

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: Entrepreneurial Mindsets for Graduate Success and Beyond

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CGS Annual Meeting, DC, 2025
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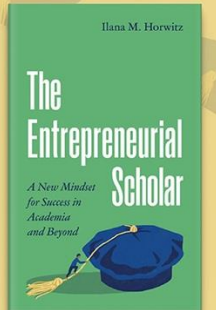
Ilana M. Horwitz

The Entrepreneurial Scholar

*A New Mindset
for Success in
Academia
and Beyond*



An invaluable guide for
scholars stifled by the
traditional academic route





What would happen if we admitted that our graduate training model was designed for a world that no longer exists?

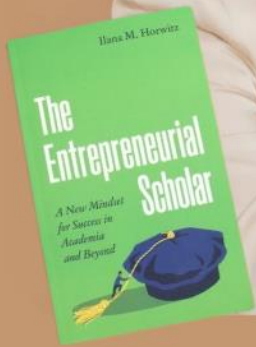
You already know...

Only a small
fraction of PhDs
get tenure-track
jobs

Your students are
anxious,
sometimes
paralyzed

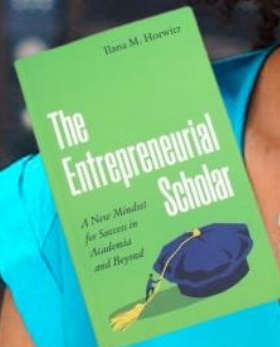
Faculty often train
students exactly
as they were
trained

Two Scholars



“I wanted to take on an entrepreneurial lifestyle and do this differently than the ‘academic’ world as we have defined it. There are different ways to fashion an academic life of thinking, research, and writing that are not confined to typical university jobs. So I left and redefined myself in a new space”

TRICIA BRUCE, PHD
“SOCIOLOGIST, RESEARCHER,
AUTHOR, FORMER PROFESSOR



We need to think of careers outside academia not so much as the failed path but as another great option for a system that is going to create “extra” people. I wish I had allowed myself the freedom to decide that a job outside academia wasn’t a “last resort.” It took me a ridiculously sad amount of time to realize how awesome the alternatives to academia are. I wish I’d known that [taking such a job] wasn’t failure.

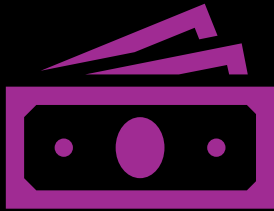
TAMARA GILKES BORR, PHD
PRODUCER OF THE WEEKEND INTELLIGENCE
THE ECONOMIST



What these scholars have in common isn't
luck

It's a particular MINDSET.

Defining "Entrepreneurial"



NOT

Start-ups & venture capital
Profit motive
Commercializing scholarship
Academic Capitalism



YES

Solving problems with limited resources
Creating opportunities, not just waiting for them
Making scholarship matter beyond the university
Navigating uncertainty



An Entrepreneurial Scholar

Generated New Knowledge With
Limited Resources While
Navigating an Environment of
High Uncertainty

