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These truths we hold self evident



BY TIM EMPRINGHAM

At one time or another we all suffer from a form of blindness. We are not blind in a physical visual way, but rather in our ability to step back and see the bigger picture. We are comfortable and confident in our own perception of things based on what we have experienced or heard that we struggle to believe that there could be another way to look at a situation or problem.

There is an old fable that originated in India of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant. There are many versions of this parable, but I think my favourite is the poem version by John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) re-printed to the right of this article.

Too often we get ourselves entrenched into a position based on how we perceive the situation. We're convinced we're dealing with a spear, a wall, or a rope, and we can't pull ourselves out to see the bigger picture. As a leader it is our responsibility to help our teams step back from our individual perceptions and explore other views to make sure we are seeing the entire "elephant in the room," and not just a piece of the anatomy.

But how do we do that when we find ourselves or someone we are working with stuck in a place where they can't see past the "trunk"? I recently saw a speaker who spend a couple of hours talk-

ing about Emotional Intelligence for leadership and one of the concepts he talked about provides a great method to help in these situations.

Fundamentally the issue with perception blindness can be solved by building a bridge between a person's current perception to a broader perception so that you can travel down the path together to determine what the reality of the situation is.

In Emotional Intelligence terms this means that as a leader you need to cross the bridge over the gap of misunderstanding to the place where your team member is stuck so that you can truly empathize with their perception, then help them to walk back across the bridge with you to look at the situation from another viewpoint. Your willingness to cross the bridge in understanding creates the trust that is necessary for people to realize that you both care about their perception and have taken the time to understand it. With that trust established you can help to walk them around the rest of the elephant to gain additional perceptions which will you to collectively see the situation as it actually is.

When we find ourselves stuck in a situation that doesn't seem to be going anywhere because people are seeing a single situation or set of facts in opposing or differing ways, we need to be conscious of our own perception blindness and force ourselves away from the "leg" we are touching to experience the spear, the wall, the fan, and the other viewpoints around the table. Only then can we gain an understanding of the reality of the elephant and help our teams to move forward. **BLIO**

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Six Blind Men and the Elephant

It was six men of Indostan, To learning much inclined,

Who went to see the Elephant,
 (Though all of them were blind),

That each by observation, Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant, And happening to fall
 Against his broad and sturdy side, At once began to bawl:
 "God bless me! but the Elephant, Is very like a WALL!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk, Cried,
 "Ho, what have we here,

So very round and smooth and sharp?
 To me 'tis mighty clear

This wonder of an Elephant, Is very like a SPEAR!"

The Third approached the animal, And happening to take
 The squirming trunk within his hands,
 Thus boldly up and spake:

"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant, Is very like a SNAKE!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
 And felt about the knee

"What most this wondrous beast is like, Is mighty plain,"
 quoth he:

"'Tis clear enough the Elephant, Is very like a TREE!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
 Said: "E'en the blindest man

Can tell what this resembles most; Deny the fact who can,

This marvel of an Elephant, Is very like a FAN!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun, About the beast to grope,

Than seizing on the swinging tail,
 That fell within his scope,

"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant, Is very like a ROPE!"

And so these men of Indostan, Disputed loud and long,

Each in his own opinion, Exceeding stiff and strong,

Though each was partly in the right,
 And all were in the wrong!

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