

Difficult Conversations

**A Leader's Toolkit for High-Stakes
Conversations**

SAMS - 2024



MLDS Facilitator:

Annette Cozort

Leadership Specialist

ATLL (Agency for Teaching, Leading, & Learning)

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#MLDSChat



Annette Cozort

- **Family: Married to Jeff**
- **2 Children**
- **3 Grands**
- **3 Fur Babies**

- **All in Missouri**
- **Teacher 16 years K-6**
- **Principal 15 years PK-4**

- **Missouri State University**
MLDS Leadership Specialist
9 years



MLDS Facilitator:

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Leadership Specialist

ATLL (Agency for Teaching, Leading, & Learning)

@klfreeman

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Kevin Freeman

- **Married to Della**
 - **Children 3 + 2**
 - **Furry friends 4 & 3**
 - **Buzzy friends - 3 hives**
- **All in Missouri**
- **Teacher 13 years 8-12**
 - **Biology/Life Sciences**
 - **Football, Wrestling, Track**
- **Administration 16 years**
 - **Principal, Ass't Supt, Supt**
- **State Dept of Ed: 2 years**
- **Missouri State University**
 - **MLDS Leadership Specialist - 5 years**



Springfield

MO



Missouri State

UNIVERSITY



SILVER DOLLAR CITY®

ATTRACTIONS



Kevin Freeman
Annette Cozort

Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS)

What is MLDS?

Competency-based training and support for school leaders from aspiring to retiring aligned with five domains of effective leadership.

The **Transformational** Principal is...



SUPPORT FOR LEADERS from ASPIRING TO RETIRING!

Outcomes for Today's Learning



- Identify types of difficult conversations
- Steps to prepare
- Having the conversation (application)
- Take away tools to use
- Tips for Success (Legal Implications, Active Listening, Strategies)

Resource document(s)

MLDS
MISSOURI LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Types of Conversations

Principal to Student <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prepare to talk. Write no more than 3 sentences clearly stating the real issue. Write the goal of the conversation.2. Design and deliver your ABC message. (Accurate, Brief, Clear)3. Stop talking and start listening.4. Respond (not react) powerfully.	Principal to Teacher/Staff <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prepare to talk. Write no more than 3 sentences clearly stating the real issue. Write the goal of the conversation.2. Design and deliver your ABC message. (Accurate, Brief, Clear)3. Stop talking and start listening.4. Respond (not react) powerfully.
Principal to Parent <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prepare to talk. Write no more than 3 sentences clearly stating the real issue. Write the goal of the conversation.2. Design and deliver your ABC message. (Accurate, Brief, Clear)3. Stop talking and start listening.4. Respond (not react) powerfully.	Principal to Central Office/BOE <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prepare to talk. Write no more than 3 sentences clearly stating the real issue. Write the goal of the conversation.2. Design and deliver your ABC message. (Accurate, Brief, Clear)3. Stop talking and start listening.4. Respond (not react) powerfully.

MLDS
MISSOURI LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Difficult Conversation Situation

(Be sure to inform your supervisor of the situation)

Is this your problem to solve?

