



Steven D'Souza

AUTHOR · TEDX SPEAKER

The performance of certainty is one of senior leadership's most damaging expectations. Transformation, culture change and strategic pivots rarely arrive with enough evidence to justify confident authority. When leadership identity is built on having answers, the conditions that most demand genuine inquiry are the ones most likely to produce defensiveness instead.

The pressure on leaders to project certainty is itself a liability when conditions are genuinely ambiguous – Steven D'Souza, author of *Not Knowing* (CMI Management Book of the Year), gives organisations the framework and language to make that argument credible internally and act on it.

Steven D'Souza's 2026 Biography

Why organisations work with Steven D'Souza

- The “Not Knowing” framework gives organisations a precise and credible language for something most leadership programmes refuse to address directly: that the expectation of certainty from leaders is itself a liability in complex environments. That reframe changes how organisations design capability programmes.
- His intellectual approach – drawing on Gestalt psychology, Theory U, Adaptive Leadership and Eastern wisdom traditions – produces a more durable intervention than conventional leadership tools. Organisations working on long-term leadership capability find it gives senior executives a framework rather than a set of techniques.
- His practitioner background spans Senior Client Partner of Leadership & Professional Development at Korn Ferry in London and Riyadh, Global Head of Leadership at Philip Morris International, VP of Leadership and Talent Management at Merrill Lynch, and Head of Diversity at Santander UK. That breadth of first-hand experience in high-stakes leadership contexts makes him unusually credible at board and C-suite level.
- His published body of work now spans six books – *Not Knowing*, *Not Doing*, *Not Being*, *Shadows at Work*, *Brilliant Networking* and *Made in Britain* – giving organisations a cumulative architecture for multi-year leadership development that moves from navigating uncertainty, to purposeful restraint, to identity transformation, to the unconscious patterns that derail capable leaders.
- A CMI Management Book of the Year and a Thinkers50 Radar recognition give senior buyers independently validated signals of intellectual credibility, reducing the due-diligence burden when positioning a leadership development investment internally.

AVAILABLE FOR

- After Dinner Engagement
- Coaching
- Speaking

STEVEN'S SPEAKING THEMES

- Change Management
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Executive Development
- Organizational Agility

LANGUAGES: English

Biography highlights

- Founder and CEO of Liminal Edge Consulting (UAE), and Senior Fellow and Executive in Residence at the Centre for the Future of Organisation, Drucker School of Management
- Author of *Not Knowing* – CMI Management Book of the Year, translated into ten languages – and the broader *Not trilogy: Not Knowing, Not Doing, Not Being*, published by LID
- Author of *Made in Britain* and *Brilliant Networking* by Pearson.
- Author of *Shadows at Work (2026)* – on unconscious behaviour, the leadership shadow, and how hidden traits shape organisational culture
- Named on the Thinkers50 Radar among management thinkers most likely to change the future of leadership thinking
- Named in HR Magazine's Top 30 Most Influential Thinkers
- Guest faculty, Adaptive Leadership programme, Harvard Kennedy School; Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford; Executive Fellow and Associate Professor, IE Business School
- Work featured in Harvard Business Review, Bloomberg, BBC, The Guardian and The Sunday Times
- Previous leadership roles: Senior Client Partner, Leadership and Professional Development practice, Korn Ferry London and Riyadh; Global Head of Leadership and Executive Development, Philip Morris International; VP Leadership and Talent Management, Merrill Lynch; Head of Diversity, Santander UK; Director of Programmes, FT/IE Corporate Learning Alliance

Biography

Not Knowing – co-authored with Diana Renner and published by LID – won the CMI Management Book of the Year and has since been translated into ten languages. Its central argument is that the pressure on leaders to perform certainty is itself a liability when the environment is genuinely ambiguous. That argument proved durable enough to generate two sequels: *Not Doing*, on the discipline of purposeful restraint in leadership, and *Not Being*, on identity, self-transformation and renewal.

