



Engineering the next generation of STEM leadership

Emilio De Stefano

Director & Principal, [De Stefano & Co](#)

Keynote Speaker, [Emilio De Stefano](#)

[Bachelor of Engineering \(Electrical & Mechatronic with Honours\)](#)

[Bachelor of Management](#)

[Master of Engineering \(Military Systems Integration\)](#)



With an adventurous and fearless spirit – and little need for rest – Emilio De Stefano has surmounted considerable challenges to become one of South Australia’s youngest business leaders in the engineering and defence industry.

His passion for inspiring people to overcome their fears and take risks has led him to invest his time working to inspire students to pursue careers in STEM. He explains why it is important to focus on younger generations and the exciting opportunities they will have following a STEM career in SA in the coming years.

Shortly after graduating from UniSA, armed with his double degree in Engineering and Management, Emilio secured a dream job at BAE Systems Australia as a Hardware Engineer. BAE Systems, as the country’s largest defence contractor, allowed Emilio to work on state-of-the-art electronic warfare systems: including radar-warning receivers and directed infrared counter measures to protect aircraft operated by the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Emilio was quickly promoted within BAE Systems to become one of the youngest Technical Authorities in the company. Proving himself to be a capable technical talent with tenacity and

leadership potential, Emilio won the Defence Teaming Centre (DTC) Young Achiever Award in 2010.

The following year he won the BAE Systems Australia Early Career Engineer of the Year Award, substantiating his place as an essential part of the team.

This led him to join the South Australian Defence Industry Leadership Program (SADILP).

"The leadership program allowed me to grow my network and work out who I was as a person. It was here I made a connection that led me to take on a new role as General Manager of Smart Fabrication, where I led a team of 60 employees, and learnt how to run a multi-million dollar business.

"People would say I was crazy for even thinking of leaving BAE. I loved my job there but this opportunity was something I knew I'd regret if I didn't take it. It was the right decision and it really set my career up for the future in a big way and gave me the confidence I needed to go on and start my own business.

"I guess I'm a big believer in taking calculated risks and continuously pushing yourself outside your comfort zone. If it doesn't work out, then so be it, as long as you've learned from it. At least you'll never regret not having given it a go."

It was here he started doing more public speaking and was asked on a tour to promote STEM careers in schools around Australia.

"I started getting asked regularly to speak about my career in schools and universities to provide students with some insight into the types of things that are possible with engineering and STEM-based skills," he says.

"When you're young and someone suggests you go into engineering you think about maths and other subjects that might seem too hard or unexciting, and that can put you off. It's a real problem – right now STEM enrolments in Australian schools are at a 20-year low.

"But when I go in to talk to students about my career I show them photos of the fighter jets I was working on, and the Lear Jets that would become my office during the flight trials we undertook to test the technology we had developed. They get to see where your skills can lead you.

"I see their eyes light up because students get really excited about that kind of stuff."



To grow his network and stay at the forefront of the engineering industry, Emilio has engaged heavily with The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) since his second year of university.

Having practised in roles as senior as Chair of The IET nationally, through the professional institution that has over 167,000 members worldwide, he has had the opportunity to travel and meet STEM professionals around Australia and the world who share his passion for promoting STEM-based careers.

“In South Australia we will see a sizeable opportunity in the coming years in the defence industry. The biggest problem is that we have a huge challenge ahead to give students the skills they need to enter the industry,” he says.

“If we are serious about succeeding with these large-scale technology and defence projects in South Australia – and keeping them here – we really need to find ways to get STEM enrolments back on track and develop the pipeline of talent that will be needed.

“I think a way to do this is to integrate the arts and humanities into STEM curriculums (creating what is known as STEAM) – this will not only help to attract a wider and more diverse group of students into STEM curriculums but also foster the soft skills that are so crucial to our personal, project and organisational success.

“It’ll also get them out of the classroom to work in teams and solve real problems through what is known as Project Based Learning.

“This kind of approach gives students the opportunity to experience how these STEM skills are used outside the classroom; to see where their maths skills will actually end up being used.”



Since 2015, Emilio has been running his own management consultancy and advisory firm, De Stefano & Co, which sees him and his team spending the majority of their efforts supporting organisations operating in the engineering, manufacturing and technology sectors.

As an accomplished Keynote Speaker, he speaks to audiences nationally on topics including navigating change and disruption, and is also the Co-Founder of Adelaide Gardening Group, a provider of turn-key garden and grounds maintenance solutions to the government, commercial and strata management sectors.

Emilio owes his success – and ever-busy schedule – to his entrepreneurial spirit, diligence, and courage to take calculated risks in his professional career.

“I truly believe that we often regret the decisions we never made, more than the regretful decisions we did,” he says.

“I try to follow the things I really enjoy and I am opportunistic in that I will always have a good look into opportunities that come up. If you don’t give it a go – you won’t know what does and doesn’t work.

“The way I see it – you can always go back to the job or industry you were in before, and you might just learn something valuable along the way.”



[Back to Alumni News](#)

[Postgraduate Study](#) | [Research Degrees](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Career Services](#) | [Events](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2018 University of South Australia | [CRICOS Provider Number: 00121B](#) | [View our privacy statement](#)