Yes / No

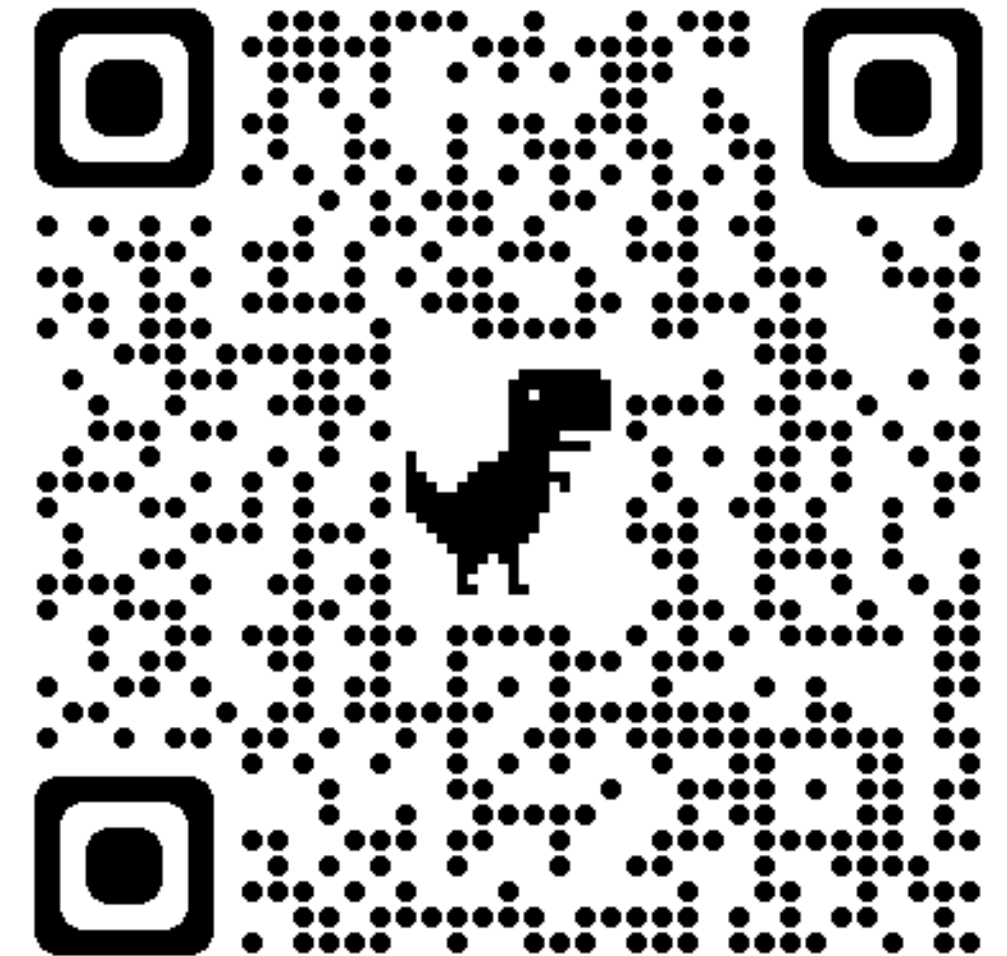
Who is the correct person?

1. Prepare to talk:
a. What is the real issue? (3 sentences or less)
b. What is your goal for the conversation?

2. Design and deliver your "ABC Message"
a. Make it Accurate, Brief, and Clear (ABC)
b. Write out the sentences you will use for beginning this conversation.

3. Stop talking and start listening.
Once you have delivered your ABC message, listen without interrupting.

4. Respond (not react) powerfully.
Respond confidently, concisely, and only with accurate, justifications, or blame.



Tips for Successful Communication

- Adopt the 5:1 rule- Five positive interactions for every one negative
- Practice genuine, active appreciation of good work
- Be humble and apologize when needed
- Master the art of saying, “I’m sorry!”
**With sincerity *Without shame or guilt*
- Never stop trying....even if they are defensive or wary of your intentions.



*I'm
Sorry!*

Identify Your MOST Difficult Conversations

- Principal to Teacher/Staff
- Principal to Student
- Principal to Parents
- Principal to Central Office or BOE



More **Conversation Topics**

Delivering bad news

Delivering sad news

Addressing rude or disrespectful behavior

Addressing poor work performance

Pointing out poor personal hygiene

Saying no; turning down a request

Disagreeing with supervisor

Ways we AVOID the Conversation

- Delaying dealing with the issue
- Blaming others
- Side-stepping the issue
- Short-term overrides the long term
- Delegating to someone else
- Harmony before integrity

The most common tactic: Silence

- **Silence** about a known problem can have unintended consequences
- **Silence** signals to the person that the behavior is acceptable (or even good)
- **Silence** about an important issue eventually leads to a blow-up



WHY?

I'm already overwhelmed. Why should I spend time on **Difficult Conversations** ?