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET: THREE SHIFTS

Consumer →
Producer

From consuming
information to
creating new
knowledge

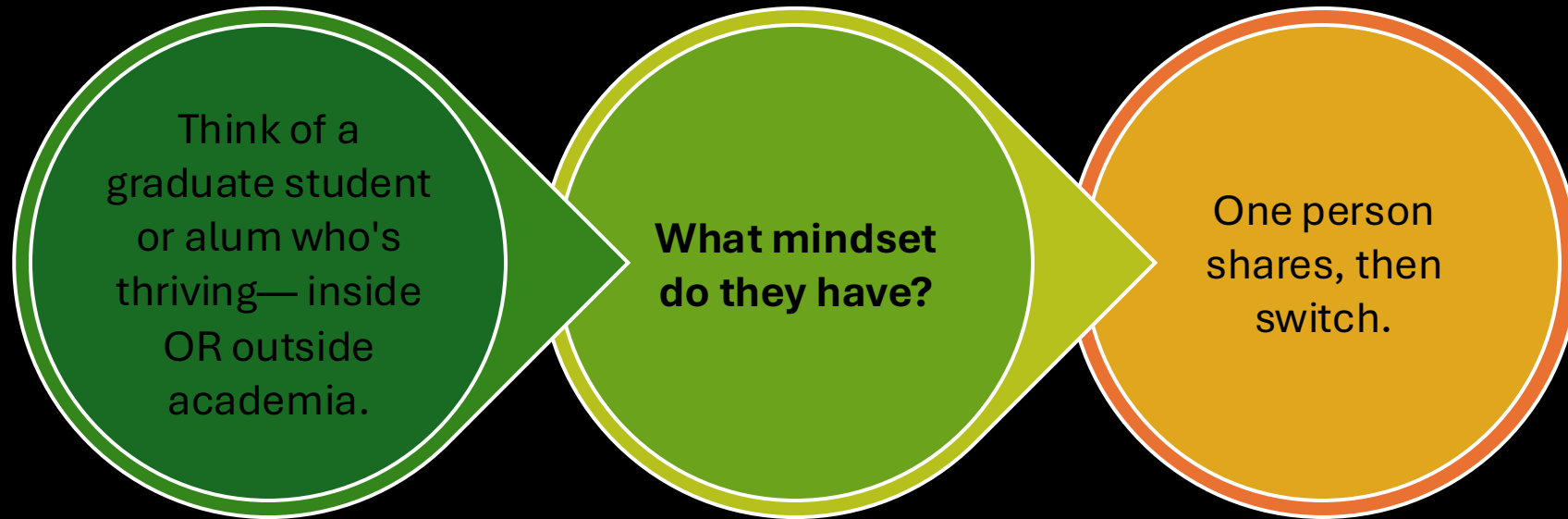
Passive → Agentic

From waiting for
direction to taking
ownership

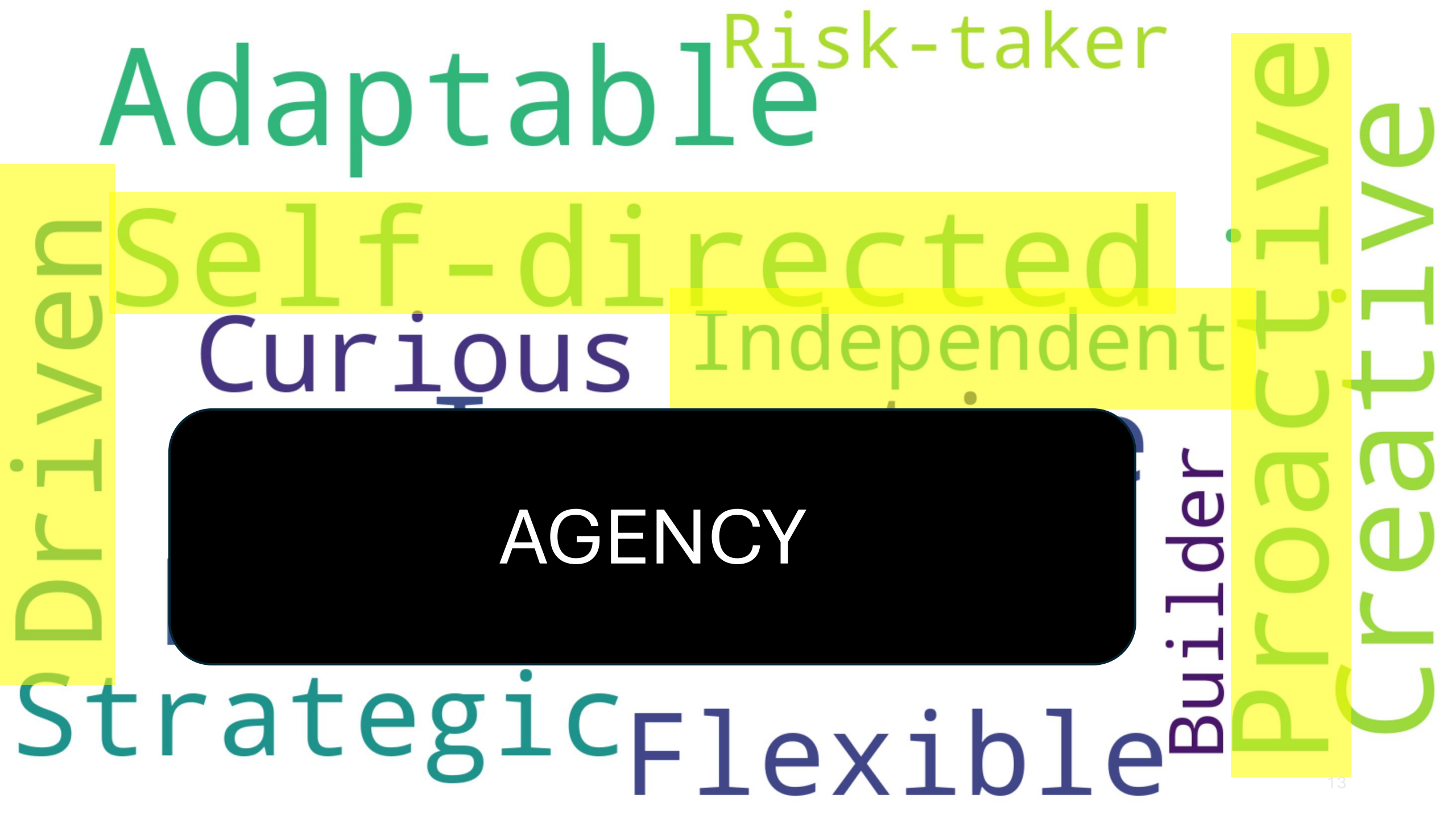
Certainty-Seeking →
Uncertainty-
Navigating

