



## Sarah Furness

### AUTHOR

Most organisations develop capable leaders for normal conditions. When those conditions break down, when the stakes are real, the time is short, and doubt is loudest, the training has not kept pace with the pressure. Leaders who look strong are often not equipped to feel strong. Performance under pressure is not a personality trait. It is a trainable skill, and most development programmes do not treat it as one.

A former RAF Squadron Leader and the first female helicopter pilot to lead UK Special Forces missions, Sarah Furness gives organisations the frameworks (grounded in combat experience and human factors science) to close the gap between how their leaders look and how they perform when it counts.

## Sarah Furness's 2026 Biography

### Why organisations work with Sarah Furness

- The H.A.B.I.T.S. (Healthy Automatic Behaviours In Threatening Scenarios) formula gives leaders a structured, repeatable system for sustaining performance under pressure – not a set of principles, but a behavioural methodology built from combat aviation and formal human factors instruction.
- Her “Practise Scared” methodology reframes discomfort as a development mechanism directly addressing the conditions under which most leadership training fails to stick.
- Her argument in The Uni-tasking Revolution, that focus is a competitive performance variable that organisations are systematically destroying through multitasking culture, gives senior teams a specific, actionable lens for redesigning how work gets done.
- She brings an instructor’s precision, not only a practitioner’s story: she taught human performance and risk management at the Defence Academy of the UK, which means the frameworks she delivers have been built and tested in a formal training environment, not assembled retrospectively for a speaking career.
- Her status as the first female helicopter pilot to fly and lead UK Special Forces missions in Iraq is not a biographical detail,
- it is evidence of what her approach to fear, credibility, and inclusion in high-performance cultures actually looks like in practice.

### Biography highlights

- RAF Squadron Leader; approximately 20 years of service including operational combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan
- First female helicopter pilot to fly and lead UK Special Forces missions

### AVAILABLE FOR

- Speaking

### SARAH'S SPEAKING THEMES

- Corporate Culture
- Executive Development
- Leadership
- Peak Performance
- Resilience & Stress Management

### LANGUAGES: English

in Iraq

- Graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge University (Natural Sciences and Theology)
- Instructor in human performance and risk management at the Defence Academy of the UK, Shrivenham
- Creator of the H.A.B.I.T.S. (Healthy Automatic Behaviours In Threatening Scenarios) performance framework and the “Practise Scared” methodology
- Author of two Amazon no.1 bestselling books: Fly Higher and The Uni-tasking Revolution
- Founder of Well Be It, an executive coaching and leadership development practice (est. 2020)
- Qualified mindfulness coach and human factors facilitator; trained in cognitive behavioural techniques

## **Biography**

Most performance under pressure research stays theoretical. Sarah Furness spent two decades testing it as a Cambridge-educated RAF helicopter pilot, then as a Squadron Leader leading combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, then as the first female pilot to fly and lead UK Special Forces missions in Iraq.

That operational record informs everything she brings to organisations. But it is not the point of the work. The point is that she identified, in conditions of genuine risk, that resilience and performance under pressure are not instinctive. They are skills. And skills can be built. This observation – simple in articulation, significant in implication – is the foundation of her H.A.B.I.T.S. framework and her “Practise Scared” methodology, both of which sit at the centre of her leadership development work.

Before founding Well Be It in 2020, Furness formalised that thinking as an instructor in human performance and risk management at the Defence Academy of the UK. That background gives her frameworks a rigour that distinguishes them from testimony alone: these are methods that were built in a professional military training environment before they were taken to the boardroom.

Her two no.1 bestselling books, Fly Higher and The Uni-tasking Revolution, extend the argument into self-leadership and organisational focus respectively. Together, they represent a coherent intellectual position: that the gap between how capable leaders look and how they actually perform under pressure is a structural problem, and that closing it requires deliberate behavioural practice, not motivation.

## **Key speaking topics**

- Leadership under pressure
- Resilience and mental performance
- Human factors in high-stakes decision-making
- Focus, attention, and uni-tasking as a performance strategy
- Psychological safety and growth culture
- Inclusive leadership and leading in the new era
- Decision-making and gut instinct under pressure

## **Ideal for**

- Senior leadership teams preparing for high-stakes change or transformation

- CHROs and L&D leaders building performance and resilience programmes
- Executive development audiences where the gap between visible capability and felt confidence is a recognised issue
- Organisations in sectors where pressure, speed, and accountability are structural features – professional services, financial services, defence, manufacturing, engineering

## **Audience outcomes**

- A clear understanding of why performance under pressure is a trainable skill, not a personality trait, with a framework for developing it
- Practical application of the H.A.B.I.T.S. formula and “Practise Scared” methodology to real workplace conditions
- A concrete argument for redesigning how attention and focus are managed at team and organisational level
- Greater leader confidence in decision-making under time pressure and ambiguity
- A reframe of fear, failure, and discomfort as development data rather than performance problems

## **Sarah Furness's 2026 talks & topics**

### **How to Lead Fearlessly**

This talk helps leaders reframe their relationship with fear and self-doubt, positioning both as navigable conditions rather than disqualifying ones.