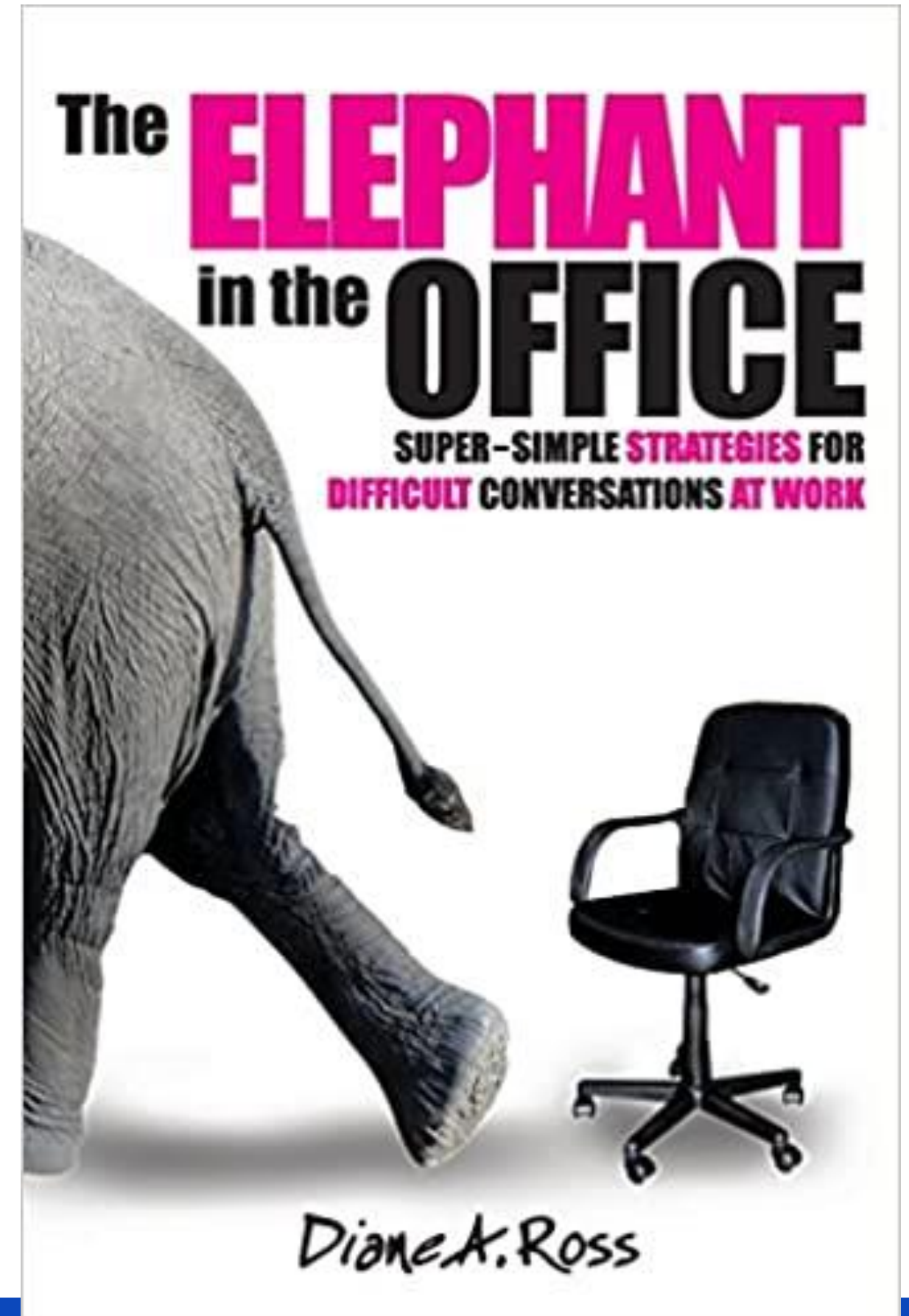
- You know you're going to have them - why not *proactively prepare*
- Develop a skill set for *increasing relationships* among stakeholders
- Learn to address an issue or concern - *before* they become bigger problems
- **Model** appropriate relationship skills
- Learn skills to *de-escalate tense situations*



Be
brave

Need a Resource?

- A guide to developing **STRUCTURED** conversations ...
- About difficult topics ...
- Related to personnel management issues...
- That most people find uncomfortable ...
- And often handle badly.





Anchor Scenario

You hear that a veteran teacher is not following through with her obligations that the team agreed upon. This is an ongoing issue and team cohesiveness is at stake.