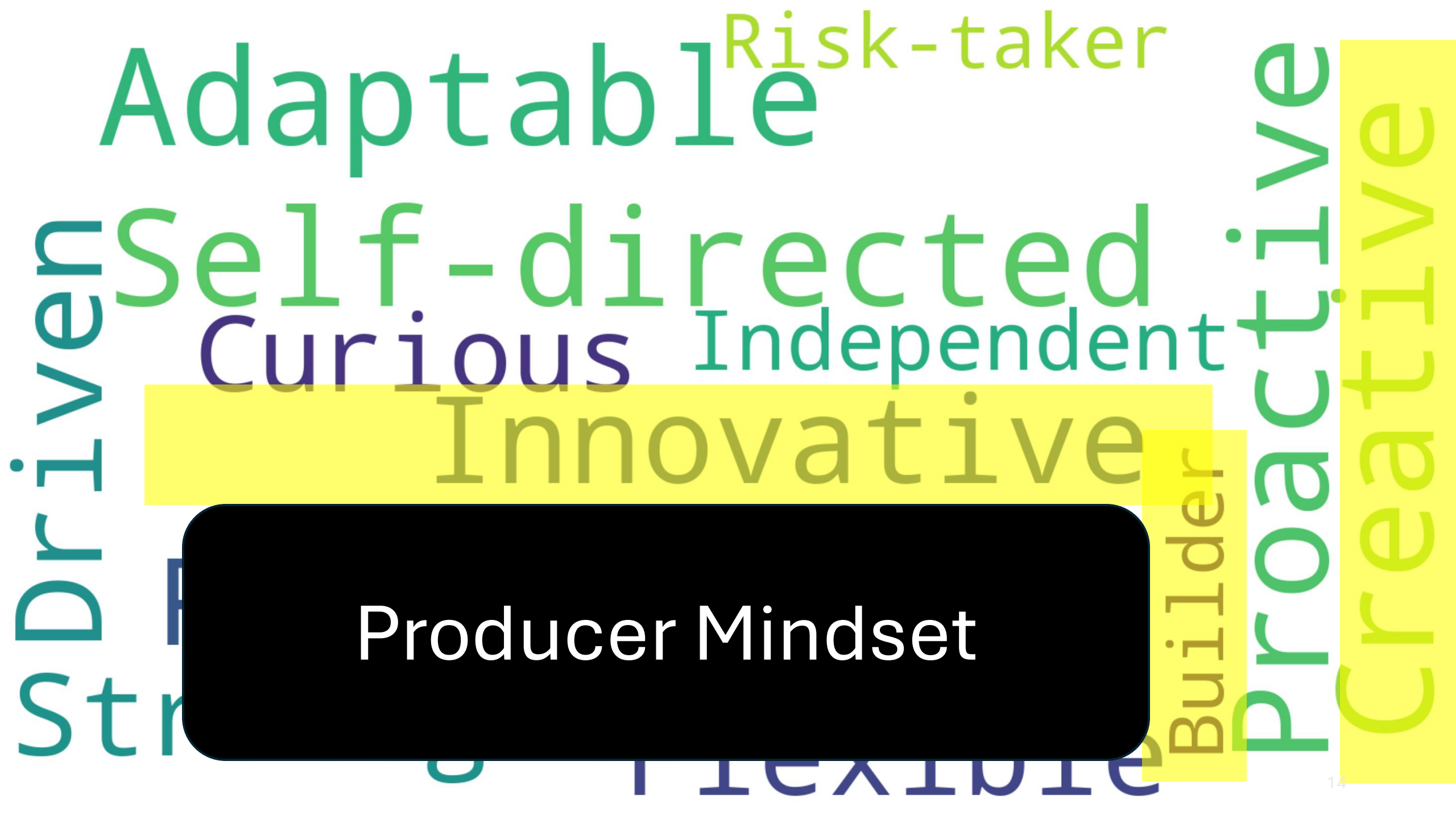
From needing
perfect information
to acting
strategically
anyway

TURN & TALK (90 seconds)



Adaptable Risk-taker
Self-directed
Curious Independent
Innovative
Resilient
Strategic Flexible
Builder
Proactive
Creative
Driven





