



Difficult Conversations with Roberta Matuson

Episode #41

Listen to the podcast or read the show notes on lisalarter.com/shetalksbusiness

Lisa Larter (00:01):

Welcome to, She Talks Business. If you're an entrepreneur, business owner or aspiring mogul, chances are you want to learn more about marketing and mastering and monetizing your business. She Talks Business is where you'll learn all of that and more. My name is Lisa Larter and I'm an entrepreneur, high school dropout, wiener dog enthusiast and your host. Let's get started.

Lisa Larter (00:24):

Hello everyone and welcome to She Talks Business. We have a special guest today, Roberta Matuson, and she is the author of two books. Well, she's the author of many books, but the two books that we're going to talk about on this conversation are her newest book, *Can We Talk?: Seven Principles for Managing Difficult Conversations at Work*. And we're also going to talk about *Suddenly in Charge*. We have a really great conversation around having difficult conversations and things that business owners need to think about when it comes to how we communicate, how we manage expectations with people, why it's important that we're direct and clear, and that we all have the courage to have some of these conversations that are really more challenging in the workplace. We also talk a little bit about managing and how do you manage up versus how do you manage down. And why thinking of yourself as a leader in your business and not just an entrepreneur is a critical part of how you lead, communicate and foster an environment where it is okay to have difficult conversations. I hope you really enjoy this show.

Lisa Larter (01:41):

All right, so I am here with Roberta and we are going to have a conversation about difficult conversations based on her new book, *Can We Talk?: Seven Principles for Managing Difficult Conversations at Work*. And while I have not



read every page of this book, I have read her seven step framework and all of the sub points, and I have skimmed through the book and stuck a bunch of post-it notes in it for things that really stick out for me, because communication is such an important part of everything we do in business. Whether it's a communication that we're having with a member of our team, a member of our family, or even the communication that we use when we are emailing someone or sending out a marketing bullet or commenting on Facebook. It's all communication and that communication leaves people feeling ... the recipient of that communication feeling a certain way. And so, Roberta, thank you for saying yes to having a conversation with me about your new book.

Roberta Matuson (02:51):

Well, thank you for inviting me.

Lisa Larter (02:54):

So Roberta and I are actually recording this interview for the second time, and I want to acknowledge that for a couple of reasons. We set the podcast up according to seasons and I was trying to make the conversation with Roberta fit into the money, measurements and metrics season, because there is a financial impact to not having open, honest dialogue in the workplace. And when someone on my team listened to our conversation, the feedback that they gave me is they really wanted to hear more about how to have difficult conversations and less about money and the financial impact. And so Roberta was gracious enough to say yes to recording this again.

Lisa Larter (03:39):

And so I share that with you for two reasons. One, I want to acknowledge Roberta for giving me her time twice. And two, for those of you who think that recording a podcast is easy and they all turn out perfect every single time, I want you to know that that's not always true. Sometimes we have to have a do-over. So Roberta, I want to just start with talking a little bit about the research that you have on page eight, because there really are some financial metrics that are connected to conversations in the workplace. And I'm wondering if you can just talk to us a little bit about that high level. Because I want people to understand there is an emotional, a psychological, an energetic, and a financial cost to having and/or avoiding difficult conversations. And I say having, if you're not having them effectively, the

cost is much higher than if you actually use some of the things, the strategies that you've outlined in this book to engage in something difficult.

Roberta Matuson (04:53):

Well, the studies have shown consistently over time that the people who are avoiding difficult conversations at work, which are many of us, the cost both personally and professionally is a lot greater than we think. And so in organizations, it's not just the financial cost, it's also the cost of the time. So I mean, how many times or how much time are we each spending thinking about, oh my gosh, I really need to have this conversation? Oh my God, this person is going down the hall, I think I should go the other way. I mean, we're talking thousands of hours collectively of time that could be better utilized if you knew how to have a productive conversation and you had that conversation.

Lisa Larter (05:45):

Yeah. I'm even thinking about the lost hours of sleep when people are lying in bed thinking about conversations that they want to have and the potential stress and anxiety that that creates. Why do you think as a society ... Like in your book, it says that 53% of employees are handling toxic situations by ignoring them. Because I read that stat and it doesn't surprise me at all. I'm surprised the stat is that low. But then I also look at the opposite and I look at the toxic commentary that I see on social media, where people are not afraid. They're not afraid to be keyboard cowboys and get into really difficult conversations there. So why is it that you think people struggle so much with having face-to-face difficult conversations?