The Four Basic Steps



1. Prepare THE CONVERSATION
2. Design and Deliver THE "ABC" MESSAGE
3. Stop Talking and Start LISTENING
4. RESPOND Powerfully

1. PREPARE THE CONVERSATION

Define the Problem

- What is the person saying or doing (or not saying or not doing) that is causing a problem?
 - *Why* is it a problem?
- Separate fact from fiction.
 - Be real about what is going on.
- What are my assumptions, judgments and beliefs?
 - Separate these from the facts.



1. PREPARE THE CONVERSATION



If you can't clearly define the problem, you can't open up a conversation about resolving the problem

- Write it down in 3 sentences
- Stick to the facts
- Determine your conversation goal





Anchor Scenario

You hear that a veteran teacher is not following through with her obligations that the team agreed upon. This is an ongoing issue and team cohesiveness is at stake.



1. PREPARE THE CONVERSATION
- 2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE "ABC" MESSAGE**
3. Stop Talking and Start LISTENING
4. Respond Powerfully

Step 2. Designing & Delivering the ABC Message

2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE “ABC” MESSAGE

Designing your ABC Message

Accurate

Brief

Clear

✓ Stick to the Facts!

✓ Be Specific

x Avoid exaggeration

x Avoid opinions

x Avoid judgemental language

x Avoid blaming

x Avoid emotionally charged language

2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE “ABC” MESSAGE

Designing your ABC Message

- Accurate **✓ 30 seconds**
- Brief** **✓ Decide what is most important**
- Clear **x Avoid lengthy explanations or justifications**

2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE “ABC” MESSAGE

Designing your ABC Message

Accurate

Brief

Clear

✓ Get straight to the issue

✗ Avoid prolonging the problem with stories or chit-chat

✓ Give diplomacy a rest

✗ Avoid waffling, equivocating, blaming, and feedback sandwiches

✗ Avoid a Wolf In Sheep’s Clothing

2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE “ABC” MESSAGE

Delivering your ABC Message

Anticipate

Set the Stage

✓ **Anticipate the reaction**

✓ **Be prepared for various responses**

✓ **Know your triggers**

✓ **Be ready to respond rather than react**

2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE “ABC” MESSAGE

Delivering your ABC Message

- Anticipate
- Set the Stage**
 - Ask permission**
 - Ask about timing**
 - Convey respect for their time**
 - Choose the right time**
 - Wait until you are calm**
 - Avoid delaying**
 - Choose the right place**
 - Put yourself in their shoes**
 - Consider comfort**




Anchor Scenario

You hear that a veteran teacher is not following through with her obligations that the team agreed upon. This is an ongoing issue and team cohesiveness is at stake.



1. PREPARE THE CONVERSATION
2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE "ABC" MESSAGE
- 3. Stop Talking and Start LISTENING**
4. Respond Powerfully

Step 3. Stop Talking and Start LISTENING



“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

— Sir Winston Churchill

3. Stop Talking and Start LISTENING

Goal:

- To understand what other people *have heard* and to *be clear* about *their perspectives*
- To be aware the other person needs time to *process* your message and *respond*



Tools to Better Listening

1. Turn the conversation over
2. Embrace silence
3. Listen with curiosity
4. Calm your inner voice
5. Aware of your body language



Defensiveness & Moments

FREAK OUT

Defensiveness: excessively concerned with guarding against the *real* or *imagined threat* of criticism, injury to one's ego or exposure of one's shortcomings.

Dictionary.com



Fight Flight Fold

Tools to Stay Cool

Take some DEEP BREATHS

Watch the drama - DON'T PARTICIPATE

Avoid “the hook”

Adopt and PRACTICE a calming mantra

Learn to anticipate reactions - KNOW YOUR PEEPS





Anchor Scenario

You hear that a veteran teacher is not following through with her obligations that the team agreed upon. This is an ongoing issue and team cohesiveness is at stake.



1. PREPARE THE CONVERSATION
2. DESIGN & DELIVER THE "ABC" MESSAGE
3. Stop Talking and Start LISTENING
4. **Respond Powerfully**

Step 4. Respond Powerfully

4. Respond Powerfully

- Resist the urge to react and become defensive
- Stay calm, quiet and in the moment
- Be concise and confident

Design your “stay cool” techniques in advance.

