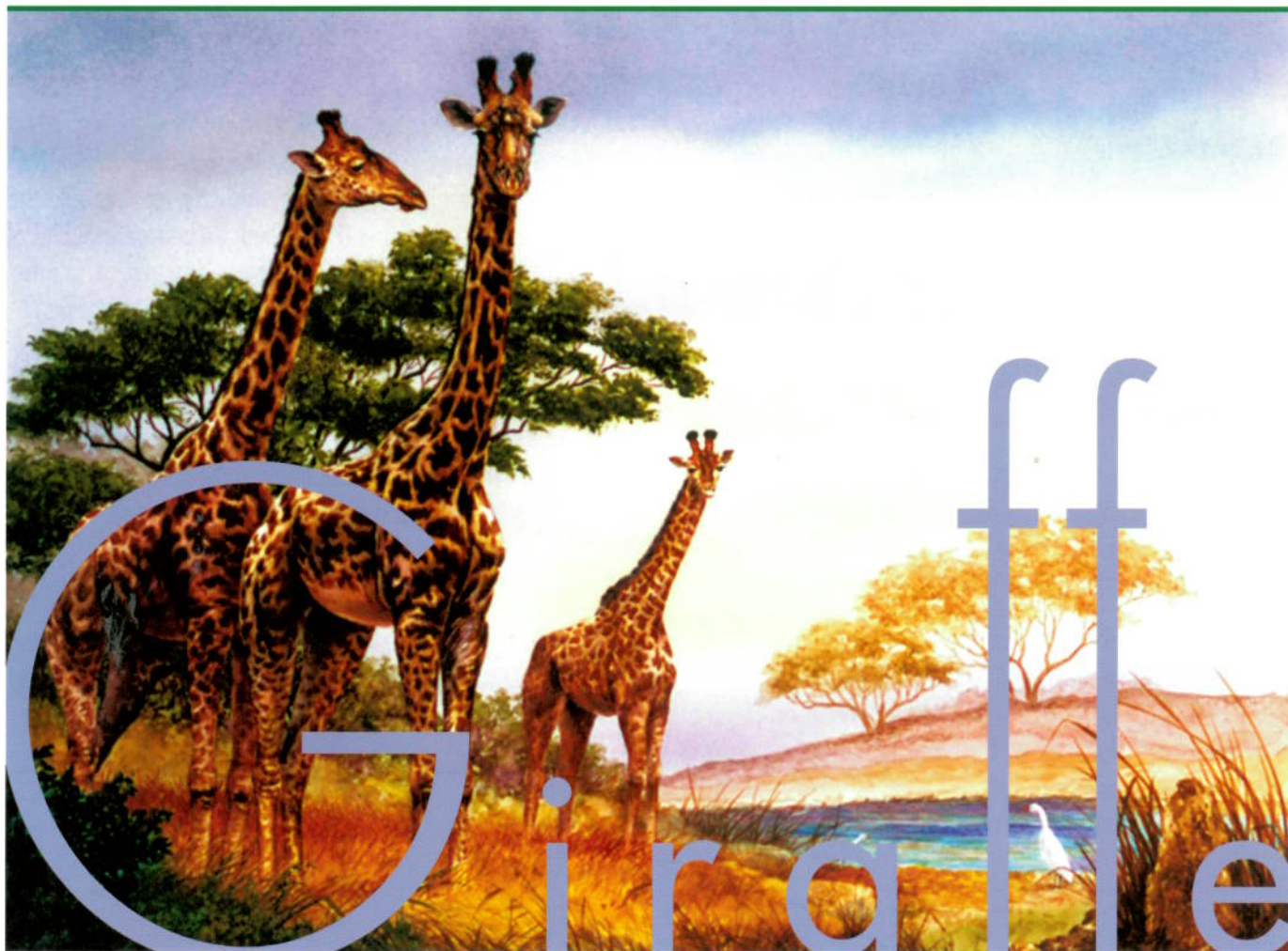




## Availability in Nature



**S**tanding almost 20 feet tall, a giraffe can see over a mile away. Its lofty height and keen eyesight give it a special ability to see needs. More importantly, giraffes don't just *see* needs, but they are also available to *meet* them.

Giraffes live in herds, which offer more protection than living alone. However, a herd requires every member to look out not only for its own interests, but also for the interests and well-being of others. Whenever help is needed, giraffes stop what they are doing to make themselves available.