Roberta Matuson (06:42):

I think that most people have no idea how to start these conversations. Because when you start these conversations and when you get them going, they're always a lot easier than you anticipated. But the idea of like, well, I don't even know how to start this. I don't even know what to say. That's scary. And I've been there. And as you know, I've written about in the book some of the situations that I've been in, where I have been in toxic work situations. And most of us feel pretty helpless. And so if you don't have a therapist, it's sort of like, okay, what do I do? And so if you're like most people, you just keep your head down and you just do your work and you hope and pray that this person leaves you alone. And they rarely do.

Lisa Larter (07:36):

Yeah. I'm trying to think of, I remember a time when I still worked in my corporate job and I read a book called *The Art of War* and it was the original, it was written by Clavell. It was one of the original interpretations of *The Art of War*. And there was this senior person on my team. And it didn't matter what I said. If I said we need to hire 10 people, he would say we don't need to hire anybody. If I said we don't need to hire anybody, he would say we need to hire 10 people. He was more interested in being right than us doing right. And when I read this book, *The Art of War*, I actually learned, this is going to sound awful, how to manipulate him. I remember I had a situation that I was dealing with HR on, and it was related to some of the work that his team did. He was in charge of Operations.

Lisa Larter (08:31):

And I went to his office and I literally sat across the desk and positioned the conversation as needing to get his counsel. I wanted his input. I wanted his opinion on how I should handle this situation. And, oh my God, Roberta, all of a sudden he became my new best friend. He went into the den and fought every battle for me. But if I had gone into his office and I had told him what I thought we should do, he would have thought we should do something different. Because he was so attached to being right that he couldn't hear what someone else had to say, even when it was right. But when I approached the conversation from a place of inquiry instead of advocating what I needed, he always ended up telling me the very thing that I needed. And so by letting him be right, it made everything that I needed to get done a lot easier. Probably not a great example of a difficult conversation, but it worked great.

Roberta Matuson (09:33):

No, it actually is a great example because in the book, *Can We Talk?*, I talk about why the need to be right is, oh, so wrong. And I talk about doing exactly what you did and instead of trying to be right about everything. So let's just say some of your listeners are like, oh my gosh, that sounds like me, I'm the person who always has to be right. I talk about how being open and listening and taking the approach if you're on the other end of that conversation, that you just took, of asking for counsel and seeking advice and being curious. I mean, that's the way to establish a relationship. And so you

took what was a toxic relationship and you actually made it into a relationship that allowed you to work through something.

Roberta Matuson (10:26):

Now, did you invite this guy to your wedding? Probably not. That's okay. You don't need your boss or even your coworker, other manager in your department, you don't need them to be your BFF, your best friend. You just need to have a productive relationship so that you can come to work every day and feel like you're making a contribution and not feel like you're miserable.

Lisa Larter (10:54):

Yeah. And for me, when I learned that strategy and I kept employing that strategy, all of a sudden this person who was always my nemesis became my ally. And he actually made a lot of things happen for me with a lot greater ease because he was senior to me. And so it really did change the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship because I learned how to communicate his way. And so I think that sometimes we as people are entrenched in communicating our way. I know in one of the pages in the book, page 69, you talk about being direct. And I'm a very direct communicator, but that doesn't always work. So sometimes what people will tell me is that I'm intimidating or they think they're in trouble because I'm so direct and clear in my communication. We all have different communication styles. How do you recommend listeners really get clear on their style and where their opportunity for improvement is?

Lisa Larter (12:17):

So I'm going to give you an example with me. Because I am very direct, I make a point of telling everyone on my team that when I'm communicating something to them, they're not in "trouble." Because people are like, oh, I thought I was in trouble. You're never in trouble. If I have a concern with your performance, I will use the words, "I have a concern with your performance and we need to have a conversation about it." I will actually be that clear with those words so you know this is serious. This isn't just feedback, this is an important change in shifting the conversation so you know now it is becoming problematic. I've had to do that so that I can make it

easier for people to know how my communication lands and whether or not it's just feedback or it's performance improvement feedback. So how do you recommend people look at their own styles and learn how to adapt them in ways that work better for them when it comes to communication?