Adaptable

Risk-taker

Self-directed

Curious

Independent

Innovative

Proactive

Creative

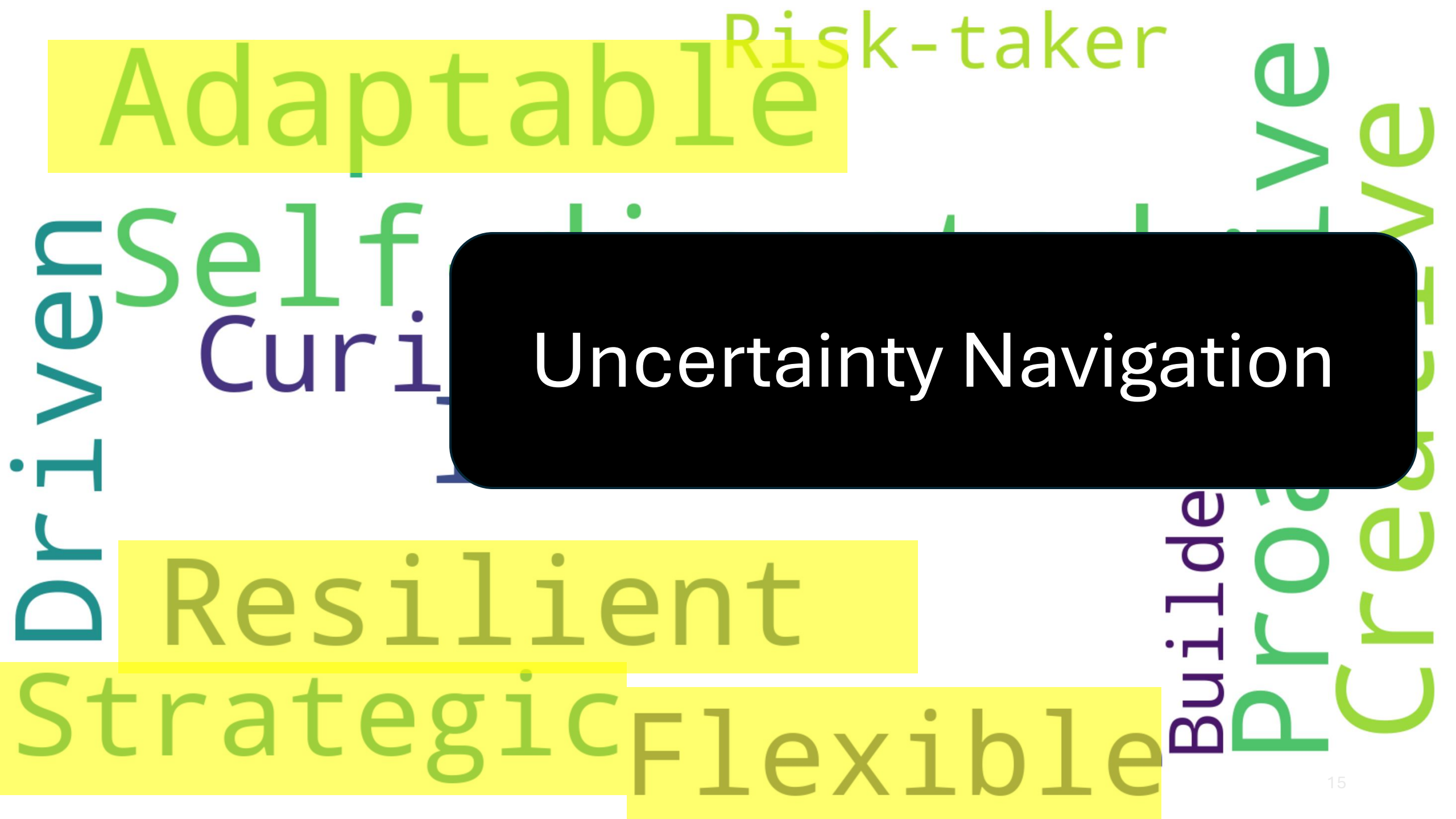
Builder

Producer Mindset

Driven

Strategic

Flexible



Uncertainty Navigation

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SCHOLAR DIAGNOSTIC

Three questions for any program element:

- Production or consumption?
- Agency or passivity?
- Uncertainty navigation or certainty-seeking?

