

# WHOLE-HEARTED TEACHING

Bringing a Different Kind of Science into the Studio

**DAVID SISCO (HE/HIM)**

*ADJUNCT VOICE FACULTY*

**NYU  
STEIN  
HARDT**



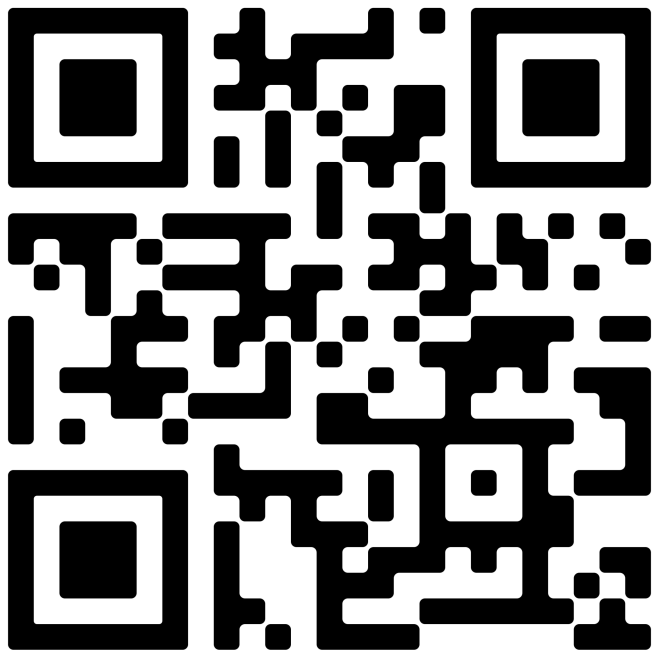


# David Sisco

Teacher, Composer, Author, Performer



## Teacher



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- [ICVT 2022 Presentation \(Video\)](#)
- [ICVT 2022 Presentation \(Slides\)](#)
- [Original MusicalsBIPOC Musical Theatre Creators](#)

[My Experience](#) [My Philosophy on Singing](#) [What's a Regular Lesson Like?](#)  
[Special Skills](#) [Statement of Inclusion](#) [Recommendations / Testimonials](#)

I have been teaching privately and at the college level and privately for over 20 years. I love what I do, and believe there's nothing more gratifying than collaborating with a singer to create more technical and artistic freedom. In addition to maintaining an active private studio, I have taught at the following institutions:

- NYU Steinhardt (2020 – Present)