What's your plan?





Anchor Scenario

You hear that a veteran teacher is not following through with her obligations that the team agreed upon. This is an ongoing issue and team cohesiveness is at stake.

Is this a legal issue?

- **Talk to your superintendent or supervisor**
- **Document using facts, dates, timeline**
- **Know and follow board policy, follow the chain of command**
- **Follow up**

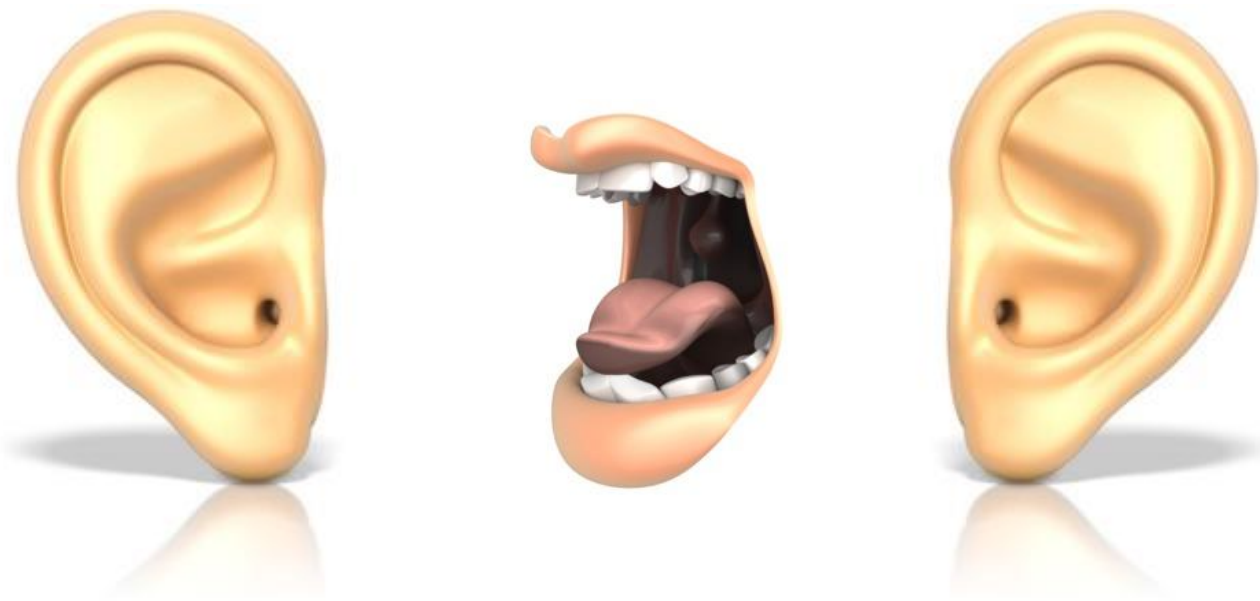




Rephrasing Ideas

Discuss how you might rephrase these statements

Linked in the QR code



Instead of saying this...	Say this...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I guess you misunderstood me. Let me explain again." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "It sounds like I have not explained myself very well. What can I clarify?"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I am being fair and my decision is final." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "It sounds like you feel I'm being unfair. I have a different perspective."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I disagree." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I have a different perspective."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I'm sorry you took it that way." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I can understand why that would bother you."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Do you think deadlines don't matter?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I have been frustrated lately with the number of occasions recently you have committed to doing something and not completed it."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "You know I think you're an amazing teacher and there is no easy way to say this. Central Office has decided to give the job to someone else. Maybe we can work on your performance to get you ready next time. Don't worry, there will be something else around the corner." (You keep talking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "There is no easy way to say this. You did not get the promotion. It was decided that the person chosen was a match for our current needs. I know this is disappointing news." (Stop talking)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel it is inappropriate to send text messages in meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you text during meetings, I am concerned it sends the message that you aren't interested in what we are discussing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are always late with your grades! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let's talk about what kind of plan we can put in place to ensure students receive grades on time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How dare you speak to me like that? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm feeling really reactive right now and I think that if we carry on, I might say or do something I will regret. I'm going to take a few minutes to cool down.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
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What is your scenario?