Program Element	Current State Assessment	Opportunity for Change
ADMISSIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> Consumer (GPA/GRE focus) <input type="checkbox"/> Producer (evidence of initiative/creativity) <input type="checkbox"/> Passive (select compliant students) <input type="checkbox"/> Agentic (select self-directed students) <input type="checkbox"/> Certainty (perfect credentials) <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty (diverse paths valued)	What could we change in our rubric or essays to select for entrepreneurial qualities?
FIRST-YEAR ORIENTATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Consumer (here's what to read) <input type="checkbox"/> Producer (here's your first research task) <input type="checkbox"/> Passive (here are the rules) <input type="checkbox"/> Agentic (what problem will you solve?) <input type="checkbox"/> Certainty (here's the one path) <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty (here are many paths)	What message could we send in week 1 that <u>says</u> "you're a scholar, not a student"?
COURSEWORK STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consumer (read and synthesize literature) <input type="checkbox"/> Producer (create original analyses) <input type="checkbox"/> Passive (complete assigned readings) <input type="checkbox"/> Agentic (pursue questions you care about) <input type="checkbox"/> Certainty (master the canon) <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty (use lit strategically for your goals)	What's ONE assignment type we could change to require knowledge production?
ADVISING MEETINGS	<input type="checkbox"/> Consumer (receive advisor feedback) <input type="checkbox"/> Producer (bring work in progress) <input type="checkbox"/> Passive (wait for advisor direction) <input type="checkbox"/> Agentic (bring agenda and proposals) <input type="checkbox"/> Certainty (seek approval for each step) <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty (make decisions, seek consultation)	Could we require students to bring written agendas to every meeting?



This work requires:

COURAGE to challenge traditional
models **INTEGRITY** to be honest about career
realities **RESILIENCE** to persist through
resistance

THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Why These Mindsets Matter

THE FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION

The Good Student

Follows directions

Seeks approval

Completes assignments on time

Masters what others have discovered

Waits for the next step to be defined

The Good Scholar

Asks new questions

Takes intellectual risks

Pursues problems they care about

Creates new knowledge

Defines their own next step

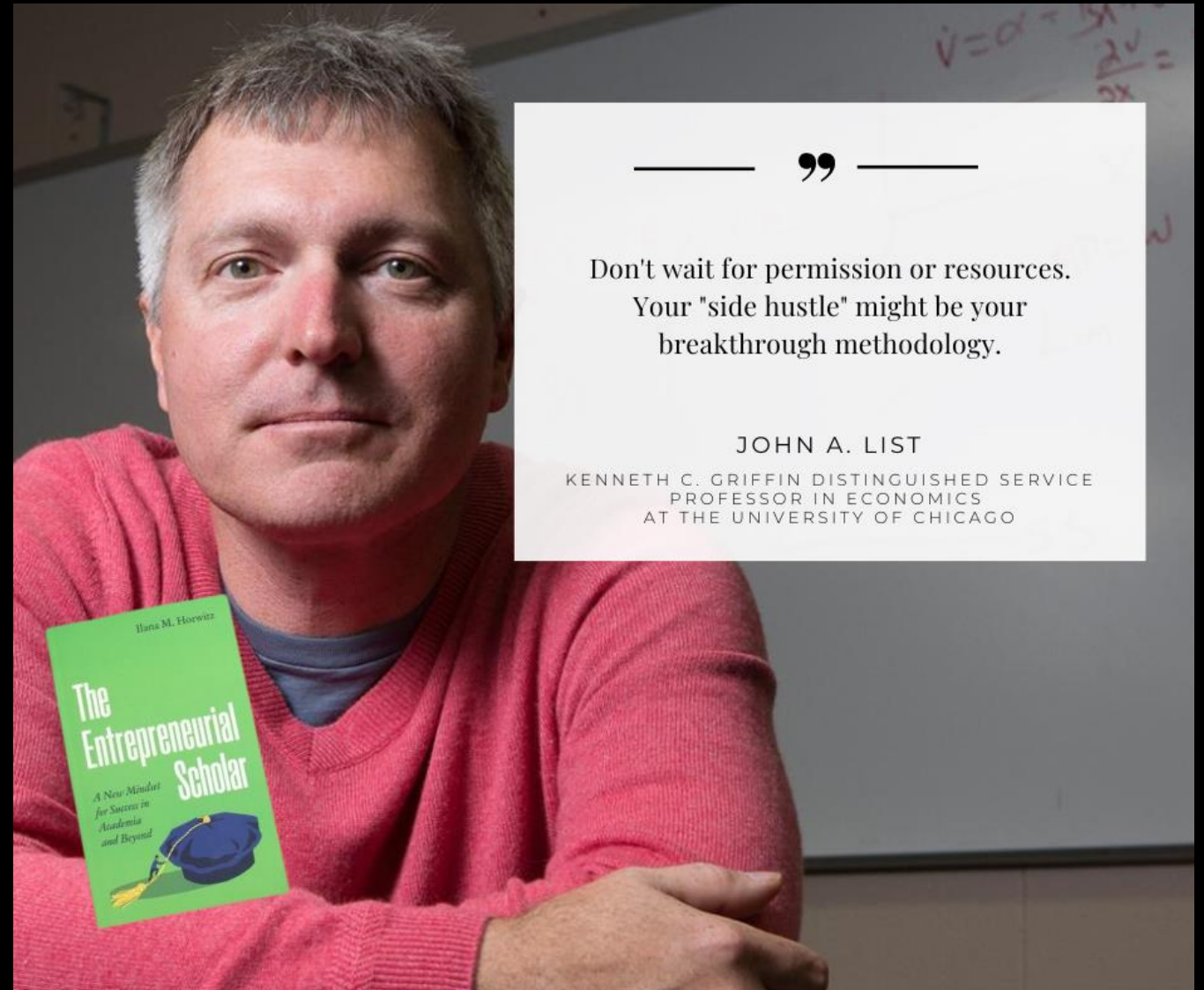
WHAT PREDICTS GRADUATE SUCCESS?