#### **Key takeaways:**

- Why fear and imposter syndrome are structural features of visible leadership, not individual failures
- How to reframe fear as a signal rather than a stop – and what that change makes possible in practice
- Practical techniques for strengthening leadership presence precisely when self-doubt is loudest

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### **Outstanding Performance Under Pressure**

This talk applies the uni-tasking argument to organisational performance, making the case that disciplined focus on single priorities is the defining variable between leaders who perform and those who stall.

#### **Key takeaways:**

- Why multitasking degrades performance and how organisations unwittingly build cultures that reward it
  - How to identify the highest-impact priority and protect attention for it under pressure
  - What focused execution looks like in practice for leaders managing competing demands
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## **Growth and Learning from Failure**

This talk gives leaders a structured approach to using setbacks as organisational data, building cultures where accountability and learning coexist rather than compete.

### **Key takeaways:**

- Why growth and innovation are structurally dependent on risk and the willingness to fail
  - The distinction between psychological safety and the courage to be genuinely accountable
  - How leaders can model error ownership in ways that shift team behaviour - not just attitude
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## **Bombproof Resilience**

This talk addresses resilience as a live skill rather than a recovery concept, and examines the specific role leaders play in sustaining their teams through difficulty.

### **Key takeaways:**

- Why resilience is built during pressure, not recovered afterwards, and what that means for development
  - How self-care functions as operational readiness - not a soft benefit
  - The leader's role in creating conditions for trust rather than rescue
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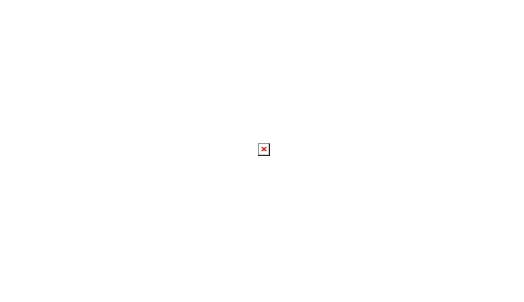
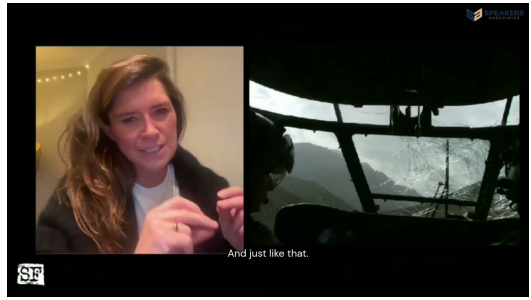
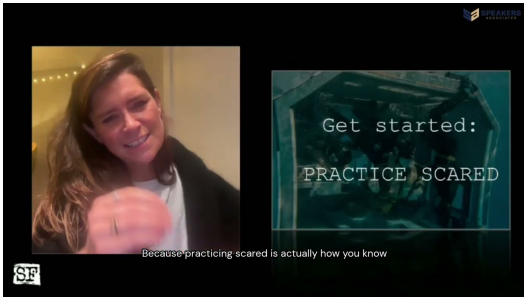
## **How to Lead in the New Era**

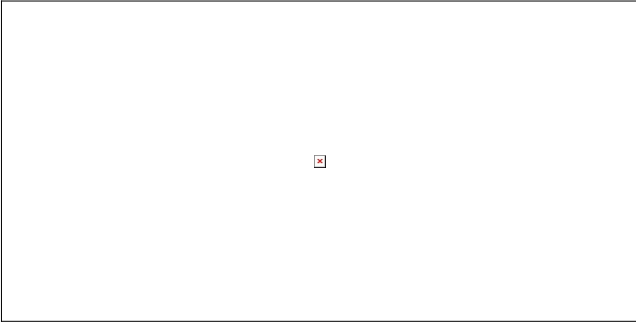
This talk addresses the shift in what credible, inclusive leadership actually requires - and what leaders who built their authority in older models need to change.

### **Key takeaways:**

- How leadership expectations have shifted and why high-performance teams are not built from like-minded people
- What inclusive leadership looks like in practice, beyond the policy level
- How leaders can build authority through vulnerability and accountability rather than despite them

## **Sarah Furness's Videos**





## What Sarah Furness's clients say

On behalf of the European L&D Weeks team, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for your participation in our annual event.

@Sarah - your session, How to Thrive 'Under Fire', was a great success!

The feedback from our participants was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees found the session to be incredibly inspiring and insightful, with many highlighting the engaging storytelling and practical relevance to their daily lives. The average rating for the session was 9.7, with 90 participants in attendance.

Thank you once again for your valuable contribution to European L&D Weeks. We truly appreciate your partnership.