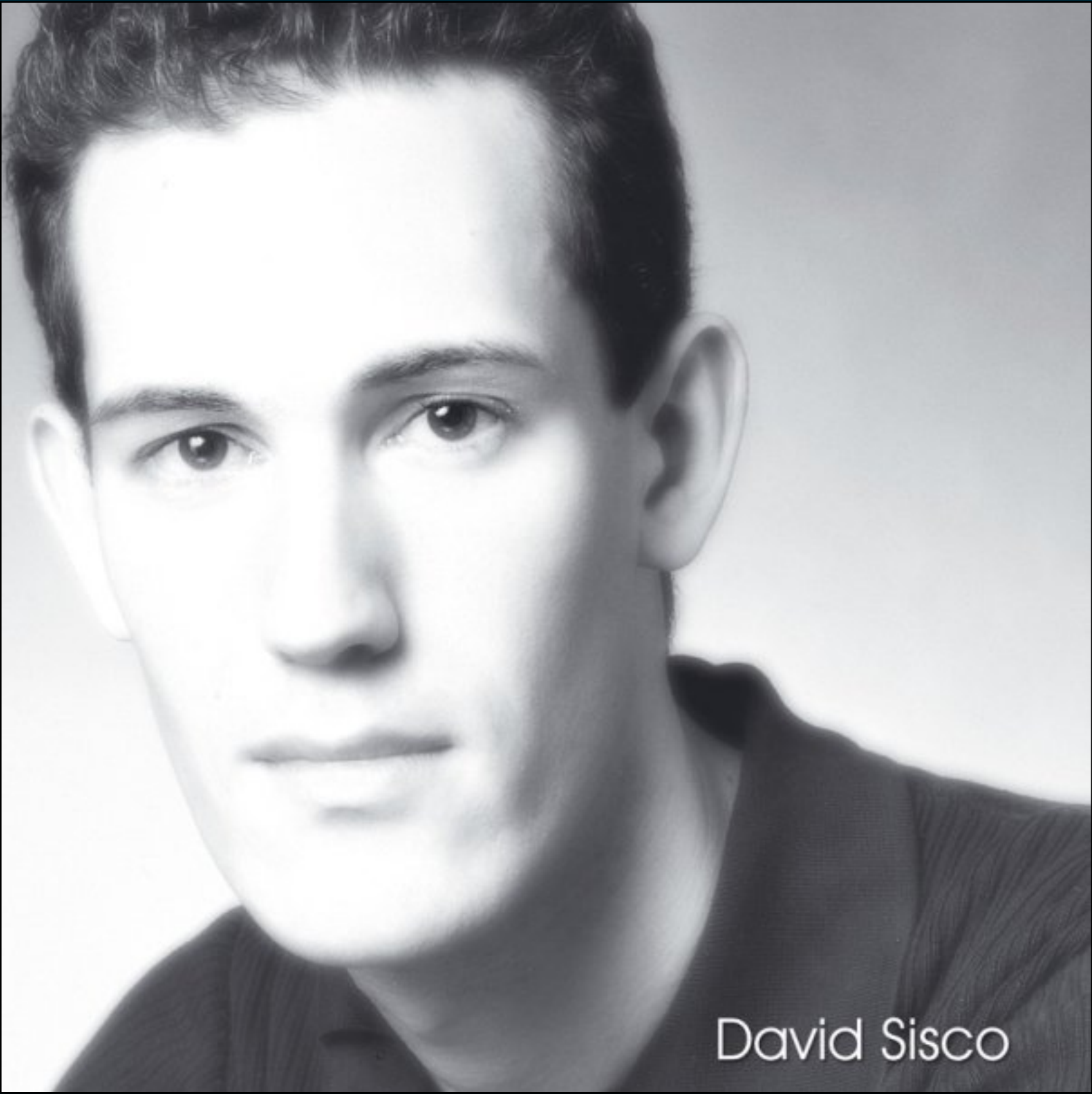
SCAN ME



~~Q&A~~









**CURIOSITY**

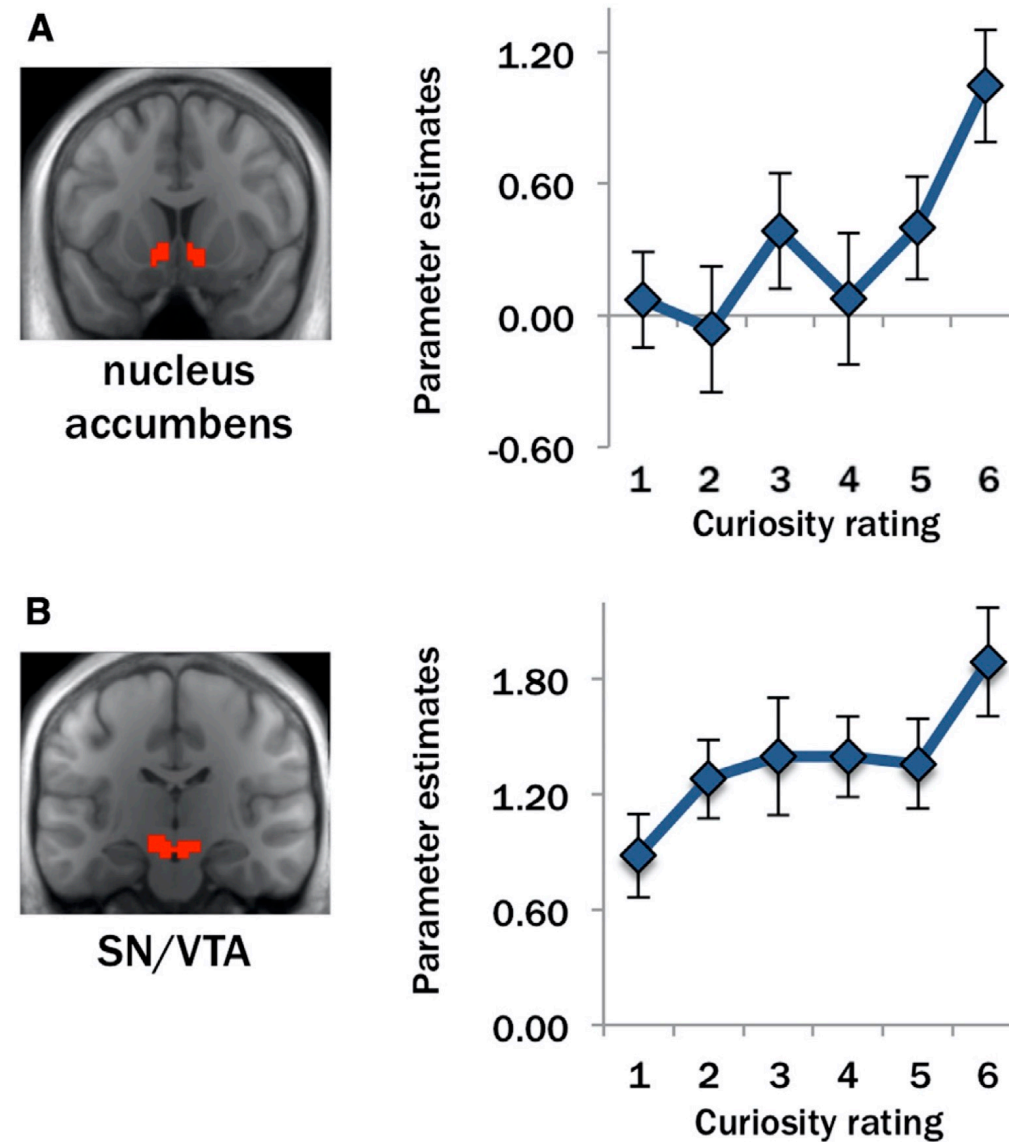
**VULNERABILITY**

**MINDFULNESS**

**SELF-CARE**



# CURIOSITY



**Figure 2. Curiosity-Modulated Activity in the Dopaminergic Circuit**  
Curiosity ratings were associated with activity increases in the bilateral nucleus accumbens ROI (A) and left SN/VTA ROI (B). On the left, ROIs are shown in red on the average, normalized anatomical image in our group of participants. On the right, to depict the effects modeled by the parametric modulation analysis, mean BOLD parameter estimates related to the onset of the trivia questions are plotted on the y axis against the curiosity rating given during the screening phase on the x axis. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SEM.

States of Curiosity Modulate Hippocampus-Dependent  
Learning via the Dopamine Circuit  
*Neuron* (October, 2014)





“The larger the island of knowledge grows, the longer the shoreline - where knowledge meets ignorance - extends. ***The more we know, the more we can ask.*** Questions don't give way to answers as much as they proliferate together. Answers breed questions. ***Curiosity isn't merely a static disposition but rather a passion of the mind that is ceaselessly earned and nurtured.***”

~Michael Smithson



Are we willing to subvert to the natural power dynamics of the teacher/student relationship in favor of helping students stay curious about what they don't know?

Can we model the kind of curiosity we want our students to practice?



- I. Maintain an active research practice
- II. Encourage students to be curious about their own singing experience
- III. Ask students if there are particular intersections of identity they would like to celebrate through the repertoire you choose together.