- Self-efficacy & confidence
- Internal locus of control (agency)
- Ability to navigate setbacks
- Diverse mentorship networks

Celebrating Autonomy

RESEARCH FINDING #1: Autonomy as Protection

- Scholars who celebrate their autonomy and see themselves as independent agents making strategic choices report:
 - Lower anxiety & depression
 - Greater career satisfaction



Navigating Self-Doubt

RESEARCH FINDING #2: Confidence \neq Absence of Doubt

- Successful scholars don't lack self-doubt but they navigate it differently.
- They reframe doubt as normal, not as evidence of inadequacy. They act despite uncertainty. They fail forward.

The Problem Matters

RESEARCH FINDING #3

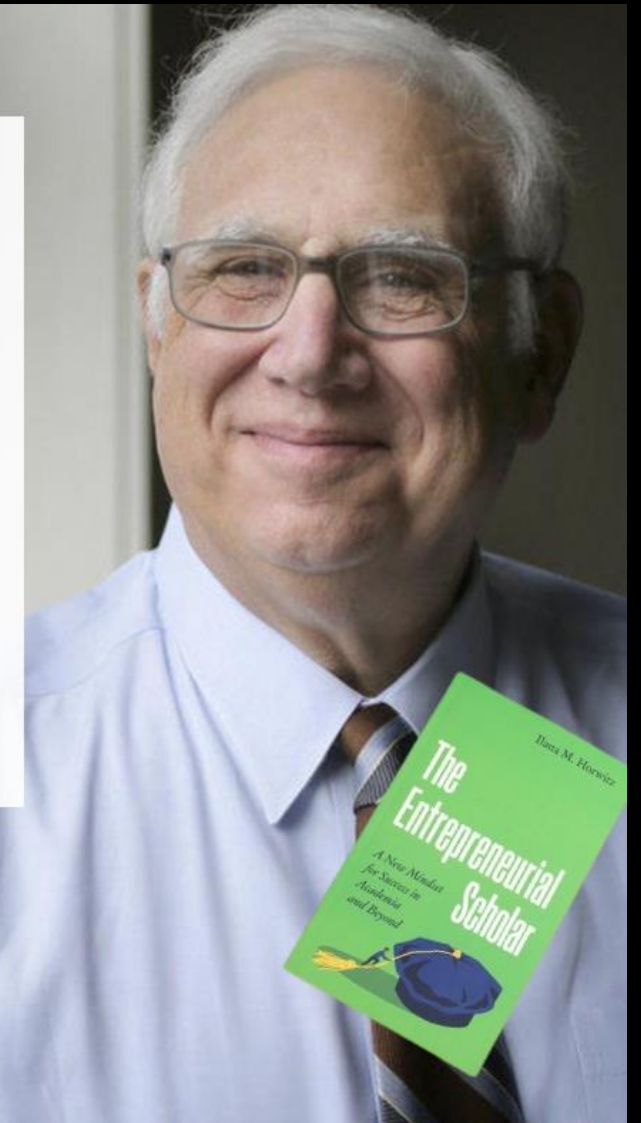
THE IDEA BUSINESS: It's Not Just What You Study—It's Your Relationship to the Problem

— ” —

I don't care if you're a sociologist, or if you're in finance, your role is not just to churn out papers and research. Being a professor is thinking about being entrepreneurial—[to] come up with new ideas that will make the world a better place.

SCOTT COWEN

FORMER PRESIDENT OF TULANE UNIVERSITY
LED THE UNIVERSITY'S RECOVERY
POST-HURRICANE KATRINA



1. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Can you articulate it in one sentence?

