He is the author of *Where You Stand Is Where You Sit* and *Pedestals, Parapets, and Pits*.

DINDY YOKEL (September 24, 2012)

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