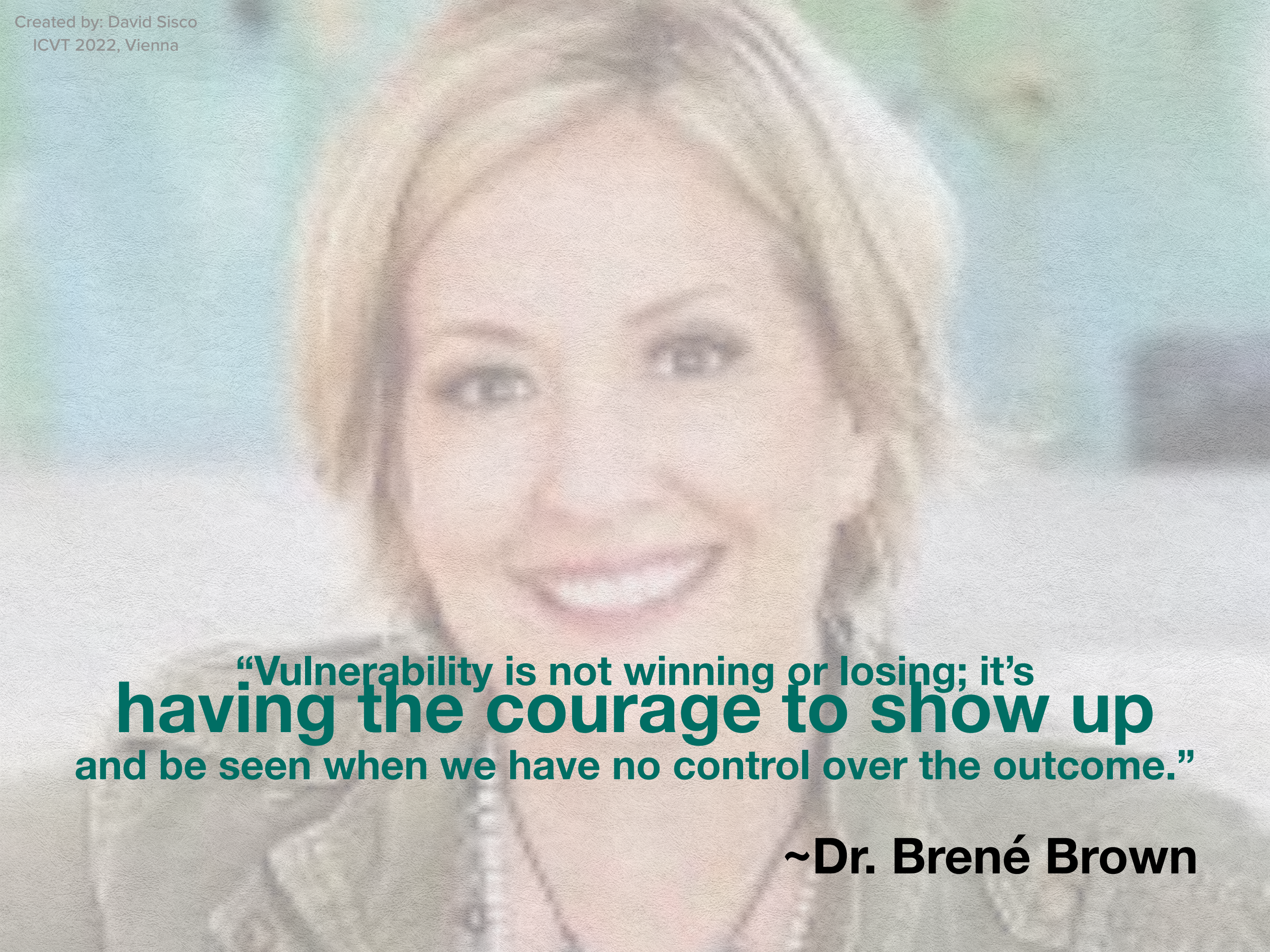


# QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS WHEN CHOOSING REPERTOIRE TOGETHER

- *How would this character, song, or role relate to your lived experience in a way you'd wish to examine?*
- *How would putting work into this role or piece allow you to explore your artistry, identity, and/or history?*
- *How would this role or piece support your learning goals?*







“Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s  
**having the courage to show up**  
and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.”

**~Dr. Brené Brown**



“True knowledge is intertwined with vulnerability because to learn something new, a learner must face uncertainty and the idea of not knowing something to be open to taking in a new perspective or new information.”

**DR. SHANNON HUDDY**

*Vulnerability in the Classroom: How Undergraduate Business Instructors' Ability to Build Trust Impacts the Student's Learning Process*

1. The teacher is personable
2. The teacher shares real-life stories -  
sometimes ones that are less than favorable
3. The teacher creates a safe environment,  
allowing students to have a voice

**DR. SHANNON HUDDY**

*Vulnerability in the Classroom: How Undergraduate Business Instructors' Ability to Build Trust Impacts the Student's Learning Process*

“The tension between vulnerability and seeking credibility creates challenge for learning and teaching.”

**MOLLOY & BEARMAN**

*Embracing the Tension Between Vulnerability and Credibility: “Intellectual Candour” in Health Professions Education*



*“One means of embracing this tension between expressing vulnerability and appearing credible is  
“**intellectual candour**,” an improvisational expression of doubts, thoughts and problems with the dual purpose of learning and promoting others’ learning. Educators’ revelations of inner struggles are proposed as a means of inviting **reciprocal vulnerability**. This builds trust and a platform for learning, particularly of the transformative nature.”*

**MOLLOY & BEARMAN**

*Embracing the Tension Between Vulnerability and Credibility: “Intellectual Candour” in Health Professions Education*



# I. Share personal stories of success and failure



“I have found that the very feeling which has seemed to me most private, most personal and hence most incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there is a resonance in many other people.

***It has led me to believe that what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others.***

This has helped me to understand artists and poets who have dared to express the unique in themselves.”

~ Carl Rogers  
American Psychologist

- I. Share personal stories of success and failure
- II. Celebrate “mistakes” as a part of the natural evolution of learning
- III. Regularly embrace the vulnerability of singing through private or public performance.