2. HONING THE PROBLEM

Can you refine it strategically?

FOUR ELEMENTS OF PROBLEM ENGAGEMENT

3. CARING ABOUT THE PROBLEM

Are you intrinsically motivated?

4. PERSONALIZING THE PROBLEM

Do you have skin in the game?

Consumer → Producer = I am in the idea business from day one

- When scholars are in the 'idea business'—when they see themselves as problem-solvers creating knowledge—they become producers, not consumers. They become agentic, not passive.

→What does your program do to help students identify THEIR problem?

The Uncertainty Reality

- Academia is fundamentally unpredictable.
- Job markets. Funding. Publication timelines. Advisor relationships.
- The question isn't how to eliminate uncertainty. It's how to act strategically despite it.

— ” —

CAUSAL THINKING:

Start with a goal » Find resources »
Achieve predetermined outcome
(Following a recipe for gumbo)

EFFECTUAL THINKING:

Start with available resources »
Imagine possibilities » Create value
from what emerges (Creating dinner
from whatever's in your kitchen)"

SARAS D. SARASVATHY

PAUL M. HAMMAKER PROFESSOR IN BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION
ACADEMIC DIRECTOR, BATTEN INSTITUTE
JAMUNA RAGHAVAN CHAIR PROFESSOR IN
ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
MANAGEMENT, BANGALORE



Intolerance of Uncertainty

RESEARCH FINDING #3: Uncertainty Avoidance

- **Intolerance of uncertainty** is associated with:
- Anxiety & depression in graduate students
- Procrastination & "analysis paralysis"
- Prolonged time-to-degree

Students who wait for certainty... wait forever.

Failing Forward

RESEARCH FINDING #4: Failing Forward

- Successful scholars reframe setbacks as data, not as verdict
- Paper rejected? → Learn from reviews, revise, resubmit Grant denied? → Refine approach, try new funder
- Experiment failed? → Adjust design, try again
- Resilience is a practiced skill, not a personality trait

The 3 shifts

Consumer → Producer


- Happens when students enter the idea business, engage with problems they care about

Passive → Agentic

- Happens when they take ownership, create opportunities through action, navigate self-doubt with confidence

Certainty-Seeking → Uncertainty-Navigating

- Happens when they learn to act without perfect information, fail forward, and see multiple paths

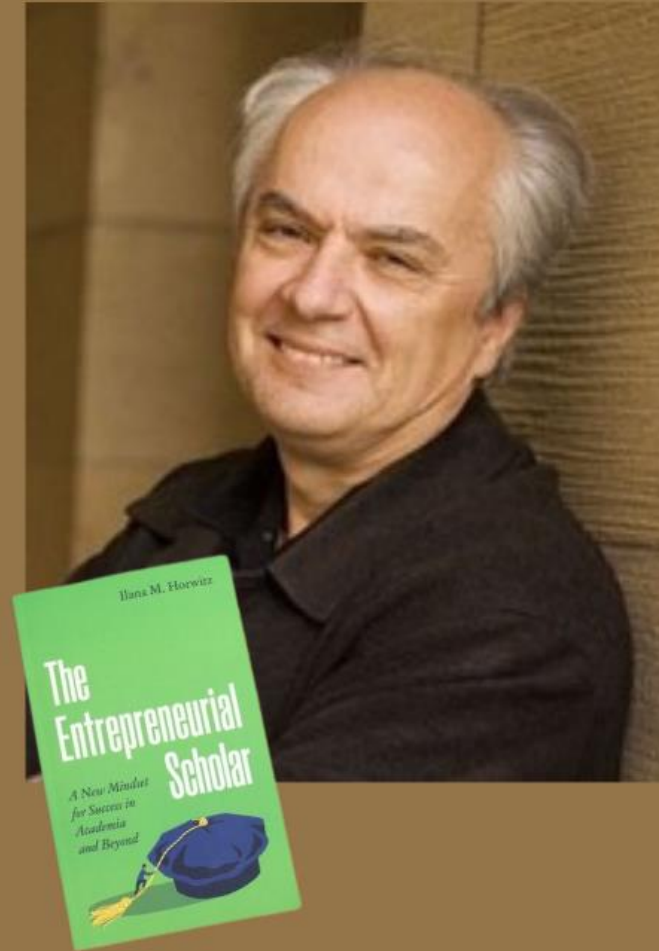


How do we cultivate these
mindsets systematically?

