

## Don't Feed the Elephants – Wilson, Sarah

This book provides insights about how avoidance can lend itself to a myriad of unwanted outcomes when the five “elephants” are left unchecked:

### Five Elephant Types:

1. Avoidphant – minimization and evasion.
2. Imagiphant – lack of curiosity and resignation of situations.
3. Blamephant – abdicating responsibility.
4. Nudgephant – passivity and round-about approach.
5. Deflectphant – boomerang, joking, and dismissive.

### Powerful Questions:

1. What's holding me back from...?
2. What am I afraid of when...?
3. What confirms this fear?
4. What disconfirms this fear?
5. What do I know to be true?
6. What role am I playing in this?
7. What assumptions am I holding?
8. What makes sense to the other person?
9. What steps could I take to help resolve this situation?
10. What do I gain when...?
11. What is the impact I want my message to make on the situation?
12. How can I confirm that they understand the message I've attempted to convey?
13. How else could I say this message so it could be more easily understood?
14. What would it look like to be direct and kind?
15. What is being avoided?
16. When are we moving on too quickly?
17. What makes it difficult for you to get curious about the role you played in a situation?
18. What value of theirs are they honoring in how they show up?
19. What value of theirs might they feel is being stepped on?

There's a common limiting belief that a positive relationship doesn't have a lot of conflict, but a productive relationship is one where all parties can disagree openly, effectively, and respectfully. (36)

**Resignation v. Acceptance:** Resignation is reaction. Acceptance is a response. Resignation is to admit defeat. Acceptance is acknowledging what has happened. Resignation is toleration. Acceptance allows up the possibility to move forward or move on. (37)

Clarify feedback for aligned impact. Approach sensible conversation. (39)

We can influence someone's feelings of trust, but ultimately, we don't get to decide how trustworthy we are. You don't get to decide if you're trustworthy. Other people do. (40)

Hearing something and getting curious about it, internalizing it, and doing something about it are two very different things. (41)

We cannot always stop the reaction. But we can notice, name, and redirect the reaction. (50)

**Ways to calm the amygdala:** Notice and name; Take a breath; Take a break. It can take about an hour to metabolize adrenaline and up to twenty-four hours to metabolize excessive amounts of cortisol. (52)

Cognitive dissonance is the natural enemy of curiosity. (60)

Shadow intentions are our unconscious, potentially uncomfortable behaviors that come from a place of self-protection. (61)

We can't change something we don't notice and acknowledge, so the first step is admitting it. The next step is working to see it clearly. (66)

Violent politeness in action. (68)

We cannot free what we cannot see. (86)

If there is an elephant in the room, everyone owns it. (90)

We can hide the fact that we're feeding an elephant by "venting." Typically, when we vent, we are seeking validation for our point of view. (92)

Blaming or criticizing someone behind their back is a way to exert power over the other person or the situation and stoke our false sense of control. Even complaining, in a way, is a version. (95)

We may continue to avoid addressing or acknowledging a harmful barrier so long as it isn't harmful to us. It protects ourselves regardless of the damage it is causing to others. (97)

Sometimes we confuse discomfort with being direct. (97)

When other people don't behave in a way that makes sense to us, it's because they're busy behaving in the ways that make sense to them. (100)

Testing assumptions can also feel risky because doing so could validate the very reason we are avoiding the situation to begin with. (100)

Be curious: with yourself; about others; with others. To be curious requires intellectual humility (113-4).

The prime zone of curiosity falls in the space between knowing nothing and thinking we know it all. (116)

Sometimes people will hide judgments, frustrations, or accusations behind a question mark. (117)

### **Curiosity Entails:**

- Getting curious about others is an invitation, not a prescription.
- Being open to possible perspectives you haven't considered.
- Opening ourselves up to changing our minds.
- Collaboration and cocreation.
- Isn't to fill in their stories, but it is to consider that they have a story.
- Isn't to amplify their needs and dismiss our own.

- Should never be weaponized or used as a way to excuse harmful or toxic behavior. (142)

To prepare for the conversation is not about what you are going to say, but to define what the goal of this conversation is. (156) Conversations should provide: clarity, changes, closure. (158)

Although our intuition as humans is fairly accurate, our interpretation of a situation may not be. (171)

Mantras: Exploration over exasperation. Reactions are about others, not me. Regulate the heat. Hold steady. Acknowledge, appreciate, repeat. (180)

The more experience we have, the more likely we are to overestimate our competence. (186)

Ignoring or minimizing your power does not remove that power. (188)

If people don't trust you, they're likely not going to tell you they don't, even when you ask. (192)

Ignoring is not a loftier stance; it's a lack of empathy and understanding. (199)

Often what we expect of other people is different from how we show up. (213)

Understanding doesn't have to mean agreeing. (238)

**Path choices:** Accept, Adjust, Avoid. (241)

Difference between unsafe and uncomfortable. Taking the time to get curious about yourself can make things clearer. Clarity leads to conviction, and conviction leads to courage. (244)

'The pain will push you until the vision pulls you.' [Sharna Fey] (246)