IV. Ask ourselves: How am I able and willing to prioritize my student's comfort over my own?

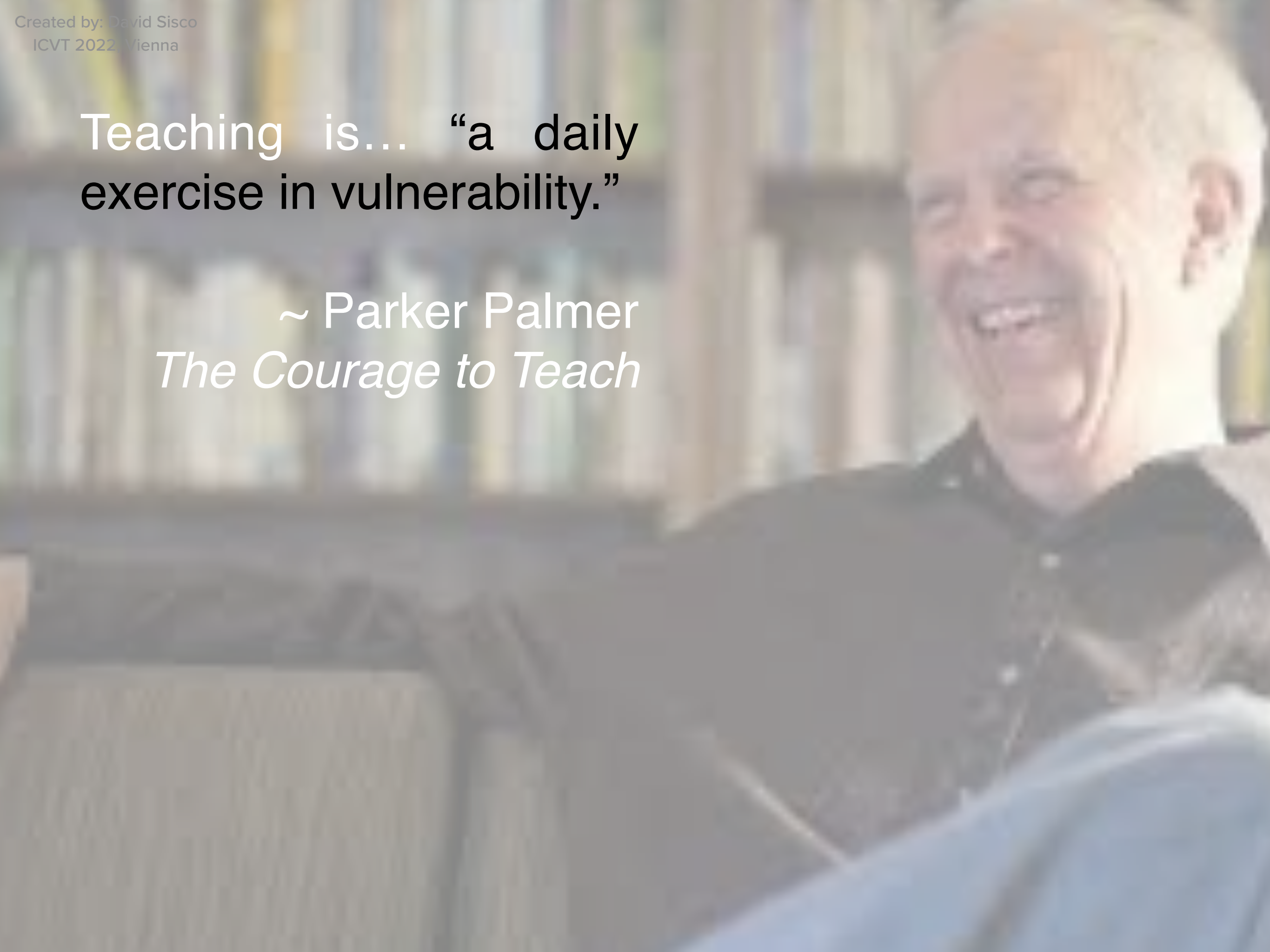




IV. Ask ourselves: How am I able and willing to prioritize my student's comfort over my own?

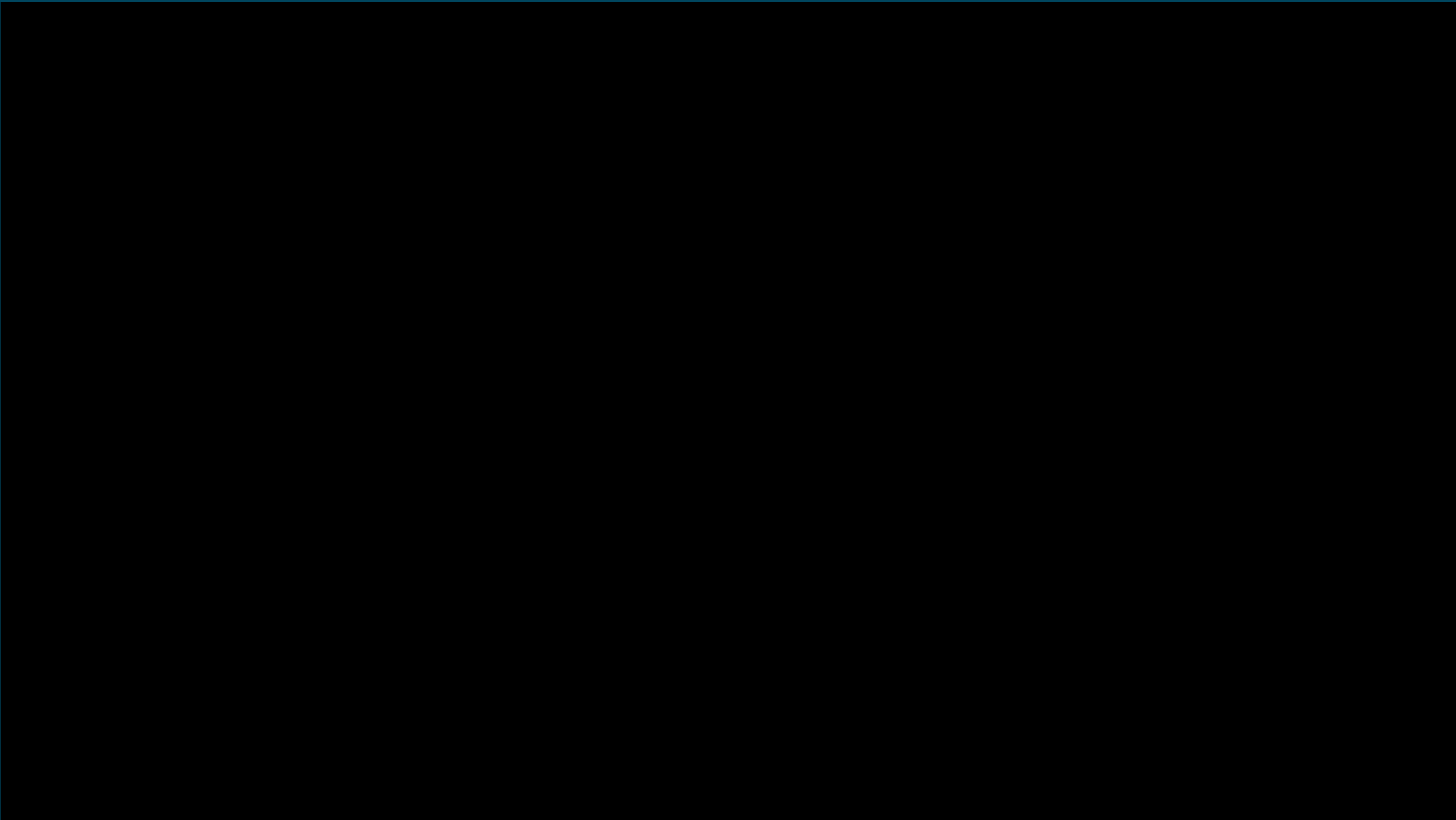
Teaching is... “a daily  
exercise in vulnerability.”

