

We Need To Talk

*Your Guide to Challenging
Business Conversations*



ANDREA J. LEE

We Need To Talk: Your Guide To Challenging Business Conversations

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*“Do the best you can until
you know better. Then, when
you know better, do better.”*

MAYA ANGELOU

CHAPTER 2

The Universal Key

It's said that most books are never read, and that even if they are, it's rare to get past the first 30 pages. Well here we are, and you're still here, so I want to spill the beans while I have your attention.

If you don't read beyond this chapter, I'd at least like for you to have the universal key to detangling most of the most difficult conversations I've witnessed in 15+ years of business. This key is a little bit like the universal blood type

“O” which every blood type can receive in a transfusion. I call it the Delta Model.

As you likely know, “delta” is the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet, and the symbol for it is a triangle, used in science to represent change. The Delta Model provides us a simple thinking structure for conversations with a goal. If you’re having a conversation in which you’re trying to ‘get somewhere,’ or help someone else ‘get somewhere,’ this model will work. The thinking structure can be outlined thusly:

STEP #1:

Find out where your conversation partner is right now. (Point A.)

STEP #2:

Find out where your conversation partner wants to go. (Point B.)

STEP #3:

Together, come up with suggestions for how you can get from A to B.

What do I mean by conversation partner? It's worth pointing out that this could be any other human being, including a client, team member, vendor, partner, or even yourself, in your own head. We all talk to ourselves and try to get somewhere in those conversations, so we may as well do it well, right?

To go along with the thinking construct, there are three questions that make the Delta Model essentially foolproof to apply. You can embellish, or put the questions in your own words as you go, taking into account the nature of your relationships. But we can boil it all down to this: ***Where are you now? Where do you want to go? How do you want to get there?*** (See Figure 1 on page 34.)

To start unpacking this model, let's do a straightforward, non-business example to illustrate:

The setting is summer. Your conversation partner is a young child who is crying. Something is amiss and you'd like to help. You apply the steps:

Step #1: Where are you now?

"Why are you crying, little one?"

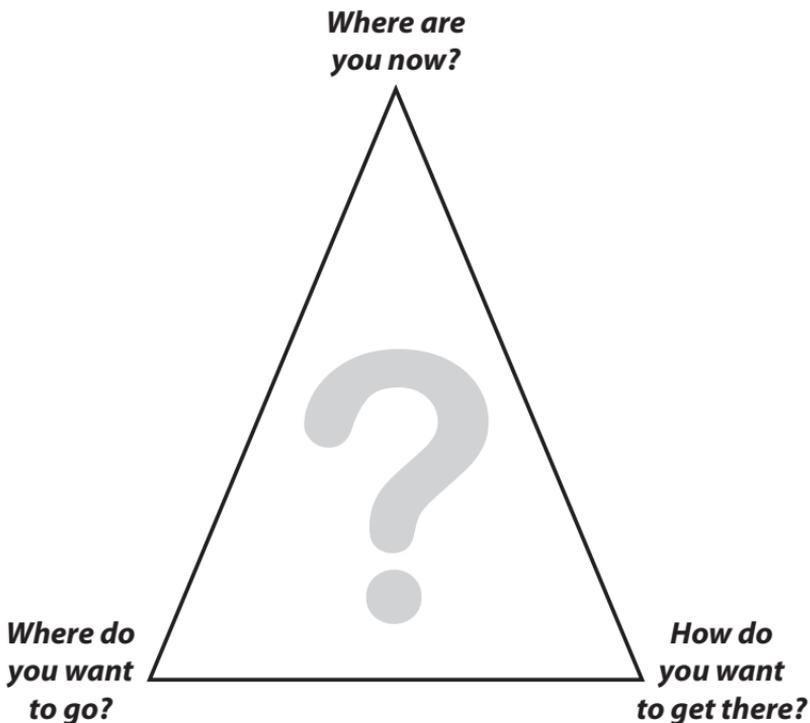
"I ate all the cherries and now there's no more cherries."

"Oh, that's sad."

"Yes."

Figure 1

The 3 Points of the Delta Model for Challenging Conversations



Step #2: Where do you want to go?

“What would make it better, sweetie?”

“More cherries!”

Step #3: How do you want to get there?

“Okay well I have some cherries left, can I give you half, or try some apples?”

“Half!”

If only all business conversations could sound like this, right? The point is, even if the solution isn't as simple, the structure for the conversation can be, when using the Delta Model. The difference between point 1 and 2 is the delta -- the change that's desired. The more truthful the answers are to each question, the more robust the results, and that's where some skill and experience will help. We'll cover more of this in the next chapter, “You Can Handle the Truth.”

Allowing the 3-step thinking structure to sink in, I suspect you will start to hear it in lots of places, even when it's not being done on purpose. We'll do more with the Delta Model throughout the book, especially in the sample templates and conversations, but for now, a few final comments on the universal-ness of this tool.

Useful one-on-one or in groups, making you look good in a pinch

The Delta questions are useful for nitty-gritty one-on-one conversations, as well as for bigger groups. They are excellent tools to pull out in a meeting that's run amok, particularly if you can find a way to say, "Whoa... this meeting seems to have run amok, could I suggest a way to structure our conversation with three questions?"