**Malgorzata Szmik**

*L&D Project Manager, RLG Europe B.V. (Swiss Branch)*

My interaction with Sarah Furness started here, under a post about her upcoming speech "How To Thrive Under Fire" at the iconic i-Con conference in Cyprus. It got me excited about her speech which is a difficult task. In my personal experience, most conference speeches are just an elaborate sales pitch. So I wasn't expecting much. And then Sarah just blew me away! Attending her speech was an extraordinary experience. Sarah's ability to connect with the audience (online and offline) and deliver a powerful message is inspiring.

**Mila Staneva**

*Partnership Manager, RedTrack*

Sarah joined us to deliver the keynote session for the launch of our Thrive Legal Community and wow, were we all blown away. The power in her content and delivery was fabulous – you could hear a pin drop! Somehow Sarah made the lessons she had learned on the frontline accessible and relatable to the legal profession – everyone left feeling inspired and engaged. Sarah’s session was the absolute highlight of the evening. Couldn’t recommend Sarah enough!

**Claire Sanders**

*Founder, The Legal Space*

Sarah’s a wonderful communicator and storyteller, she makes her experiences so relevant to the audience and makes the room vibrate with inspiration. I have been part of her audience twice both in person and remotely and would take the opportunity to recommend her to anyone looking for a speaker in the UK or internationally.

**Eliza Iatesen**

*Marketing Director - Tech for Purpose, Telecoms*

Sarah’s remarkable stage presence and adaptability were evident not only in her keynote for the sales audience but also in her tailored speech for the L&D room. Her ability to pivot and deliver content tailored to different audiences speaks volumes about her expertise and versatility.

I am delighted to recommend Sarah Furness for any event seeking a speaker who can deliver riveting, insightful, and adaptable presentations. Her engaging style, combined with her wealth of experiences and lessons, makes her a standout choice for any occasion.

**Steve Lindsey**

*National Sales Conference*

Sarah brought a very fascinating and motivating talk to our event. Not just about her experiences flying impressive equipment in challenging conditions, but relating those to valuable lessons, connected to neuroscience, to daily life.

The result was a very inspirational experience, driving our intended playing-to-win team attitude as well as individual breakthroughs in thinking and acting. Thanks again Sarah!

**Marc D.**

*Director Operational Excellence - Civil Business Line & Global Lean Master, GKN Aerospace*

Authentic, engaging and insightful. Sarah’s experience and leadership tools are exceptional. A wonderful speaker who delivers a fantastic workshop for leaders, with actionable takeaways that can make a real difference.

**Marko Ilincic**

*Chairman, CEO, AhaMo™*

Sarah is an absolutely fantastic public speaker. She is engaging, interactive and powerful. The content of her talks is extremely relevant. The internal feedback about Sarah has been excellent. The below are just a couple of messages received after the event:

'Thank you for such an interesting presentation - loved it!'

'I really thought Sarah was great, really engaging session!'

I would highly recommend Sarah for anyone looking for a speaker to come into your organisation or event to discuss a range of topics including, operating under pressure, imposter syndrome and performing better.

**Katherine Ashdown**

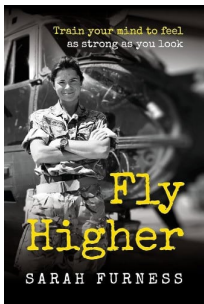
*Senior Relationship Manager, C. Hoare & Co.*

Sarah was the key note speaker at our annual conference this year. Her talk was passionate , captivating, and challenged us all on how we focus & manage tasks but also how we provide feedback & show leadership in the best ways . I never knew that flying a helicopter could provide such compelling lessons for business. If that sounds quite dry, then at the end of a full schedule of presentations Sarah had the whole audience captivated & following every word. Highly recommended.

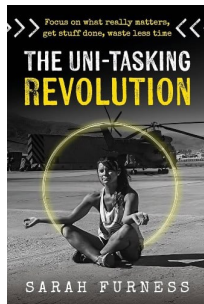
**David Hurren**

*Chairperson Green Gas Committee, REA*

## SARAH'S LATEST BOOKS



**Fly Higher: Train your mind to feel as strong as you look**



**The Uni-tasking Revolution: Focus on what really matters, get stuff done, waste less time**

## ARTICLES AND PODCASTS



Debrief - Why Defining Your Purpose Matters



Debrief - How to Do It Right



Creating a Feedback Culture

## Sarah Furness's 2026 speaking fees

Specific fees fall within the ranges shown. These are presented as a guide only and are subject to change without notice.

	<b>EUR</b>	<b>GBP</b>	<b>USD</b>
<b>Home Country</b>	Under €12000	Under £10,000	Under \$15000
<b>Asia Pacific</b>	Please enquire	Please enquire	Please enquire
<b>Europe</b>	Under €12000	Under £10,000	Under \$15000
<b>Middle East &amp; Africa</b>	Under €12000	Under £10,000	Under \$15000
<b>South America</b>	Please enquire	Please enquire	Please enquire
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Under €12000	Under £10,000	Under \$15000
<b>US East Coast</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>US West Coast</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>Virtual</b>	Under €12000	Under £10,000	Under \$15000