~ Parker Palmer  
*The Courage to Teach*



# MINDFULNESS





Caleb Ajao, MM Vocal Performance, Musical Theatre  
NYU Steinhardt



Mindfulness is “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn  
*Wherever You Go, There You Are*

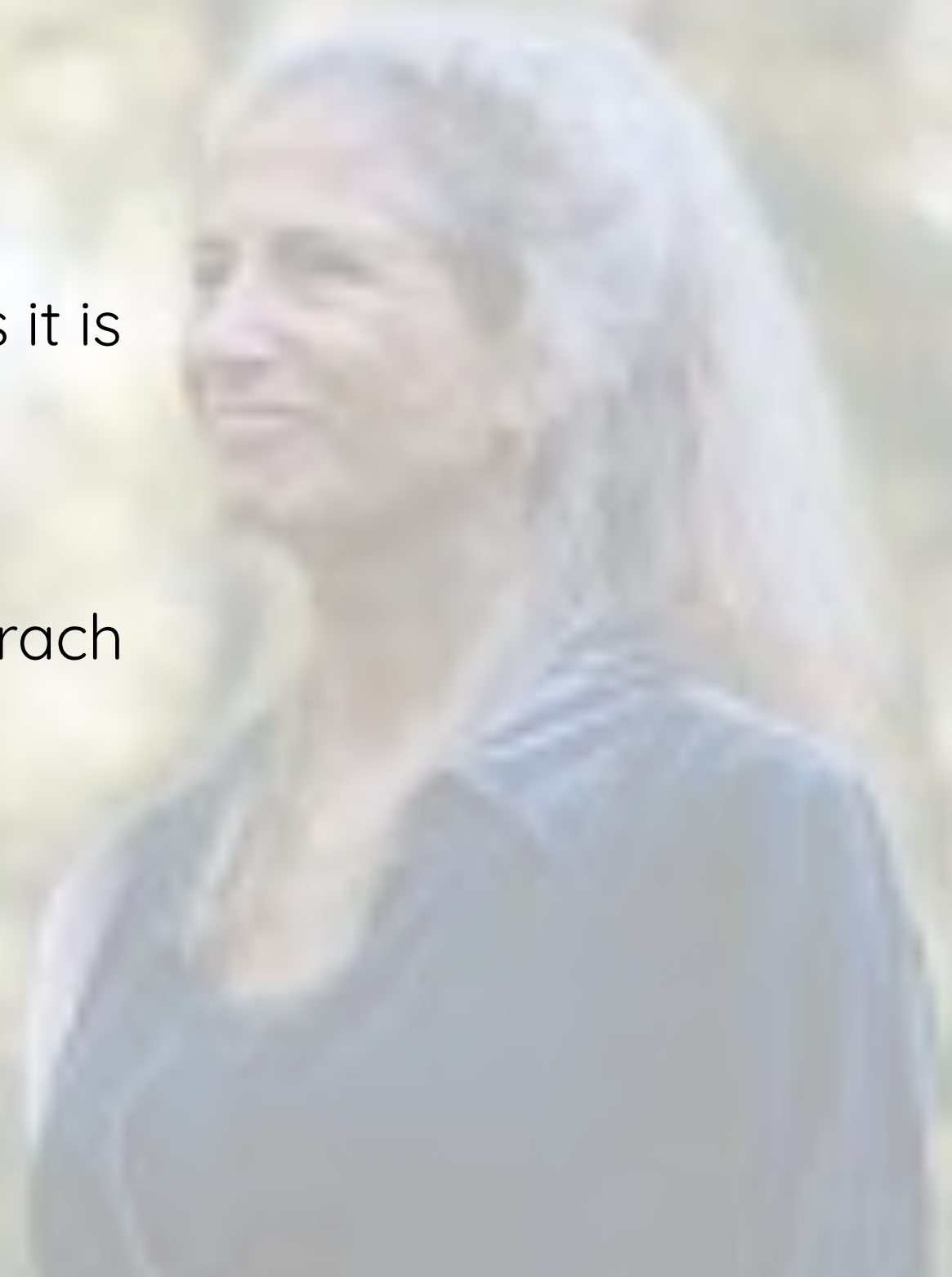
- I. Minimizes the transition from self to other
- II. Affords an opportunity to develop reflective teaching
- III. Helps us maintain connection to our humanity



# I. Find a meditation practice that works for you.

**Recognize** what is going on  
**Allow** the experience to be there, just as it is  
**Investigate** with interest and care  
**Nurture** with self-compassion