His 2026 book *Shadows at Work* extends that body of work into examining the leader's shadow from the lens of psychology, biology, culture and meaning. He shows how the unconscious traits leaders repress become the behaviours that most undermine the cultures they are trying to build – and how to surface and redirect them.

The trilogy draws on Gestalt psychology, Theory U, Adaptive Leadership and Eastern and Western wisdom traditions. That blend is not incidental – it is what separates D'Souza's framework from leadership development built around models and process tools. The approach asks executives to examine how their identity as leaders shapes what they can see and do in genuinely complex situations.

The practitioner credibility that anchors that philosophy is substantial. Steven was formerly a Senior Client Partner at Korn Ferry in London and Riyadh, speaking to C-suite audiences across consumer, energy, industrial and technology sectors. As Global Head of Leadership and Executive Development at Philip Morris International, he worked with the company's top 200 leaders through a major industry transformation. As VP of Leadership and Talent Management at Merrill Lynch and Head of Diversity at Santander UK, he worked on the kind of complex, people-facing challenges that most leadership theorists observe at a distance.

His academic record spans the Drucker School of Management where he is currently a Senior Fellow and Executive in Residence, Oxford's Saïd Business School, INSEAD, IE Business School, and guest faculty status at the Harvard Kennedy School's Adaptive Leadership programme. Thinkers50 named D'Souza among the management thinkers most likely to change the future of leadership thinking. HR Magazine included him in its Top 30 Most Influential Thinkers. His work has appeared in the Harvard Business Review, Bloomberg, the BBC, The Guardian and The Sunday Times.

Key speaking topics

- Leadership under uncertainty and complexity
- The "Not Knowing" framework: turning ambiguity into organisational advantage
- Sustainable leadership and the discipline of effortless action
- Identity, self-transformation and leadership renewal
- Diversity, inclusion and social capital
- Leadership capability design for senior executives
- Contemplative and philosophy-based approaches to organisational development
- The leader's shadow: unconscious behaviour, derailers and organisational culture

Ideal for

- CHROs and Chief People Officers designing senior leadership development programmes
- Boards and C-suite teams navigating transformation, major strategic pivots or cultural change
- Executive education and MBA programme directors at business schools
- Learning and development leaders investing in long-term leadership capability at global organisations

Audience outcomes

- A reframed relationship with uncertainty – from a condition to be managed to a resource to be developed as a leadership capacity
- A clear distinction between problems that respond to expertise and those that require adaptive, inquiry-led approaches – and practical tools for each
- Awareness of how leadership identity built on authority and answers can become a liability in genuinely ambiguous situations
- Practical techniques – drawn from philosophy, Gestalt psychology and organisational development – for leading with more presence, less reactivity and greater sustainability
- A framework for individual and team reflection on where current leadership practice is serving the organisation and where it is reinforcing defensive patterns

Steven D'Souza's 2026 talks & topics

Not Knowing: The Art of Turning Uncertainty into Opportunity

Based on the CMI Management Book of the Year, this talk reframes uncertainty as an active leadership resource – showing how the capacity to admit not-knowing opens the conditions for deeper creativity, trust and organisational learning.

Key takeaways:

- How to challenge assumptions and find new alternatives when existing frameworks no longer hold
 - Why acknowledging not-knowing builds trust and deeper connection in leadership relationships
 - How to reward curiosity and reframe failure as a source of organisational intelligence
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Not Doing: The Art of Effortless Action

Drawing on philosophy and modern science, this talk challenges the culture of busyness that drives leader burnout, showing how purposeful restraint creates the conditions for more sustainable and effective leadership practice.