Roberta Matuson (13:26):

Well, I mean, I'm like you, I'm very direct. I'm from New York and so I just lay it out there. But I have learned over the years that you have to look at the other person that you're speaking with and you have to figure out, okay, is the approach that I'm about to take, is that going to work for them? Just like if you had a boss who doesn't appreciate chit chat and you go in and you waste her time and you spend 15/20 minutes warming up the conversation. Pretty soon you're going to be kicked out of that office before you even get in there. So I think it's just really important to ... It's easy if you pay attention to soften your message. But I think the key is really paying attention and seeing how the other person is reacting.

Roberta Matuson (14:22):

And in my experience, we're so worried about what are we going to say next that we're not looking, we're not listening. It's like, okay, and then she's going to say this and I'm going to say that. But you've got to just slow down and just take in the environment that you're in and practice. It takes a lot of practice to do what you're doing now with your employees. I'm sure the first time you went in and said it, it probably didn't just roll off your tongue like, you're not in trouble. You're like, you're not in trouble. And that's a different tone.

Lisa Larter (14:58):

Right. Absolutely. So, difficult conversations come in all different shapes and sizes. And I have been coaching someone on my team lately on managing expectations, or not managing expectations, default management. And so I use default management a lot with people that are busy. If I don't hear back from you by such and such a date or such and such a time, this is what I'm going to do. And so I'm always reasonable in the timeframes that I give people, but I will default manage to keep things moving inside of the business. And so I am trying to teach my team members to default manage

with our clients in order to be able to keep things moving forward, and there are some people who are afraid they're going to upset the client by doing that.

Lisa Larter (15:58):

So when you think about difficult conversations, to me, saying, hey, Roberta, I'm going to go ahead and place the order for those stickers by noon tomorrow if I don't hear back from you before then isn't really a threatening conversation. But that's me. But for someone else who is telling themselves a story that, oh my gosh, I can't say that to you, you might be upset. How do you help people ease into the conversations that they're making more difficult than they really need to be?

Roberta Matuson (16:31):

Well, I would ask that person, this is how ... If I were you, I would say, this is how I would frame it, how would you be comfortable framing this? The end result is we want to move this task on, we want to get it off of our list, we want to get it to the client on time. Here's how I would do it, here's what I would say, how would you like to frame this? Because it's interesting, they may actually have a better way to frame it that may be more customer friendly than you have. And they may be more comfortable with that. And I always say to people that I'm coaching, listen, this is my style, these are my words. You're welcome to use them, you're welcome to not use them, dismiss what I say. You're welcome to put this in your own voice and I would encourage you to do that. So there are many, many ways to say the same thing to get the same result. And what feels right for you might feel not so right for them.

Lisa Larter (17:35):

Right. So for the people who are listening to this show, most of the people that listen to this show own their own business. And so the difficult conversations that they have are either most likely client conversations or conversations with their team. And when I say conversations with their team, most of our listeners are small business owners and they likely have a handful of employees. And if not, they are working with freelancers or independent contractors. So when I think about those types of people and I think about some of the difficult conversations that come up, one is always around money. So money could be money in terms of having a difficult conversation

where you are chasing down payment from a client who hasn't paid you, or you are having to negotiate a fee with a client. You're afraid you're not going to get the business if you price yourself too high or whatever, or you take it personally if they try to negotiate.

Lisa Larter (18:36):

And then the other difficult conversation is typically from having a conversation with a team member about how much money they make. Because you may feel that they should only make X and they may feel they need to make Y, and then there's discomfort there. So do you have any tips on how to approach difficult conversations when it comes to money? Because money tends to add a whole other element, I feel, to conversations to make them harder in people's minds.

Roberta Matuson (19:07):

Well, first I would say, do your homework. So let's talk about money. It's very fascinating to me right now the employment market. And since a number of your listeners have employees, they need to be aware that things have dramatically changed since last year. And I'll give you an example. My son is graduating from college in June and he is a co-op student and he and his friends who also worked for the same co-op employer, they're doing their homework and they know he is ... I also should say, he is a computer programmer. So they're really in demand right now. And he and his friends know exactly how much the co-op students last year got as far as compensation when they were asked to stay on full-time. And let me tell you, he was blown away, as was I, because this year's offer was 33% higher than last year's offer.