Your plan?



Takeaways

Need a Resource?

From one of our Missouri Principals - Documents she developed to help her teachers make parent contacts.

Credit:

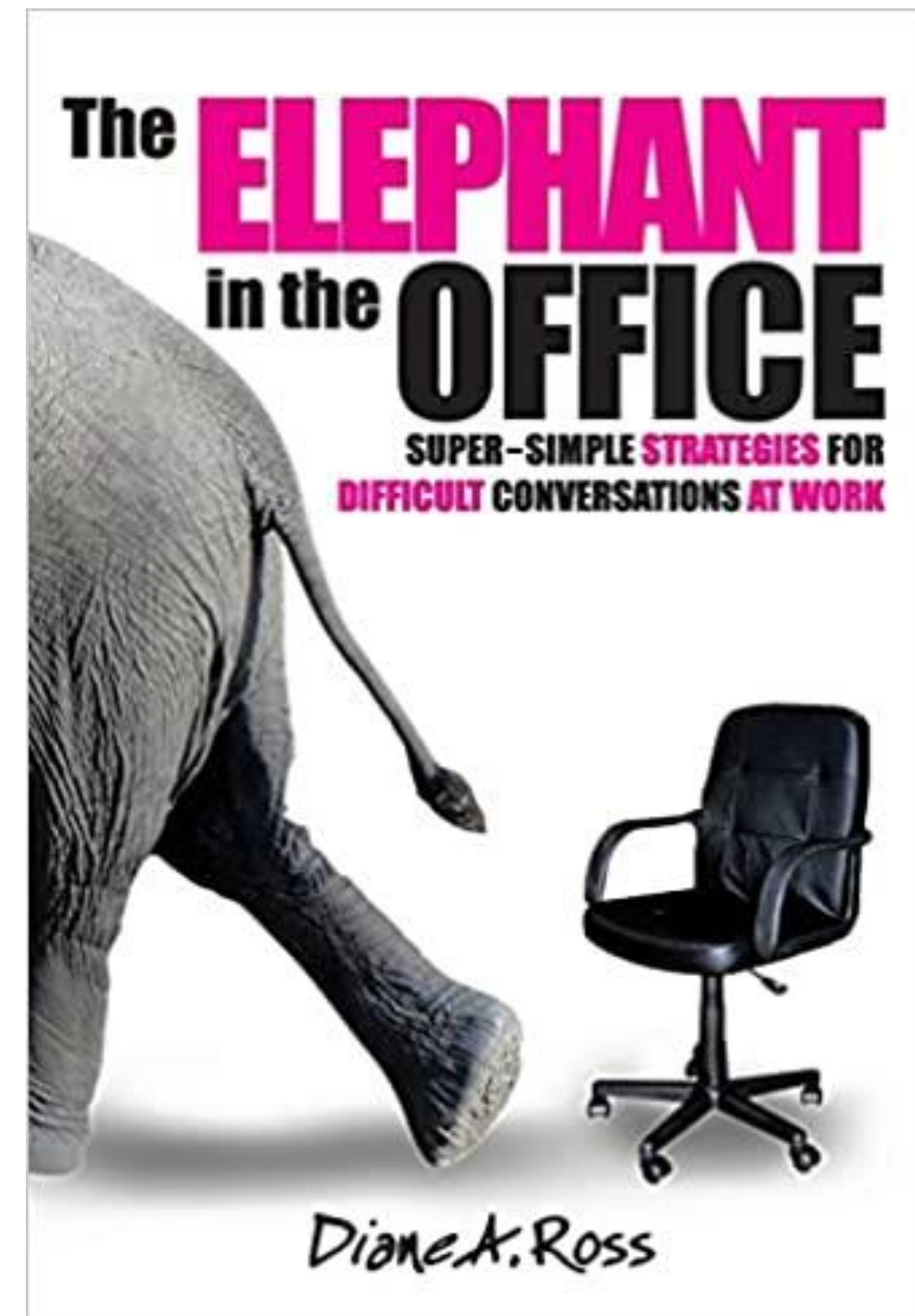
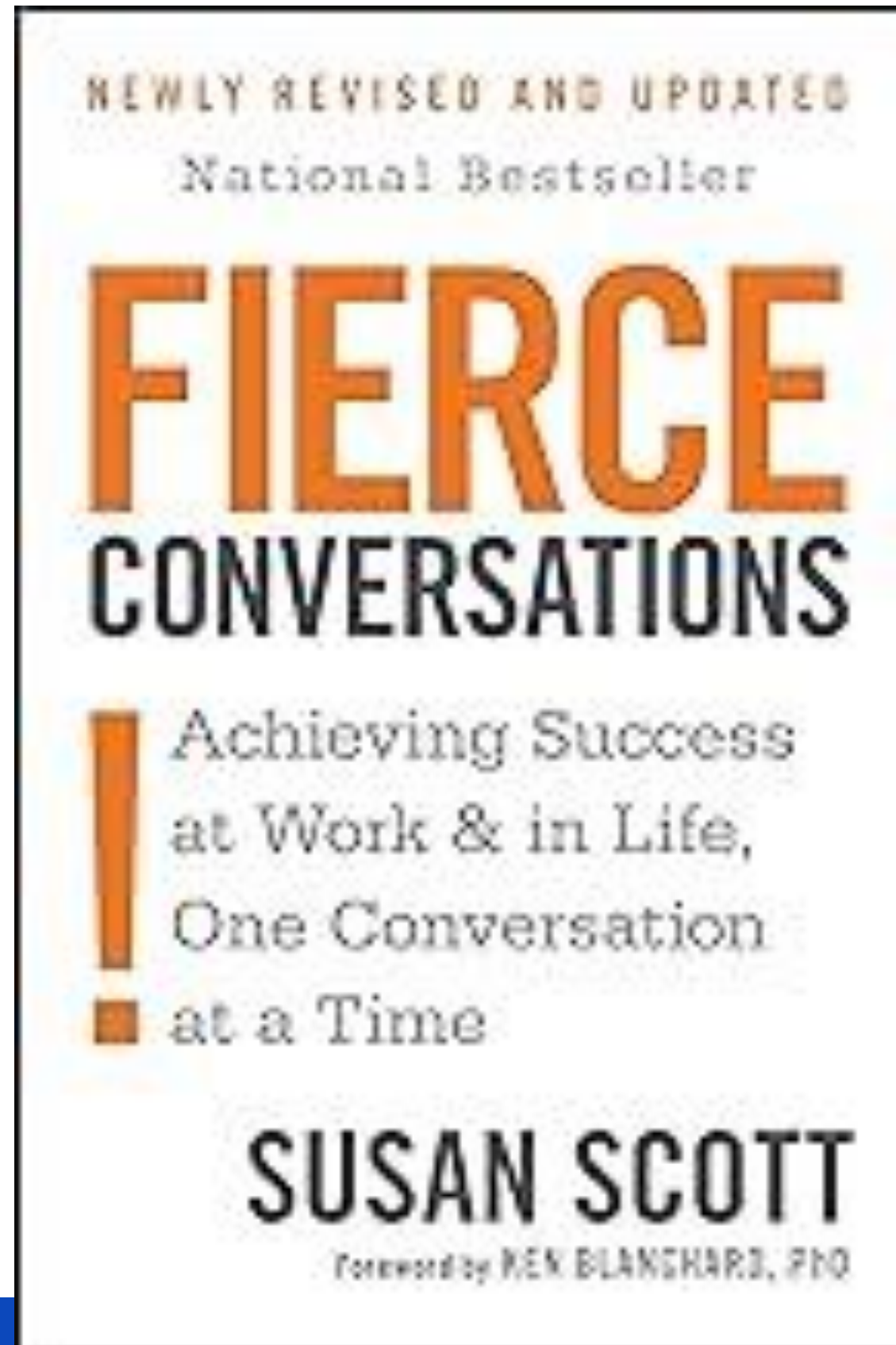
Amy Thomas Ed.S