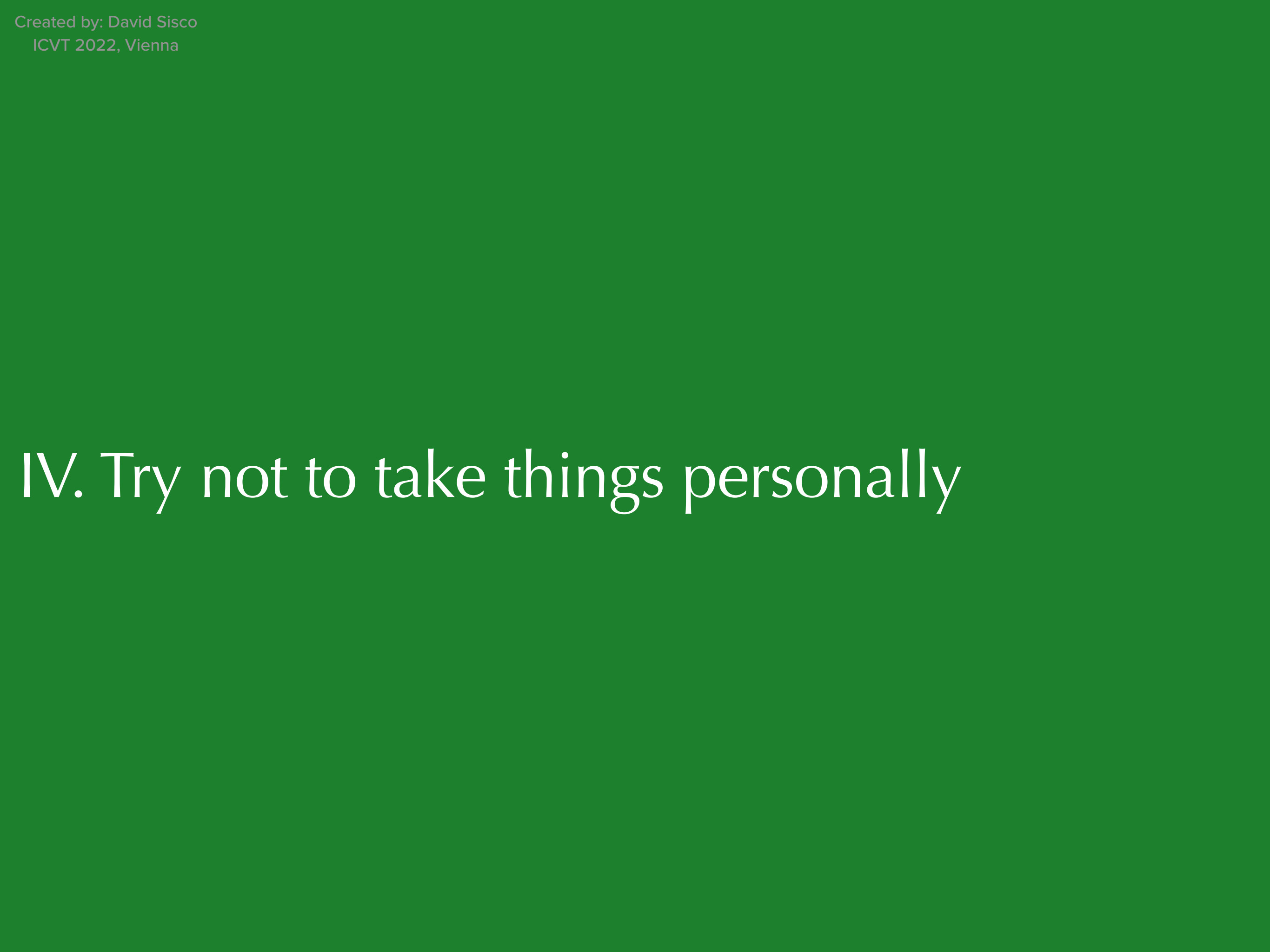
~ Tara Brach



- I. Find a meditation practice that works for you.
- II. Journal
- III. Be curious about any resistance you may feel while teaching.



“Resistance fundamentally means you’re saying to the world, “I don’t like it the way it is.” However, the world is *exactly* the way it is – which means the more you resist, the more unhappiness you create. Accepting things the way they are will not only allow you to enjoy life more, but also helps you facilitate change.”



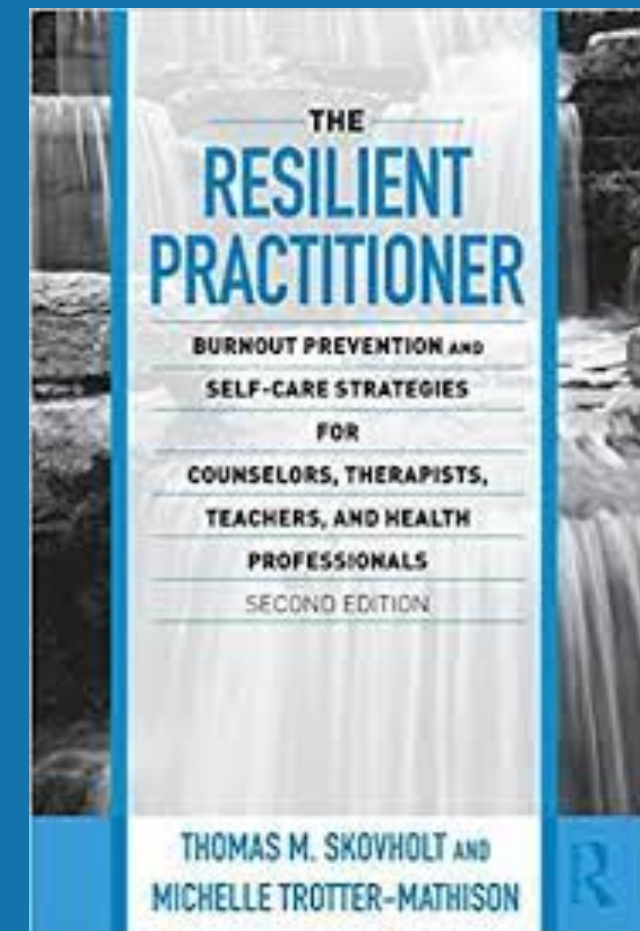
# IV. Try not to take things personally



# SELF-CARE



“In the theater of life, the other becomes the illuminated part of the stage; *our I is often outside the illumination.* The lives of others —their hopes, ideas, goals, aspirations, pains, fears, despair, anger—are in focus. Like a leaf under a microscope, we see all of this in highly illuminated detail... *Out of the illuminated microscope, we can easily lose sight of our own needs.* We even lose sight of the need to not respond to all needs around us.”



# ***COMPASSION BURNOUT***



“Many of us are familiar with **living in our heads**, depending on our intellect, and developing enough external architecture to function and get by. But if we are to truly **care** for ourselves in a **sustainable way**, let alone anyone else - if we are to **thrive** - then something greater is required of us. We must discover an **awareness** of what allows us to live, moment by moment, from a centered place, from an **awakened** heart.”

