



Anne Mao says "The Wizard of Oz" inspired teamwork at Gadge USA in Lake Success.

agers' leadership skills.

"To create growth and change in an organization, people need to be moved, touched and inspired, and what's going to do that the most is a great story," says Ellen Cooperperson, CEO of Cooperperson Performance Consulting in Hauppauge, who was brought in to guide the process.

Cooperperson used the plot and characters of "The Wizard of Oz" as an analogy for the company's transformation. She began by asking the leadership team to describe their vision of Emerald City — where they were going and what they saw as their future goal or mission.

"It's really about getting their ideas on the table, getting them excited about creating their own journey and their own reasons for doing it," Cooperperson says.

Just as characters in the story counted on each other, Cooperperson explained to the Gadge managers, they needed to work together as a team to get what they wanted and fulfill their mission. The Yellow Brick Road became the new core values of the organization during the journey.

Dorothy always knew the secret to get home, Cooperperson says — a lesson the Gadge team came to identify with.

"She showed us that we were all of us individually Dorothy going through this journey," says Anne Mao, director of business development at Gadge.

Mao had her team pick one new core value every week and tell how they lived up to it. When they saw they had been following these values already, "that was the Dorothy moment. They realized they had it in them all along," Mao says. "We just didn't identify it."

Since going on their "Oz" adventure, Mao reports, their internal communications have dramatically improved and problems are addressed more quickly than before. She continues to use stories today whenever she works with her own team on a project.

"Storytelling is a positive tool," she says. "You can have such an amazing outcome. You have much more buy-in and happier people. They feel more accomplished, and ultimately they retain the information that the story is telling."

# The art OF THE TALE

## Businesses find stories help engage staff and prospects

BY ROBERT LEROSE

Special to Newsday

**T**he tradition of telling stories has been around since the beginning of human civilization. Increasingly, members of the business community have been using storytelling as a potent tool for engaging with employees, prospects and customers.

"There's something about stories that inspire us," says Paul Smith, author of "Lead With a Story" and an organizational storytelling coach. "The kind of reaction you'll get from a really good PowerPoint presentation is that it was nice. But you immediately share a great story with somebody else."

Stories have the power to touch people in ways that logical arguments and data-driven presentations can't, Smith says,

making it easier for your message to be understood and remembered.

Joe Campolo, managing partner at Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, a business law firm in Ronkonkoma, does a lot of public speaking and trains younger lawyers in his firm. He said he frequently draws upon episodes from his own life to craft stories that will resonate with his audience.

To stress the importance of a strong work ethic, Campolo tells the story of his 97-year-old grandmother — a single parent who labored in sweatshops turning out ladies' garments, but scraped together enough money to buy a brownstone in Brooklyn and raise his father.

"Everybody likes to pretend they work hard, but when I start telling stories of how she sold apples during the Depression to

try to put food on the table, it sort of brings in a context of how much progress we've made and how much easier the workforce has it today than back then," Campolo explains.

Overcoming an obstacle is a staple of the narrative technique that businesses should keep in mind. According to Smith, a good story needs "a hero we care about, a villain we're afraid of, and an epic struggle between them. You don't have to love the person in the story, but you have to relate," he says.

For Gadge USA, a privately owned packaging company headquartered in Lake Success, the management team became heroes in their own success story by relying on a beloved children's book to take a metaphorical journey. The company wanted to change its corporate culture and hone man-