

Short Bio



MARIA
JAMES

Under fire in Basra, one comrade chose not to leave Maria James behind. A shared doughnut became a lesson in trust and inspired The Doughnut Principle™ | The Trust Loop, the model she now teaches senior teams under far less extreme pressure.



A leadership keynote speaker and Culture, People & Transformation Leader, Maria delivers Leadership Under Pressure, asking what makes someone turn back when it would be easier to keep running. She shows teams how their behaviour is experienced by the people they depend on for trust, then helps them change it before it slows delivery.

Her authority spans two front lines: military operations as a Royal Military Police Reservist, where she led a community policing programme for the Iraqi Police Service and earned a Military Commendation, and more than 20 years leading culture and people change, supporting Virgin Mobile UK's \$2bn merger, scaling Virgin Mobile India across 23 regions, and leading Deloitte UK's culture plan for 27,000 people.

Awarded Soldier of the Year by the Army Reserves and admitted to the Freedom of the City of London in recognition, she was named a 2026 Finalist for Outstanding Achiever in the British Forces in Business Awards. She's also a qualified yoga and meditation teacher.

Maria's secret is a doughnut. Shared under fire in Basra, it taught her that trust isn't built in the calm moments; it's built in the ones that test you. She now shows senior teams how to earn it, protect it, and rebuild it before pressure does the damage.

A leadership keynote speaker and Culture, People & Transformation Leader, she helps senior teams confront the mixed signals, avoidance and damaging conduct that erode delivery.

Maria began her career working alongside CEOs of major global organisations while serving as a Royal Military Police Reservist. Compulsorily deployed to Basra during a militia uprising, she led a national community policing programme for the Iraqi Police Service, training and mentoring officers through interpreters and helping rebuild trust between police and local communities as the country began to recover. Rank carried little weight for a woman in that context. Respect had to be earned through action, and her contribution was recognised with a Military Commendation. That's where it happened: the moment that became **The Doughnut Principle™ | The Trust Loop**, the model at the centre of her keynote, which asks one question: **what makes someone turn back when it would be easier to keep running?**

Maria left the military and decided to take those proven standards; clarity, ownership, consistency, into corporate life, where change fails mostly because of how leaders behave, not because the strategy was wrong. Organisations scale what leaders do, not what they intend. That's the belief she's built her career on.

Her authority on leadership under pressure comes from two front lines: military operations, where behaviour carried life-and-death consequences, and more than 20 years leading culture and people change. She supported executive integration during Virgin Mobile UK's \$2bn merger, scaled Virgin Mobile India's joint venture across 23 regions, and led Deloitte UK's culture plan for 27,000 people.

Awarded Soldier of the Year by the Army Reserves, she was admitted to the Freedom of the City of London in recognition. In 2026, the British Forces in Business Awards named her a Finalist for Outstanding Achiever, for translating military leadership into culture and people transformation.

What drives Maria is helping people be at their best. Not just in work but outside too, where she's a qualified yoga and meditation teacher. Her standard is clear: **"If people don't feel safe or seen around you, you're not leading; you're just in charge."**