~ **Laura van Dernoot Lipsky**

*Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*



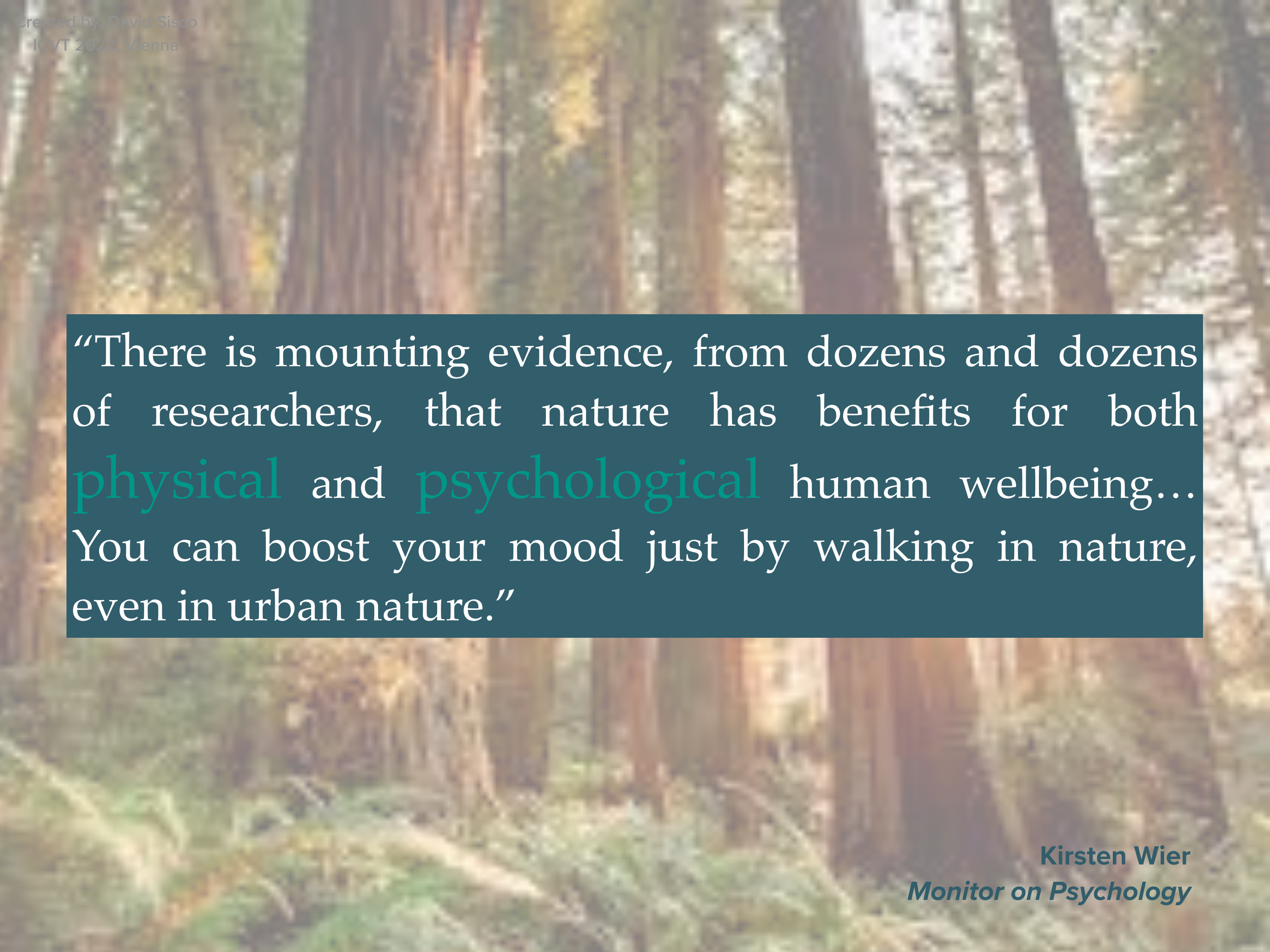
- I. Avoid centering your identity on your work
- II. Find a meditation practice that works for you

*“If we are aware of the constant changes in our **inner** and **outer environment**, we can mobilize to manage them. But we can’t do this unless our **watchtower**, the MPFC [**Medial Prefrontal Cortex**], learns to observe what is going on inside us. This is why **mindfulness practice**, which strengthens the MPFC, is a **cornerstone of recovery from trauma**”*

Bessel Van Der Kolk  
*The Body Keeps the Score*

- I. Avoid centering your identity on your work
- II. Find a meditation practice that works for you
- III. Get outside, or bring the outside in





“There is mounting evidence, from dozens and dozens of researchers, that nature has benefits for both **physical** and **psychological** human wellbeing... You can boost your mood just by walking in nature, even in urban nature.”