Roberta Matuson (20:09):

And I just saw the look on your face, and you and I had the same look. And the signing bonuses were double. So the point I'm trying to make here is that you've got to do your homework. If you think that last year you hired somebody for a particular job at \$40,000 and now you're going to bump that up 3%, I'm going to tell you right now, you are not going to get the talent that you need because the salaries have gone ... they are sky high. So you've got to do your homework before you go in to have this conversation with somebody. If somebody says to you, I feel like I need more money and I deserve more money and here's why, and you have no idea that what you're

paying really isn't competitive anymore, then you're going to lose that conversation.

Lisa Larter (21:04):

Right. And then the other side of that is, businesses have to offset that increased cost in the revenues that they generate through customer sales. So it's not for a small business owner listening right here to increase their payroll spend by 33%, if they haven't increased their sales by 33% could leave them in hot water. I just did a podcast episode 31 called pricing for profit during inflation and I was talking about that exact thing with rising costs. If your pricing hasn't gone up, you are going to be in trouble.

Roberta Matuson (21:42):

And I just listened to that podcast and took note. And I was talking to a friend of mine the other day and I said, man, every single restaurant that I have been to in the last couple of months, I've noticed a pattern. They all have new menus, just newly printed menus. And each menu is significantly higher in price than what they were ... I mean, my husband and I would go out and we were like, usually for lunch maybe it'll cost 40 bucks. Now it's a 50, \$60 lunch. And so you're right, things have gone up considerably. And I know that the wages in the restaurant business and in retail have gone up, and I'm glad because I think they need it to go up and I'm more than willing to pay those higher prices. But you're right, and that just reminds me that I need to raise my fees.

Lisa Larter (22:42):

Right. But then the other side of that, Roberta, is having those conversations with a client. So how do you go to a client and say, hey, Roberta, that marketing that we do for you, we have to increase the fee by 20% or 30% because the work that ... We need to give our team members a raise in order for them to be able to afford to live with all of the things that are changing with inflation. Those conversations to me feel incredibly difficult. So pricing something at a higher level for a new client feels easy to me because they don't have a point of comparison. But how would you advise a small business owner to double back to a customer that is already doing business with them and to let them know that their rates are going up?

Roberta Matuson (23:42):

Well, I would think long and hard about raising a current customer's rates and I would do exactly what you said. And I would look at considerably raising my rates for new customers because they're your bread and butter. They've been with you, they've worked with you through the pandemic, they're probably low maintenance at this point because you've got them on autopilot. And so I would say I would start with the new customers and try to get my revenues there. The other thing I would certainly not do is tell your problems to the customer. Because on the other hand, the customer is like, well, you could take a little less money out of the business yourself and pay your people. So they don't really want to hear about your problems, they want to hear about what is the additional value that you're going to be offering them.

Roberta Matuson (24:38):

Because in, let's say your business, you know that there is inflation and you know that your clients need to bring in more money. So what are you as a business owner going to do? What are some extra little bennies you can throw in there to help them increase their revenues? So that when renewal time comes, they're like, yeah, that's okay. I get that it's gone up and it's worth every dime.

Lisa Larter (25:03):

Right. I think the difficulty is in approaching the conversation to say that a fee is going up. Because in some cases, business owners have no choice but to increase fees for their existing clients. So if you're a retailer, you're going to have to increase the price of your goods, regardless of whether somebody's shopped at your store for a decade or not. And so I'm not talking just specifically about my business, I'm talking about business owners in general and how they approach that, because it's a difficult conversation to have with someone.

Roberta Matuson (25:42):

Well, the good news for retailers is you have to be living under a rock if you're not reading about the supply chain issues and the impact that's having on pricing. I mean, I know when I go into my local store, if I shop small business, I know the prices are higher. I'm not going to complain to the

business owner because I know that their shipping costs have increased to get their products in. I know their labor costs have. But if you do have to have one of those conversations, and especially if you're a small business owner, I think it's better to have that conversation for a very valued client on the phone and not just send a form letter. Right?

Lisa Larter (26:24):

Right.

