

KEYNOTE · SIGNATURE TALK

Mapping the Journey

Finding Your Path, Passion, and Purpose

You are not lost. You are between maps.

Dr. Pardis Mahdavi

Anthropologist · Author of 8 Books · 2x TEDx Speaker · Former University President

We hand people a map of the whole world and forget the one dot that makes it usable: ***you are here.*** Then we ask **the wrong question, what do you want to do, when the real one is who do you want to be.**

Drawing on twenty-five years of fieldwork from Tehran to Dubai to Madagascar, a tenure running universities, and the leaders she coaches across the most uncertain threshold of their lives, Dr. Mahdavi shows that most of the people we call lost are not lost at all. They are in the valley, between one map and the next, doing the quiet work of integration no ceremony makes room for. She learned it the hard way: exiled from Iran after a book on women's rights, then stepping off the stage of a university presidency to build a new model of education, sure each time that she was lost. But, she later learned, she was only relocating. Figuring out where she stood became her vocation, and she calls it wayfinding. Purpose was never a place to arrive. It is the path you make by walking.

WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE LEAVES WITH

- A way to read their own map: three questions that place the “you are here” dot on it.
- Language for the descent and ascent that no ceremony ever gave them, so a low season reads as integration, not failure.
- Three wayfinding tools, courage, curiosity, and creativity, for crossing terrain with no visible far side.

THE STORIES

- The three calls: accomplished friends who lost the plot of their own story.
- The students who deposited, then called back: “now that it is quiet, I am not sure anymore.”
- Her own arc: exiled after a book on women's rights, then off the presidency stage, learning she was never lost, only relocating.

“You are not falling. You are grounding. Fear is not the rocks, it is the lighthouse.”

FORMATS

18-minute TED-style keynote · 45–60 minute main-stage keynote · commencement · fireside · workshop. Customizes for commencements, early-career and high-potential programs, women's leadership, career transition, and corporate audiences.

Columbia PhD
Medical Anthropology

8 Books
Stanford · Duke · Hachette

**TIME · WaPo ·
NPR**
Foreign Affairs · LA Times

CFR + YPO
Lifetime Member

“Revolutions start in culture.”

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