Kirsten Wier  
*Monitor on Psychology*



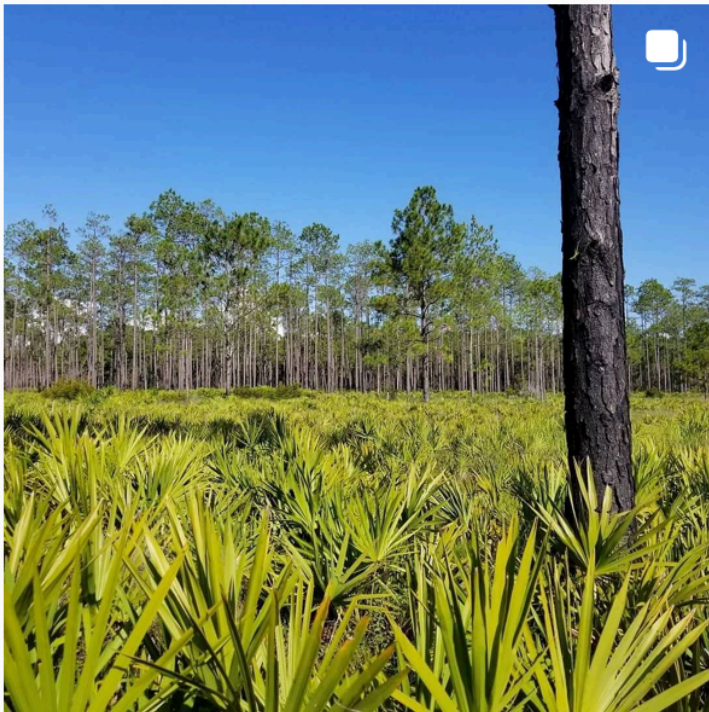


#findthelizard

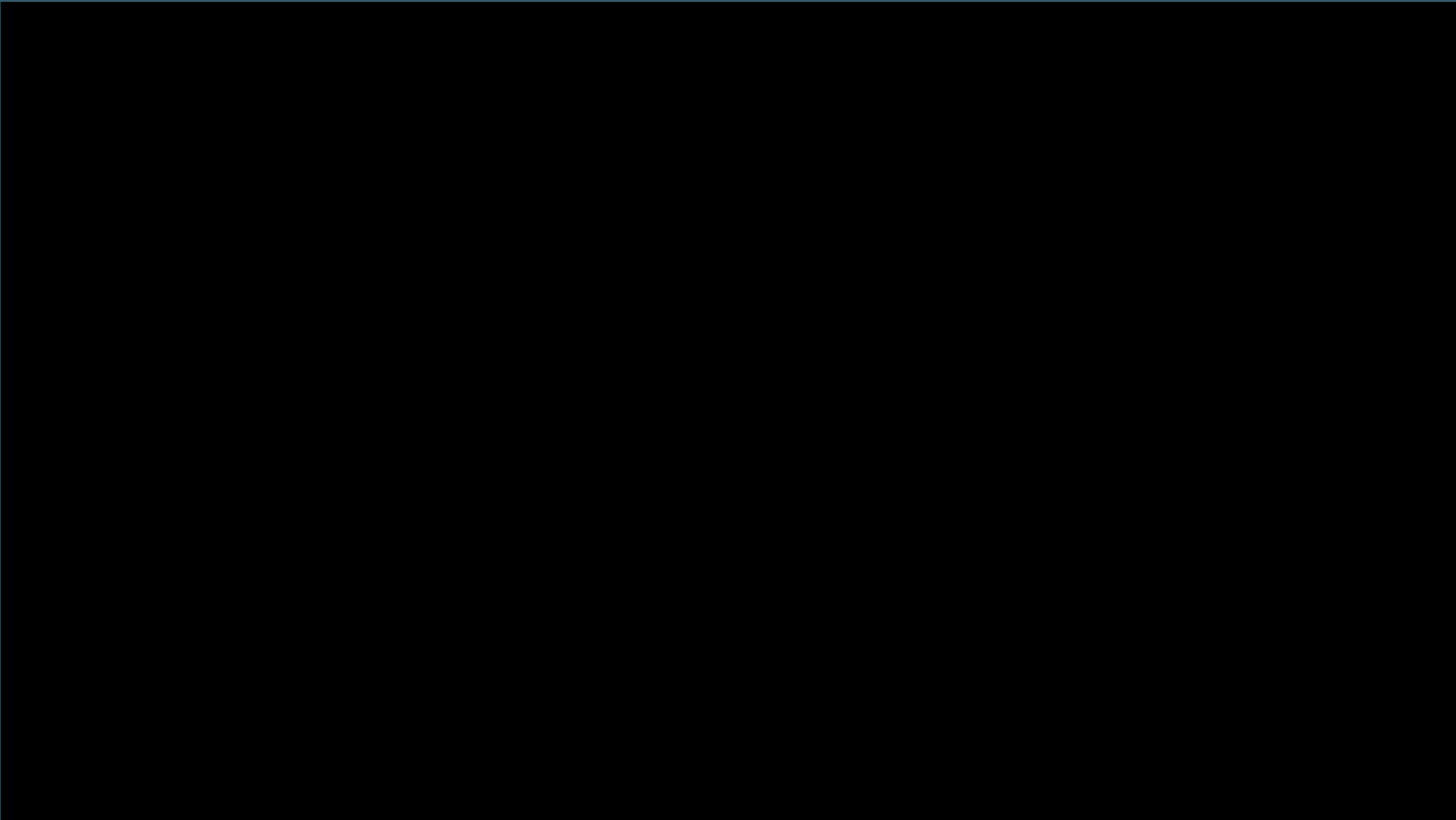
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# IV. *Maintain your sense of humor*



Jerry Lewis in *The Patsy* (1964)



**CURIOSITY**

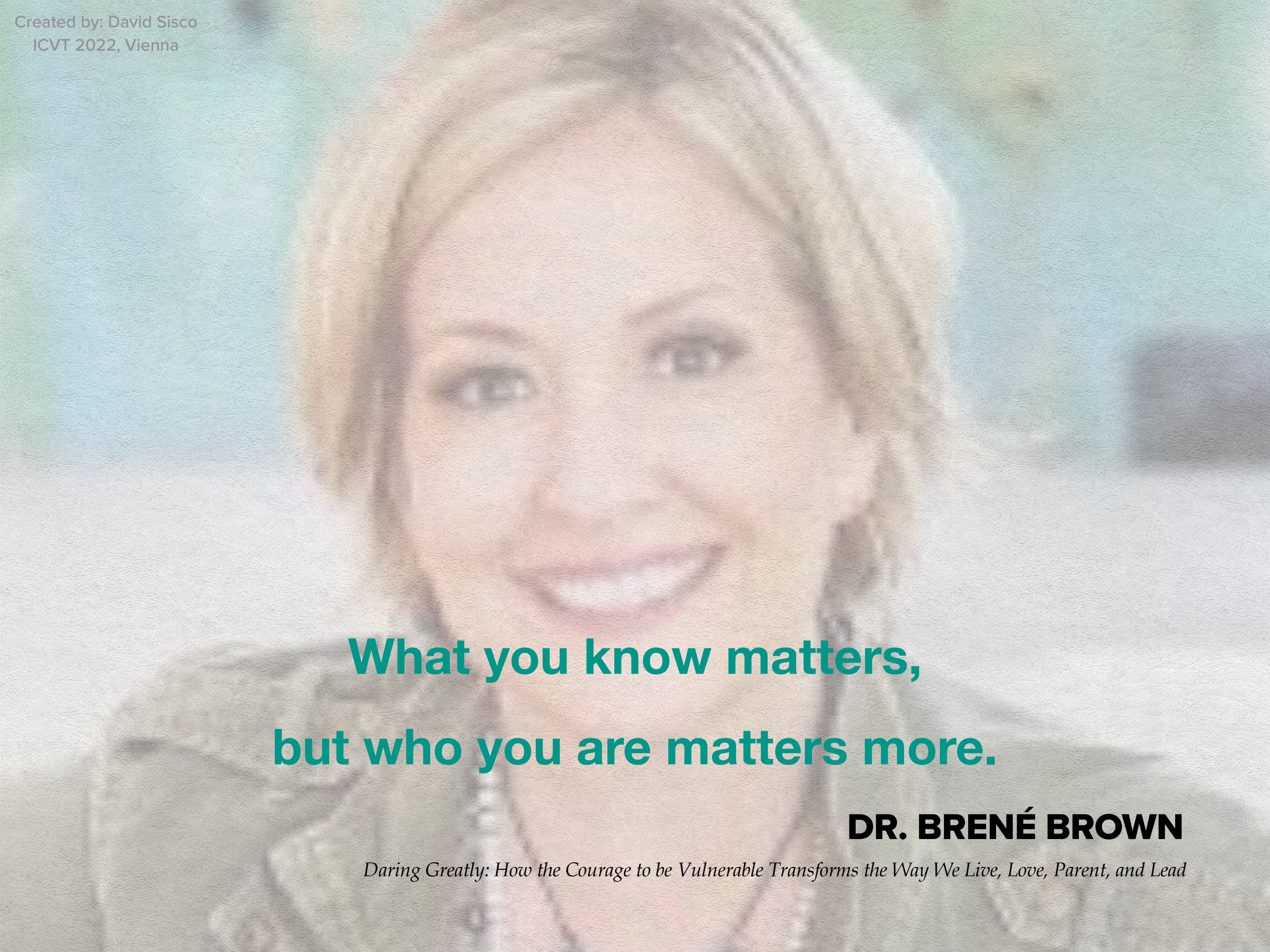
**VULNERABILITY**

**MINDFULNESS**

**SELF-CARE**

**FAIL BETTER.**





**What you know matters,  
but who you are matters more.**

**DR. BRENÉ BROWN**

*Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*



What you know is  
important.

Who you are is *more*  
important.

**DR. BRENÉ BROWN**

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# RESOURCES

Created by: David Sisco  
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