Roberta Matuson (26:25):

So I think that's the way to start the conversation and just say this was ... preface it by saying, this was a really hard decision that we needed to make. But in order to be here for you in the long run, here's what we have to do. And we hope that you'll stay with us. And I also think it's a good idea to give people advance notice and not say, as of next week you'll be paying 40% more.

Lisa Larter (26:54):

Yeah. I actually just had that happen. I had someone send me an invoice, an independent contractor, and they sent me an email along with the invoice to let me know that as of December, their fee would be going up by 25%. And so there was part of me that was kind of like, oh, wow. It landed a little bit funny for me in the sense that, do I think that they are worth what their new fee is? Yes, I do. Absolutely. Do I think that their original fee was maybe a bit low? Yeah. Absolutely. But the manner in which it was communicated, as being a recipient on the customer side, felt a little almost maybe abrupt. It felt like I'm being told. It just didn't feel, like you said, it didn't feel as smooth as maybe a phone conversation would have been. To say, hey, I just want to let you know my fees are going up as of such and such a date.

Lisa Larter (28:00):

I think 30 days notice is pretty short. I think if I was going to do a repricing in my business, I would probably give 60 to 90 days notice or something like that. And I think what I would probably do ... and in this case it's different because the person is billing hourly, is I would just reprice our programs. And say that, as of such and such a date, we're no longer offering our programs based on changes in the type of work we do and this is what our new suite of offerings looks like. And that way you can apply what I'm going to call shrinkflation to the offerings. And you can put the offerings together in such

a way that the customer can actually choose to stay within the same price range, but to have a different option than what they have today. Or they can choose to go up in price and have additional options provided to them. So that's definitely how I would do it.

Roberta Matuson (29:00):

I think that makes a lot of sense. And I think what's really interesting with what you just experienced, it to me would have made more sense for that person to say as of the 1st of the year.

Lisa Larter (29:13):

Yes. I agree.

Roberta Matuson (29:15):

Not like, oh, as of my birthday, I'm charging this. So yeah, I think there are some lessons that we can all learn from that.

Lisa Larter (29:26):

Yeah. But I also think it comes back to communicating those things is, it's a difficult conversation. It feels awkward, it feels uncomfortable. And so when things feel awkward and uncomfortable, we avoid them. And then we think about them and eventually it's like, we just blurt it out instead of actually doing what you recommend in the book, which is really think through what it is you want to talk about. I love how you talk about prepare for the worst and expect the best. So I think that when you prepare for the worst and expect the best, it can help you frame a conversation in a way that lands in the most favourable light for everyone involved.

Roberta Matuson (30:06):

Absolutely. And I think the preparation and knowing what your expectations are up front and being really clear. And I love what you said earlier, as far as when you have to have a performance conversation with somebody, it sounds like you're pretty clear. Are you having this conversation because you want to help this person improve? Or is this the first of a couple of conversations that you're using to exit them out of the organization? Because those are very different conversations.

Lisa Larter (30:38):

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I never want people walking around thinking that their job is on the line and I think I'm just coaching them. I think I'm just giving them feedback to help them improve, but they think they're going to get fired. Because as soon as somebody thinks they're going to get fired, what do they do? They look for a new job. And if I think I'm just coaching you and you're looking for a new job, then it's a lose-lose situation. Right?

Roberta Matuson (30:58):

Yes. We see that a lot.

Lisa Larter (31:01):

I'm sure. So I'm curious, I love that you talked about location for a difficult conversation in the book. Because I remember being a young person working in retail and I can remember a couple of different conversations that my bosses at the time had with me. I was a very young, impressionable woman at the time. And one of them had a difficult conversation with me in the food court and another one had a difficult conversation with me over lunch in a restaurant. And so I love that you talk about location because I think it's just such an important thing to think about when you're having a conversation. Because when you put somebody in an environment where other people can hear what happens, that person ... I know for me, I am more concerned with controlling my emotions than I am listening to what the person is saying. So if you're not in a traditional corporate setting where you can bring somebody into a boardroom or an office, what type of thinking about timing and location should people consider when it comes to difficult conversations?