Even when eating, giraffes remain available. The giraffe's diet is largely made up of acacia leaves. Because its

neck is so long, it reaches into the top of an acacia tree and bites off a clump of leaves. It must be careful, though, not to bury its head to the point where it can't see what happens around it.

After all, availability isn't hiding, but helping. That's why giraffes take a bite, then look around. They take another bite, and look around again.

Giraffes also seem glad, not mad, for the chance to serve. Every few days, giraffes leave together in search of food and water. To travel faster, they leave their young giraffes behind under the care of one or two older giraffes.

These guardians serve as babysitters while the mothers are away. All the giraffes take turns watching the young.

No one seems to mind; it's simply part of being available.

Giraffes also remain ready to help—ready *now* rather than later. When drinking at a lake, giraffes spread their front legs in an awkward position for their mouths to reach the water, making them especially vulnerable to attack. However, giraffes are always ready to help. When everyone's head goes down to the water, at least one giraffe pops its head up. When its head goes down, another one lifts its head in response. They never let a moment slip by unprotected. When giraffes need help, any delay could result in disaster.

Finally, young giraffes are careful not to leave the herd without the supervision of an older giraffe. Though some-



thing may seem urgent, young giraffes always move under the protection of their parent or guardian. Receiving permission avoids getting themselves into serious trouble.

## Not Hiding, But Helping

Let's see how availability might look in a classroom. (Introduce three helpers to assist in a role play.)

Let's imagine a teacher and student settling into their seats at school. They just finished learning what *available* means, and the teacher asks, "Who will show *availability*?"

"I will!" the student replies, confident he knows everything there is to know about availability.

Let's put this student to the test. Imagine a school librarian entering the classroom. (Librarian enters with arms full of books.) "Excuse me," the librarian says, "I need help shelving books in the library. Would one of your students be available to lend me a hand?"

(When the student hears the librarian's request, he hides behind his book and slides farther behind his desk.)

Is our student showing availability? Clearly not. He is hiding instead of helping. Availability doesn't find a way *out* of work, but finds a way to *make* things work for other people. It is like the giraffe that doesn't hide its head in a tree, but finds a way to help instead.

## Not Mad, But Glad

Let's sit the student back down and try again. The librarian enters the classroom and asks, "I need help shelving a load of books. Would one of your students be available to help me?"

(This time the student slowly stands to help and reluctantly drags himself toward the librarian. He looks bored and upset, complaining all the way.)

Is the student showing availability? No. Availability is more than just helping—it is being glad, not mad, for the chance to serve. It is like giraffes that each take their turn to babysit younger giraffes. Everyone does his or her part with a *cheerful* attitude.

## Not Later, But Now

Most people wouldn't guess there is so much to being available. Let's try the scene again to see how our student does. Imagine the librarian entering the room for the third time. "Would one of your students be available to help me?" she asks the teacher.

(The student immediately looks up and replies with enthusiasm. "Just a minute," he asks while he finishes making a paper airplane. The librarian looks at her watch while the student makes her wait, and wait, and wait.)

Is the student being available yet? No! While he isn't hiding and seems glad to help, he is too busy to help when the librarian needs him. By the time he is ready, he may lose his opportunity. It is like a group of giraffes when drinking water. If they aren't ready when it's their turn, they may be too late and put the whole herd in danger. Availability is being ready to help *now*, not later.

## Not Assuming, But Asking

Perhaps the student can get it right this time. The librarian enters the room once again and asks, "Can anyone help me with these books?"

(Immediately, the student stands up, and runs over to the librarian. He takes the books, and as he leaves the room, he announces to his teacher that he will be back in an hour.)

As willing as the young man is to help, is he being available the right way? No. While ready, glad, and certainly not hiding, he forgot to ask permission from his teacher, assuming he could be gone for an hour. It's much like a young giraffe that wanders from its group without supervision. A helpful student can do more damage than good by neglecting to ask permission from the right person.

## Not Self, But Others

There is much to remember about availability: It is not hiding, but helping. It is not mad, but glad. It is not helping later, but now. It is not assuming, but asking.

Let's see if he can put all these points into practice and be completely available to the librarian. Imagine the librarian entering the room one last time. "Excuse me," she says, "Would one of your students be available to help me shelve some books?"

The teacher turns to the student and asks, "Would you like to help in the library for a while?"

"I would be glad to," he says, "if it's all right with you."

The teacher grants permission, and the student stands to help without waiting or complaining. Has he passed the test? Yes, he has! He has learned to put *others* ahead of himself.