



A whirlwind year teaches the value of collaboration

It has been an honor to serve as president of Learning Forward's board of trustees. My sojourn was much like Dorothy's voyage in *The Wizard of Oz*. While making her way to Oz, Dorothy met new friends, encountered struggles, and was besieged with setbacks in her quest to go home. By the end, Dorothy learned life lessons she'd never forget. Throughout my term as president, so did I.

Last December, I accepted the leadership gavel, and, from day one, I knew I wasn't in Kansas anymore. Perhaps you've felt this way, too. The tornadoes that continually whip education to and fro can be unnerving. The whirlwinds of Common Core, next-generation assessments, new teacher evaluation, and accountability systems can easily pitch us off course and far, far from home.

As leaders in professional learning, we must continue to create and share common missions, visions, and plans for the future. We must ask ourselves: Who are we? What do we want to become? Where are we going? How will we know when we've arrived? When districts and schools work together to answer these questions, we gain the knowledge to weather any storm.

Like Dorothy, my journey was fraught with detours requiring the help of friends. Every success, conflict,

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on board JULIE BLAINE

unexpected twist in the road, and new relationship unlocked opportunities to learn and grow. Dorothy's first new friend, Scarecrow, confessed he had no brain to think with and nothing to offer. Turns out, Scarecrow actually had much to contribute. He helped his team unlock seemingly impossible circumstances in order to find what was possible. The lesson for me is that inviting diverse thinkers to our learning tables creates advantage. We should value each voice, encourage togetherness, invite in every seeker of knowledge, and lead forward with heads and hands together.

Enter the Tin Man. He thought he didn't have a heart, but it's easy to find evidence to the contrary. Tin Man actually loved much along the way. So have I, especially the feeling that I'm in a zone of true learning. Remember how you felt when you first learned to ride a bike? That drive to conquer those two wheels of freedom completely overrode the fear of falling. That's what this leadership role has been like.

We fall down all the time. In the beginning,

we need friends to help us get back up and have another go at it. Perseverance, motivation, and fun build a solid faith in our abilities to master each new challenge — and they build heart.

Then comes the Cowardly Lion, a scaredy-cat in need of courage. He learned much from his trekking experiences — so much so that, in the end, he received a badge of courage. Doing what's right in our business frequently requires not only courage but also sacrifice.

Leadership requires courage. How will we make our voices heard for continued professional learning? How will we address the inevitable political tornadoes yet to come? Where will we find our courage? If we are courageously honest, we know we will always face educational challenges that perturb our beliefs, challenge our commitments, and place roadblocks in front of our ultimate destinations. We must be

prepared for courageous conversations and tenacious actions.

Each step of my yellow brick road was full of collaborative input and brilliant insights, ardent relationships of heart, and passionate courage from indomitable colleagues. It was an amazing educational experience. ■