Roberta Matuson (32:17):

Well, I think they should take the trip to Starbucks off their list. The Starbucks are way too small for these kind of conversations if they get sticky. I recall writing in the book that there was a conversation I overheard, a guy getting fired while he and his boss were sitting at a table while I was in line. There's nowhere for you to go. You're in line, the line is snaking out the door. This poor guy is getting fired while you're listening. I think it's super important, especially today with so many people working remotely, that we ask people. Because we ask these questions such as, I'd like to have a conversation with you, is there a date and time where we can have a private conversation?

Lisa Larter (33:06):

That's a good way.

Roberta Matuson (33:08):

Everyone that I know is using virtual backgrounds, so you have no idea if somebody's eight-year-old son is sitting next to them. You have no idea if their spouse is across the table. And this could be embarrassing, what you're sharing. They may not want to share what you just said with the world. And so asking those questions and preparing people and just saying I'd like to have a private conversation with you will help avoid any of those kind of mishaps. But-

Lisa Larter (33:41):

That's a really, really, really good point, Roberta. One of the things that I ask my team members to do for that very same reason is I ask them to wear headphones when we're having conversations. Because I want to ensure that the privacy of any client work or business stuff that we're talking about isn't being listened to by somebody else. But I never thought about it from the perspective of having a conversation with them about their performance and having a family member potentially hear that. That's a really, really valuable point.

Roberta Matuson (34:13):

Yes. And for those of you, like you pointed out, I mean, you might be a retail store owner and you might have the only option is at the front at the register or in the stock room. I think you might want to suggest, hey, let's go for a walk. If you can, if there's somebody there to watch the store. Let's go for a walk and go outside, if it's not 20 degrees below zero or something. And have that conversation while you're walking and let that person know what's on your mind.

Lisa Larter (34:51):

Yeah, absolutely. What advice do you have for our listeners in terms of difficult conversations during a distracted ... I feel like as a society, we are so distracted. And because we are so distracted by notifications and text messages on our phone and my dog at home needing to go outside, my kid at home ... I don't have a kid, but you know what I mean. There are so many different things competing for our attention. Do you have any advice around

how to, I guess, get people to communicate more effectively so those distractions don't become the cause for need of a difficult conversation?

Roberta Matuson (35:44):

Well, you and I were talking earlier and we were talking about having people turn off their notifications. I think we're so used to getting those notifications. I mean, while you and I are talking, I did exactly that. I turned off my text, I turned off my email. What I didn't turn off is my Apple Watch. So while we're talking, I'm being jolted every 10 minutes because something is coming through. I think it's a good reminder when you're getting ready to have one of these conversations, even, just to say to the person, look, can you put your devices on do not disturb so that we can focus on one another. And I think it's also good advice and there's nothing wrong with saying to one of your employees, hey, when you are at work, unless it's an emergency with a kid, which I so get because I do have them, it's best that you keep these alarms and alerts on pause during the work day.

Roberta Matuson (36:49):

And I totally get if you need to, on your break or at lunch, check to make sure that everything is okay at home. We're so used to living with these devices that it may seem like common sense. Well, wouldn't you know to turn off those? Well, yeah. I mean, I have common sense. I didn't turn my watch off. So it's good to just like ... And make a list. It's not a bad idea to have a list. When I'm going to address my employee or a client, these three things I need to remember to do so I can be focused.

Lisa Larter (37:28):

Yeah. Because there's an actual term for it called context switching. And every time you are distracted by something, there is a recovery time that is needed to come back to what you were originally doing. And so I think that in the workplace, it can have a huge impact on performance, it can have an impact on communication. And when communication isn't clear and performance isn't as good as it could be, then you're really on the road to a difficult conversation of some sort.

Roberta Matuson (37:58):

Yeah. I also believe that we're responsible for some of that. Meaning we have an employee who is working on a particular task and we walk over and go, oh, could you do this? And then they're starting to do that and they're focused and then you come back and go, oh, do you have this? So as a leader and a business owner, I think you have to watch your own behavior to make sure you are not the one that's creating this problem.

Lisa Larter (38:26):

I think that's really, really, really great advice. Really great advice. So what advice do you have for people in terms of managing difficult conversations upwards? So as a leader, it's my responsibility to really think through and get comfortable having difficult conversations with my team and with my customers. But sometimes the tables are turned and sometimes they need to have a difficult conversation with me. And so what advice do you have for someone who needs to have a difficult conversation with either their direct support person or their employer in terms of how they approach that conversation?

