

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



980 Six Blind Men and the Elephant

Today, a traditional folk tale from India, and why it has great relevance in our organizations and workplace relationships. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's next, on The Extra Point.

As the story goes...long ago, six old men lived in a village in India. Each was born blind. The other villagers loved these men, and kept them away from harm. Since the blind men could not see the world for themselves, they had to imagine many of its wonders.

They listened carefully to the stories told by travelers to learn what they could about life outside the village, and were most curious about elephants.

They were told that elephants could trample forests, carry great amounts of weight, and had loud and frightening trumpet calls. They also knew that even a princess rode on them as she traveled throughout the kingdom, so how dangerous could they be?

The old men argued day and night about elephants. "An elephant must be a powerful giant," claimed the first blind man. "No, you must be wrong," argued the second blind man. "An elephant must be graceful and gentle if a princess is to ride on its back."

"You're wrong! I have heard that an elephant can pierce a man's heart with its terrible horn," said the third blind man. "Please," said the fourth blind man. "You are all mistaken. An elephant is nothing more than a large sort of cow. You know how people exaggerate."

"I am sure that an elephant is something magical," said the fifth blind man. "That would explain why the Rajah's daughter can travel safely throughout the kingdom."

"I don't believe elephants exist at all," declared the sixth blind man. "I think we are the victims of a cruel joke."

Finally, the villagers grew tired of all the arguments, and they arranged for the curious men to visit the palace of the Rajah, to touch the creature and learn the truth about elephants, once and for all. That day arrived, and the six blind men were taken to the palace, where an elephant was standing in the courtyard.

The first blind man reached out and touched the side of the huge animal. "An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall!" he declared. "It must be very powerful."

The second blind man put his hand on the elephant's limber trunk. "An elephant is like a giant snake," he announced.

The third blind man felt the elephant's pointed tusk. "I was right," he decided. "This creature is as sharp and deadly as a spear."

The fourth blind man touched one of the elephant's four legs. "What we have here," he said, "is an extremely large cow."

The fifth blind man felt the elephant's giant ear. "I believe an elephant is like a huge fan or maybe a magic carpet that can fly over mountains and treetops," he said.

The sixth blind man gave a tug on the elephant's coarse tail. "Why, this is nothing more than a piece of old rope. Dangerous, indeed," he scoffed.

The men were led to a large tree, which gave them shade from the sun, and they began to argue about what they had experienced, each repeating what they had felt.

"An elephant is like a wall," said the first blind man. "Surely we can finally agree on that."

"A wall? An elephant is a giant snake!" answered the second blind man.
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"It's a spear, I tell you," insisted the third blind man.

"I'm certain it's a giant cow," said the fourth blind man.

"Magic carpet. There's no doubt," said the fifth blind man.

"Don't you see?" pleaded the sixth blind man. "Someone used a rope to trick us."

Their argument grew louder and louder. "Wall!" "Snake!" "Spear!" "Cow!" "Carpet!" "Rope!" Then an angry voice yelled, "Stop shouting!" It was the Rajah, awakened from his nap by the noisy argument.

"How can each of you be so certain you are right?" asked the ruler. The six men considered the question. And then, knowing the Rajah to be a very wise man, they remained quiet.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the Rajah. "Each man touched only one part. If you put the parts together, perhaps you will see the truth. Now, let me finish my nap in peace."

"He is right," said the first blind man. "To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together. Let's discuss this on the journey home."

What can we learn here? Too often, we base our opinions on one piece of information, and don't make any effort to dig deeper. Then, we seek similar opinions to confirm our belief. This is known as confirmation bias. We do it in business, and we do it in the rest of life.

We all have blind spots and we all exhibit some degree of confirmation bias. Hopefully, today's story of the blind men and the elephant will remind us to consider different opinions.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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