

The Giraffe and the Elephant

A giraffe was proud to win an award for "Best Giraffe Home of the Year." It was tall and elegant like himself, with a wood workshop in the cellar. He had a good friend, an elephant, who was good at woodwork. The giraffe wanted to get involved in joint projects with the elephant, so he invited him round. Getting him in was no problem, as the door was adjustable, so as to get large woodworking tools in.

The elephant was impressed and the giraffe was proud. When he was called away to the phone, he told the elephant to make himself at home. That was when the trouble started. Only the outside door was designed to be widened, so when the elephant decided to go into another room, the doorway splintered.

He went upstairs to tell the giraffe. The stairs had been designed for giraffes, and wouldn't take the weight. The stairs, the elephant, and part of the wall collapsed.

The giraffe heard the racket and rushed down. He was a tolerant giraffe, and, though angry, valued the elephant, and still felt they could work well together. He at once thought of a solution to the problem.

There was an aerobics class nearby. If the elephant went to those, he could become more lithe, and ballet lessons could help him be lighter on his feet. Then, the giraffe felt, they could work well together.

The elephant didn't think much of this idea. The giraffe had leapt to the solution of changing the elephant to suit the needs of the giraffe. The elephant thought that, from an elephantine view, there were basic flaws in the whole plan. If they were to work together, those flaws would have to be addressed. This had genuinely not occurred to the giraffe. His assumptions had been ingrained in him as a young giraffe, and, until he was challenged, he would not notice they were there.

(© Copyright 2002 [Trans4mation](#). Reproduced with permission. Any opinions or views contained in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Training Reference.)

This reflects a common situation. There are insiders (giraffes) and outsiders (elephants). The insiders may genuinely want an equal partnership and value the other group. It's just that the baseline assumptions are effective blinkers that prevent them seeing solutions outside their own norms. The outsiders also have their own assumptions about how things should be. This means there will be tension, but tension need not be disaster. It can be part of the process to a creative solution.

Embracing diversity means having a genuine respect for differing perspectives, so that solutions encompass all the diverse views and needs. Diversity increases the wealth of knowledge and ideas available, as long as they all look for creative and mutually satisfactory solutions. Asking one side to conform is likely to create confusion and hostility.