You can even whip out the three questions when you're put on the spot to lead any kind of conversation, and you'll see how well it serves you.

Removes hidden agendas, builds credibility and trust

If you've never experienced being the 'Switzerland' in a given conversation and think you might like it, there's one more reason to make the Delta Model one of your go-to's as a business person.

People readily rally under a structure that, in its simplicity, doesn't seem to have a hidden agenda. You might be surprised at how much more trustworthy you're perceived to be when you lead in this way.

Removes excess emotion

Heated debates and tough negotiations can also thrive under the 3-questions model, because excess emotion gets removed. You'll see more examples in the specific problem-solving chapters to come, but here is a taster:

Have the participants in the meeting answer the three questions, and based on their answers, you will quickly see if there is overlap. If there is, you can proceed to negotiate an agreement that meets at least some of the needs of everyone.

If there isn't any overlap, it will become clear to everyone that there isn't, and the parties can agree to stop trying to force an agreement, a victory in itself! Or, they may discover their willingness to re-state their answers to questions 1 and 2 and try again.

Gets to 'how' not just 'what' to make change stick

Finally, back to using the Delta questions on you. Don't let the third question fool you. It addresses what I believe are the deal breakers that are so often hidden, namely the manner in which you'd like to achieve your goal, not just what you want to achieve.

Let's say the scenario is you and you'd like to raise your fees. Or, you're a business advisor and you're helping your client with this:

Step 1: Where are you now?

"The business expenses keep going up, and I'm starting to feel resentful of all the work my team and I deliver for the price. I discovered that what I'm charging is on the low side compared to other people in my field."

Step 2: Where would you like to go?

"I'd like to raise them to at least 25% higher than they are now. That way, my profit margin would be reasonable and I could pay the team a bit more. I would feel more properly rewarded and be able to wow the client better, too."

Step 3: How do you want to get there?

"I want to do it professionally and not seem desperate. I think it's reasonable to raise my prices, but I also want to treat existing clients with respect. Maybe I'll give 45 days notice that the fees will be going up so they can be prepared, and invite clients who want to pre-purchase more work from us to do so within 45 days at half the increase."

How – in what manner – the delta, or change, is achieved, is as important as achieving the delta itself. If you were successful in raising your fees but, in the scenario above, lost the clients' respect, an important part of the goal would have been missed. For results you can be proud of, and especially if you have a history of reaching an agreement, only to have it fall apart later, give each of the three questions in the Delta Model their full due.

Cuts through complexity

The most complex conversations often have a great deal of jeopardy attached, for example, when a big consulting firm gets a call from their biggest client saying 'We're unhappy.' In cases like these, I suggest that you throw everything out and carefully offer the Delta questions. By putting just a few key things back on the table for the conversation, you can often sidestep the baggage and history that's gumming up the machinery.

PREDICTION:

Use the universal 3-step thinking structure and corresponding three questions well, and I, and many other business mentors, will soon have much less work to do. Bring it on!



About the Author

ANDREA LEE is founder + CEO of Thought Partners International, which does business online under the identity '**Wealthy Thought Leader**' — an internationally-known boutique coaching and training company that has helped thousands of entrepreneurs prove their original business concepts,

design offerings that break new ground, and sell in lucrative ways that feel good.

She is also Director of Strategic Planning for the **Indrani's Light Foundation**, a global non-profit committed to eradicating domestic violence.

Andrea is also the previous author of ***Multiple Streams of Coaching Income*** and ***Pink Spoon Marketing***, and was named by Seth Godin and Fast Company Magazine as a Bull Market company helping clients stand out and be remarkable.

In addition to her 18+ years as a business mentor, Andrea is a domestic violence survivor, recovered abuse perpetrator and a believer that all things, both good and bad, can and must be learned from. She considers herself an activist-entrepreneur.

To find out more about Andrea, visit:

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'Light years ahead of what everybody else is talking about.'

~ BONITA RICHTER, MBA BONITARICHTER.COM

WE NEED TO TALK. Those four little words have the power to strike fear into the heart of the most experienced business person. That's why too often, the hard things, the words we're afraid to say, the conversations we don't quite know how to handle, remain unsaid. And the stress on our businesses and our lives builds up.

Well – not any more.

This practical, step-by-step guide will help you break the silence and open the lines of communication in a new, healthy, productive and *profitable* way.

It's packed with tested tools proven in real-life scenarios and designed to navigate a full range of difficult business conversations, including:

- How to ask for – and get – more money for your work
- How to calm down an angry or disappointed client
- How to take control of a meeting that's going nowhere
- How to apologize in a way that actually makes you look, and feel, better
- ...and more

Filled with real templates and sample conversations you can actually use, **WE NEED TO TALK** will help you clear the air, reboot relationships and transition to powerful and productive new beginnings – from a business mentor who's been there, done that and made it work for thousands of happy clients.



Andrea Lee is founder + CEO of Wealthy Thought Leader, an internationally-known boutique coaching and training company that helps business owners break new ground with ideas that shape the world. She is also Director of Strategic Planning for the Indrani's Light Foundation, a global non-profit committed to eradicating domestic violence. More info at www.weneedtotalkguide.com.

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