Roberta Matuson (39:17):

Well, I'm glad you asked me that question because in the book, *Can We Talk?*, the way the book has been written intentionally is that I included scenarios, not just for how do you have one of these conversations with an employee, but also if you have to have a difficult conversation with your boss, as well as a peer. And with your boss, first of all, timing is everything. And so the time to have one of these conversations with your boss isn't after he or she has just gotten in and thrown their backpack on the chair and they're getting ready to return some phone calls from last night. So you really just have to focus on what's the best time. And if you are working with somebody, you have a pretty good sense of their availability. You also, as we talked about before, want to consider location. You don't want to hit them up at the elevator. And then you want to say, hey, there are some things that I'd like to speak to you about, is there time on your calendar when we can have an uninterrupted conversation?

Roberta Matuson (40:30):

And it goes back to the same principles. What are your expectations? What are you trying to achieve when you're having this conversation? What is your

ask? What is your evidence that the person that you're saying is perhaps doing something that's making your work life more difficult? How can you frame that in a way so it's not personal? So the seven principles that are in the book very much apply. And then the one that I would say applies the most is having the courage to have that conversation with your boss. Because I can assure you, most bosses don't come into work thinking, how am I going to make your day miserable? They just don't. And so the feedback that you can bring to them to let them know that, hey, I know you think you're doing this and I know you think your intentions are good, but here is how I'm receiving it. I think that they will appreciate that as much as you'll appreciate good feedback.

Lisa Larter (41:35):

Absolutely. Absolutely. I really love the example that you put on page 23, where you talk about Catherine and Don. And Catherine expected a report to be on her desk and when it wasn't there she had to go to the meeting without the findings and she was embarrassed and was called upon with questions. And then you gave the example of how Don responded. And then you gave the example after. After some reflection, he concluded that he handled the situation with his boss poorly. And then there's a reframe there in what he should have said where he accepts responsibility for part of what happened in his role of not coming to this person. And I think that sometimes, difficult conversations are the result of not wanting to bother someone or not wanting to feeling like it's your role to speak up about something.

Lisa Larter (42:40):

And it's kind of that whole managing expectations or default management. If there's something that I need, so for example, I'm in the process of planning a free webinar in November for people to help with some planning for 2022. And my team has been very clear, we need the copy and the description from you by this date if you want this up by this date. And so if I don't do my part to deliver by the date that they've given me, then I can't expect them to meet their date. But if, for example, I missed that date, it would be really great if somebody had proactively come to me the day before and said, hey, just a reminder, if you still want this thing by such and such a date, we need this from you today. Otherwise, the date is going to have to be moved. I feel like sometimes people are not proactively communicating things like that

when they're managing up. They just let it go because they don't want to bother somebody. So what advice do you have on things like that?

Roberta Matuson (43:53):

Well, since I wrote the book *Suddenly in Charge* and half of that book is on managing up, I can tell you that I have had many of my clients who are business owners go to their people, literally hand them the book, the side that's on managing up, and they say to them, I want you to manage me and this is what that looks like. So I think that in a situation like the one you described, if your people aren't managing you, then you need to go to them and you need to say, I need you to manage me and here's what that looks like. And I'm okay if you ping me at nine o'clock at night saying, Lisa, you said that you wanted this up tomorrow morning, we don't have the copy. It's not going to go up unless you give me the copy within the next 30 minutes. So you have to be explicit. They are not mind readers.

Lisa Larter (44:49):

Absolutely. Absolutely. Now, I got to revisit that *Suddenly in Charge* book. It's funny because [crosstalk 00:44:56]. Yeah. And I recommended it to a client of mine and she was talking about that book, that there's two different sides to the book. And I was, "I don't know what book you're talking about." And then she came back she's like, "*Suddenly in Charge*, it's such a good book." And I was like, "Oh, that's Roberta's book. I need to read that book."

Roberta Matuson (45:17):

Yeah. I mean, I have clients. It's very funny. I have friends who have given the book to their boss and they have said to their boss, "I'll make a deal with you. You read the side on managing down," because maybe they're not such a great manager, "And I'll read the side on managing up. And then we'll come together."

Lisa Larter (45:36):

That's a really great idea.

Roberta Matuson (45:37):

It is.