SOLUTIONS SHOWCASE

SHIFT 1: How to shift students from consumption to production

- 1. Week-1 Problem Statement**
- 2. Reframe Qualifying Exams**
- 3. Create-Don't-Consume Syllabi**



—— ” ——

Your job is no longer to consume knowledge. Your job is to produce it

EAMONN CALLAN
PHILOSOPHER OF EDUCATION
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Turn & Talk



Which ONE of these three interventions
is most feasible for your program?



Why that one?

SHIFT 2: PASSIVE → AGENTIC



1. **Student-Driven Advising Agendas**
2. **Required Networking/Outreach**
3. **"Opportunities Through Action" Assignments**

TURN & TALK



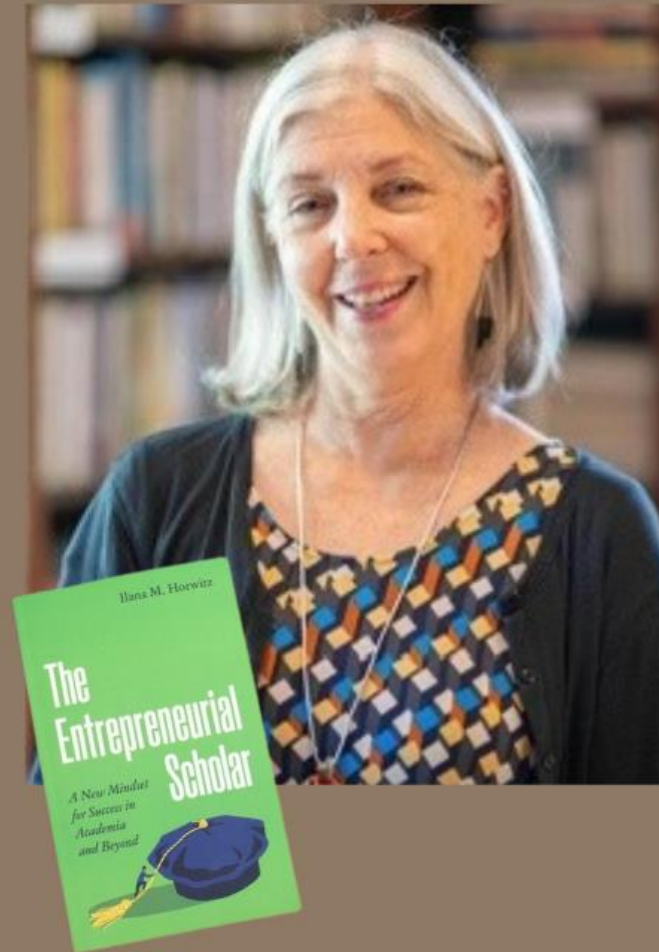
WHICH INTERVENTION WOULD MOST
SHIFT THE CULTURE OF YOUR
PROGRAM?



WHAT MAKES IT POWERFUL?

SHIFT 3: CERTAINTY- SEEKING → UNCERTAINTY- NAVIGATING

- **Fail-Forward Reflection Protocol**
- **Diverse Mentorship Committees**
- **"Multiple Paths Are Normal" Messaging**



—— ” ——

It's never occurred to PhDs that what they are doing could prepare them for a myriad of career paths

TERESA MANGUM

PROFESSOR EMERITUS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, WOMEN'S, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES & DIRECTOR OF HUMANITIES FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

TURN & TALK



WHICH INTERVENTION ADDRESSES
YOUR STUDENTS' BIGGEST
STRUGGLE?



WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO
IMPLEMENT?

Synthesis



- 9 concrete interventions across three shifts



- Most cost \$0



- Most take <1 hour to implement



- All send clear messages about valued mindsets



- These are **leverage points** in existing structures

LEADING WITH COURAGE, INTEGRITY, AND RESILIENCE



LEADING WITH COURAGE,
INTEGRITY, AND
RESILIENCE



COURAGE to challenge
training models that aren't
working



INTEGRITY to be honest
about career realities
while empowering
students



RESILIENCE to persist
when change feels slow

Anticipating Resistance

What's objections you'll hear when you propose these ideas?

- "This lowers rigor"?
- "We don't have resources"?
- "Faculty will never go for it"?
- "Students should figure this out themselves"?
- Name the obstacle you're anticipating

CLOSING - COMMITMENT

YOUR COMMITMENT

Take out your phone or a piece of paper.

Write down:

- 1. ONE specific action I will take within 30 days** (Include a date)
- 2. ONE person I will share this framework with** (DGS, associate dean, department chair)

You have 3 minutes

OPEN Q&A

OPEN MICROPHONE Q&A

Come to the microphones to:

- Share your commitment publicly (if you choose)
- Ask implementation questions
- Raise challenges you anticipate • Get context-specific guidance
- You're facilitators and change leaders.
- Let's surface the questions you'll face, and practice the answers together.