Key takeaways:

- How creating space for reflection improves the quality of strategic decision-making
 - The relationship between presence, listening and high-quality leadership action
 - Practical approaches to leading with purpose and ease without sacrificing performance
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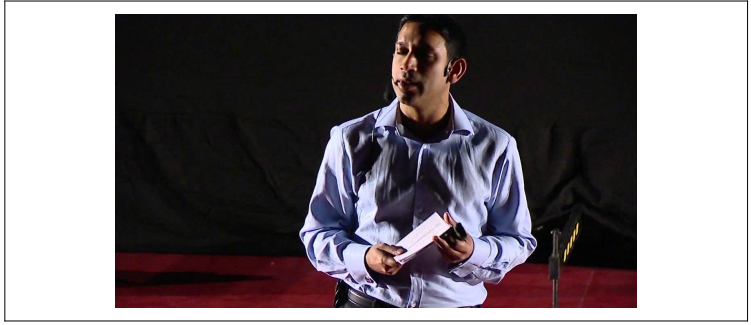
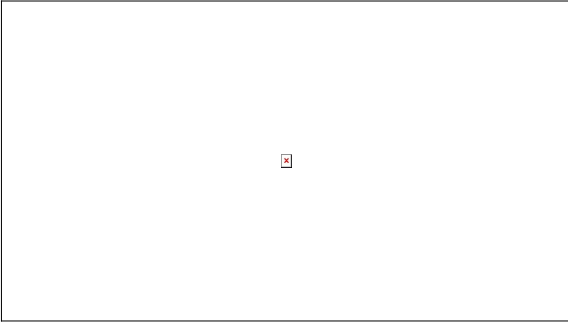
Not Being: How to Thrive in a Disruptive World

This talk gives leaders a framework for identity and self-transformation – showing how disruption becomes an opportunity for renewal, clarity, and the development of a more sustainable model of leadership.

Key takeaways:

- How to navigate major professional and organisational transitions without losing clarity of purpose
- The role of self-transformation in building leadership resilience during sustained disruption
- Frameworks for resetting leadership identity, values and direction when the previous model no longer serves

Steven D'Souza's Videos



What Steven D'Souza's clients say

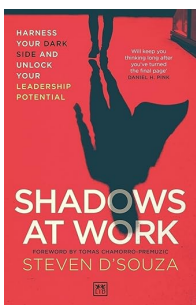
Thank you so much for coming to speak at the Vodafone Legal Leadership Conference. Your talk was very well received and people took a lot from it. Colleagues were saying they felt encouraged and inspired by your message of thinking about the unknown in a different, more curious and open way. Your way of delivering your presentation was very clear and easy to ingest. You came across as knowledgeable, wise and yet also modest. Thank you for starting our conference in such an uplifting and thought-provoking way.

Global Head of Legal , Vodafone, Annual Conference

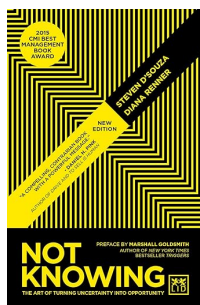
Thank you, Steven! You really tied the day together so well for us. I'll be happy to recommend you and see how we can get you incorporated into the network. When we reconvened, we went around the room and everyone shared their key takeaways. It was great to see such a quantitative group share their feelings on your session. They felt it took their uncertainty and reframed it. They felt your messages were energizing and highlighted for them the opportunities that exist in times of uncertainty. Really well done and thanks again!

Global Head of Procurement , Nestle

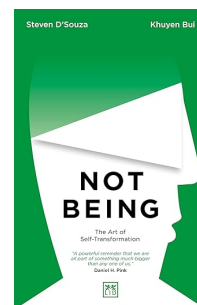
STEVEN'S LATEST BOOKS



Shadows at Work: Harness your dark side and unlock your



Not Knowing: The Art of Turning Uncertainty into



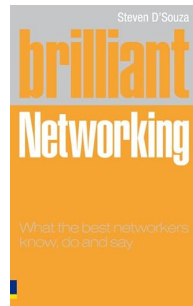
Not Being: The Art of Self-Transformation

leadership potential



Not Doing: The Art of Turning Struggle into Ease

Opportunity



Brilliant Networking: What the best networkers know, say and do



Made in Britain: Inspirational Role Models from British Black & Minority Ethnic Communities