Lisa Larter (45:38):

It's a really great idea. I'm going to get that book. I'm going to get it for some of my team members, because I do have new team members that are in management roles that I think avoid having difficult conversations. And maybe it's not because they don't know how to have difficult conversations, maybe it's because they don't know how to manage up and down yet.

Roberta Matuson (45:58):

And honestly, I think it's a combination, which is why I have said to people that this new book, *Can We Talk?*, is a great companion guide to actually *Suddenly in Charge*. Because my story is that when I was 24 years old, I was promoted into the executive suite. You can imagine how much knowledge and experience I had at 24. I thought I knew-

Lisa Larter (46:23):

I know. I thought I knew everything at 25. So I understand exactly how you felt.

Roberta Matuson (46:29):

But I was so brilliant. Of course, I knew everything. And so when you're suddenly in charge and you're suddenly in a new role, you have to have a lot of these difficult conversations, and I shared some of them in the book. And man, the books that I write, Lisa, I write books that I wish that I had when I was in that situation. And *Suddenly in Charge* is certainly a book, if I had that book, I wouldn't have gotten fired six years later. I know that. And I also know that if I had this book, *Can We Talk?*, I would've had much more productive conversations and relationships with my boss. So that's how I frame things whenever I'm thinking about, well, what am I going to write next? It's like, what do I wish I had?

Lisa Larter (47:19):

Yeah, that's a really good point. Really good point. Well, Roberta, this has been absolutely fantastic. Thank you for all of your wisdom and insights on both books, *Suddenly in Charge* and *Can We Talk?*. I think that for our listeners, it doesn't matter. If you run a small business, I think what happens sometimes is we don't think of ourselves as leaders, we think of ourselves as entrepreneurs. And I think it's important that we start changing the titles that we use that identify the work that we do. And I think that we have to become leaders of our companies. Whether they're a company that employs

one person or a company that employs 100, we've got to think of ourselves as leaders. We've got to look at our own leadership skills and we've got to learn how to have these difficult conversations.

Lisa Larter (48:11):

And I think both of Roberta's books can really do a lot in terms of helping people to do that. So thank you very, very, very much, Roberta. I know you do a lot of work with larger organizations. But if we have a small business owner listening here, aside from your books, is there any place else you'd like them to go to learn more about you and your work or any programs or things that you offer that are applicable to small business owners?

Roberta Matuson (48:44):

Yes. In fact, I also work with small business owners as well as high growth companies. So if anyone is interested, those of you who are interested, you can reach out to me at roberta@matusononconsulting.com. You can head to my website matusonconsulting.com. And you can also reach out to me on LinkedIn and send me an invite, mention the podcast. I have programs where I work as a strategic advisor on talent and I also work as an advisor to business owners who are looking to attract and keep the best people.

Lisa Larter (49:28):

Yeah. That's awesome. Thank you very, very much, Roberta. I will ensure that in our show notes that we have the links to both of Roberta's books, as well as the link to your website, Roberta. So that everybody knows the spelling of your last name and they know exactly where to connect and reach out with you. Thank you, again, for recording this podcast a second time with me. I really, really appreciate it and it was a real joy to speak with you today.

Roberta Matuson (49:59):

Thank you.

Lisa Larter (50:01):

Thank you for joining me for this episode of She Talks Business. If you enjoyed the show, you know the drill, leave us a review, tell someone

about it and join the conversation on social media. Thanks for listening and until next time remember, done is always



Lisa Larter is a Business Strategist, Digital Marketing Expert, Author and Speaker.

The Lisa Larter Group helps their clients to formulate marketing strategies that support their business goals and objectives. Lisa provides consulting & advisory services, and implementation services including: social media & content management, book marketing, and website design.

better than perfect.

Roberta Matuson is a Consultant, Talent Retention Expert and Author.

For more than 25 years, she has helped leaders in Fortune 500 companies and small to medium-size businesses achieve dramatic growth and market leadership through the maximization of talent. She has worked with General Motors, Takeda Pharmaceuticals, The Boston Beer Company, and more. In addition to being a Forbes contributor, she is the author of five commercially published books on leadership and talent, including the international bestseller, *Suddenly in Charge*, and her most recent book *Can We Talk?* She has also been named one of LinkedIn's Top voices and is a former executive who knows how to succeed in the world of business and thrive in the executive suite.