Principal

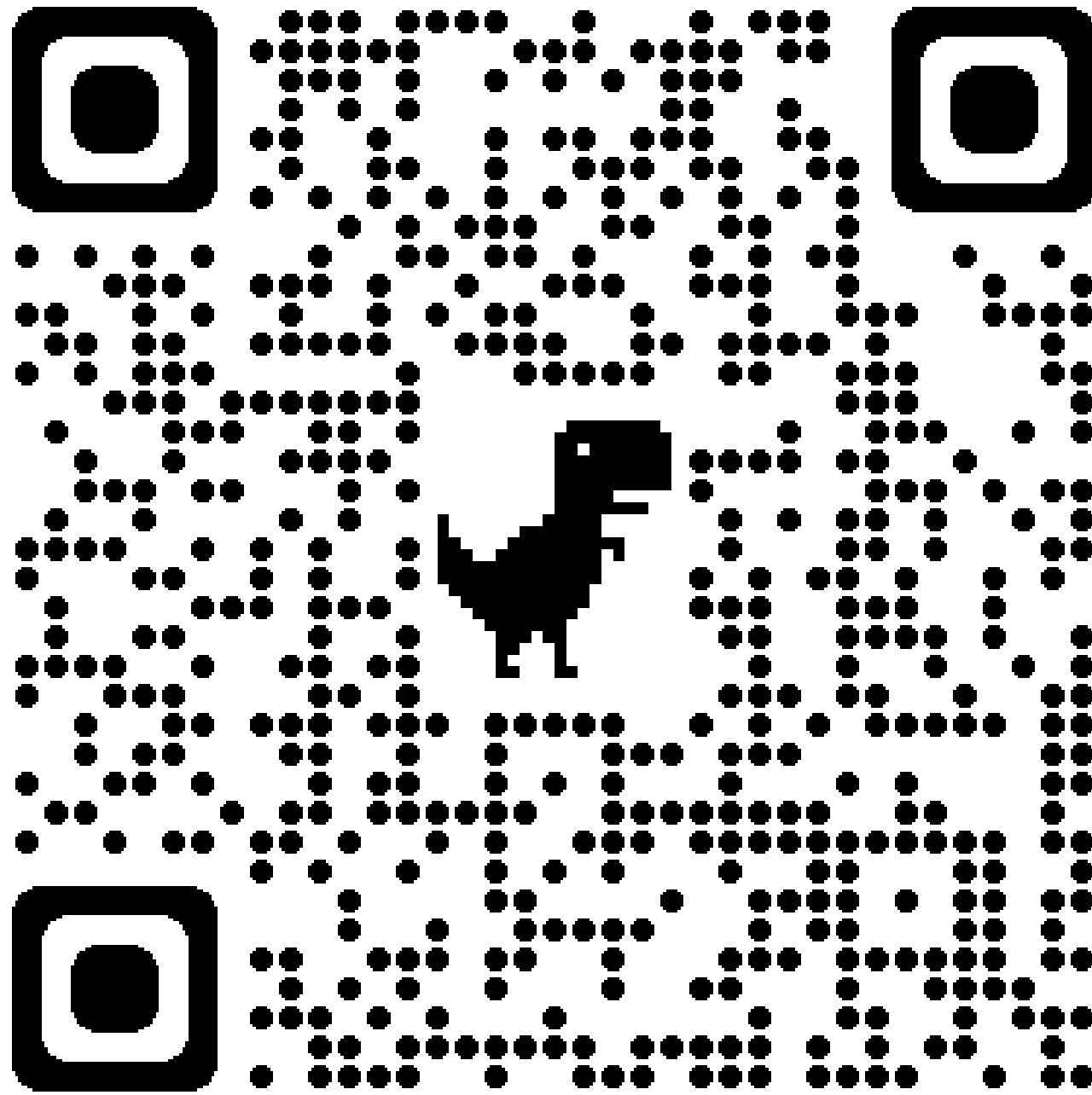
Nixa Junior High School

(417) 724-6400

Phone Call and Parent Contact “mini”
course slide decks



Need a
Resource?



Same QR code as from before. Contains links to all the documents in this presentation. Including the presentation itself.

*Thank you!
Annette & Kevin*



MISSOURI LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM



Enjoy the Conference!

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