REANIMATING WHAT WE KNOW

Teach the Thing You Just Learned

A Case for Reckless Generosity in Security



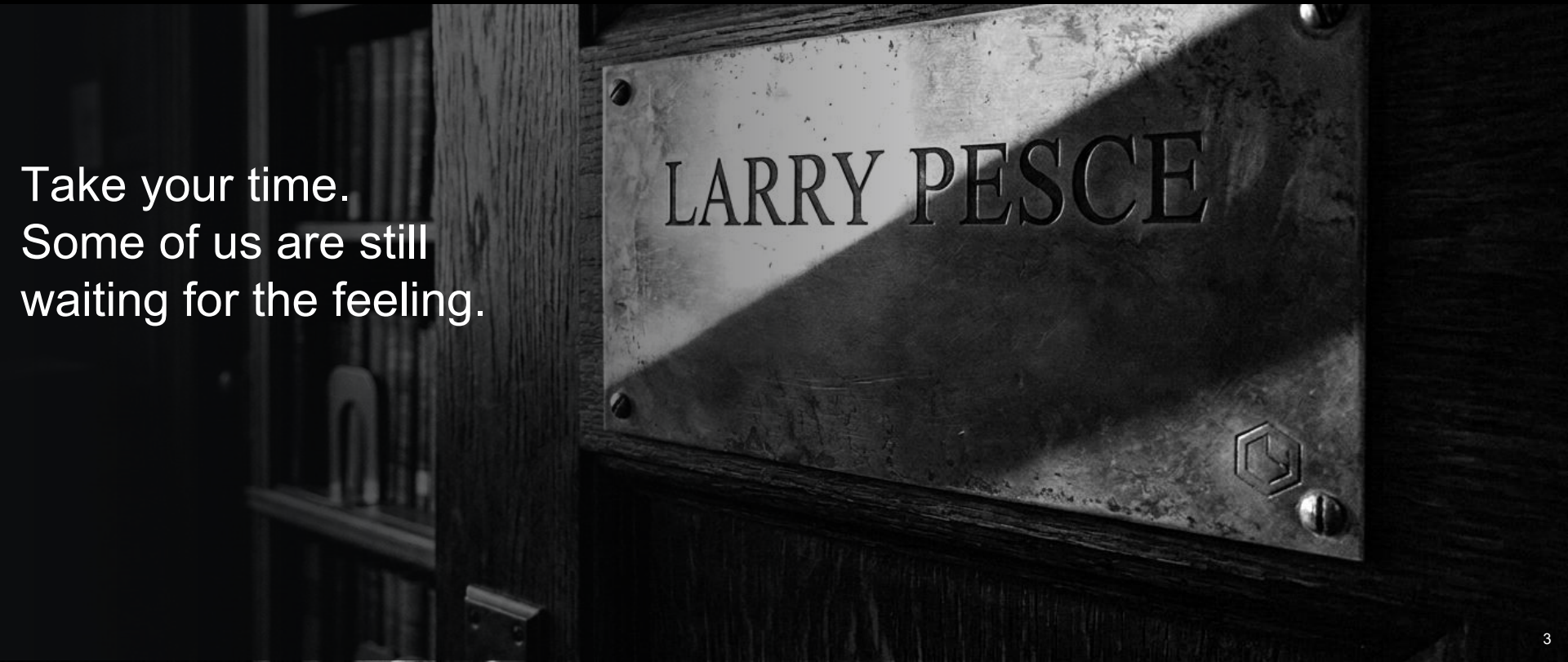
Larry Pesce, Executive Director - Research,
Secure Ideas, SANS Senior Instructor
@haxorthematrix

Secure Ideas
professionally evil


A SPOOF ON YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN
TEACH THE THING YOU JUST LEARNED
A CASE FOR RECKLESS GENEROSITY IN SECURITY

THE QUESTION

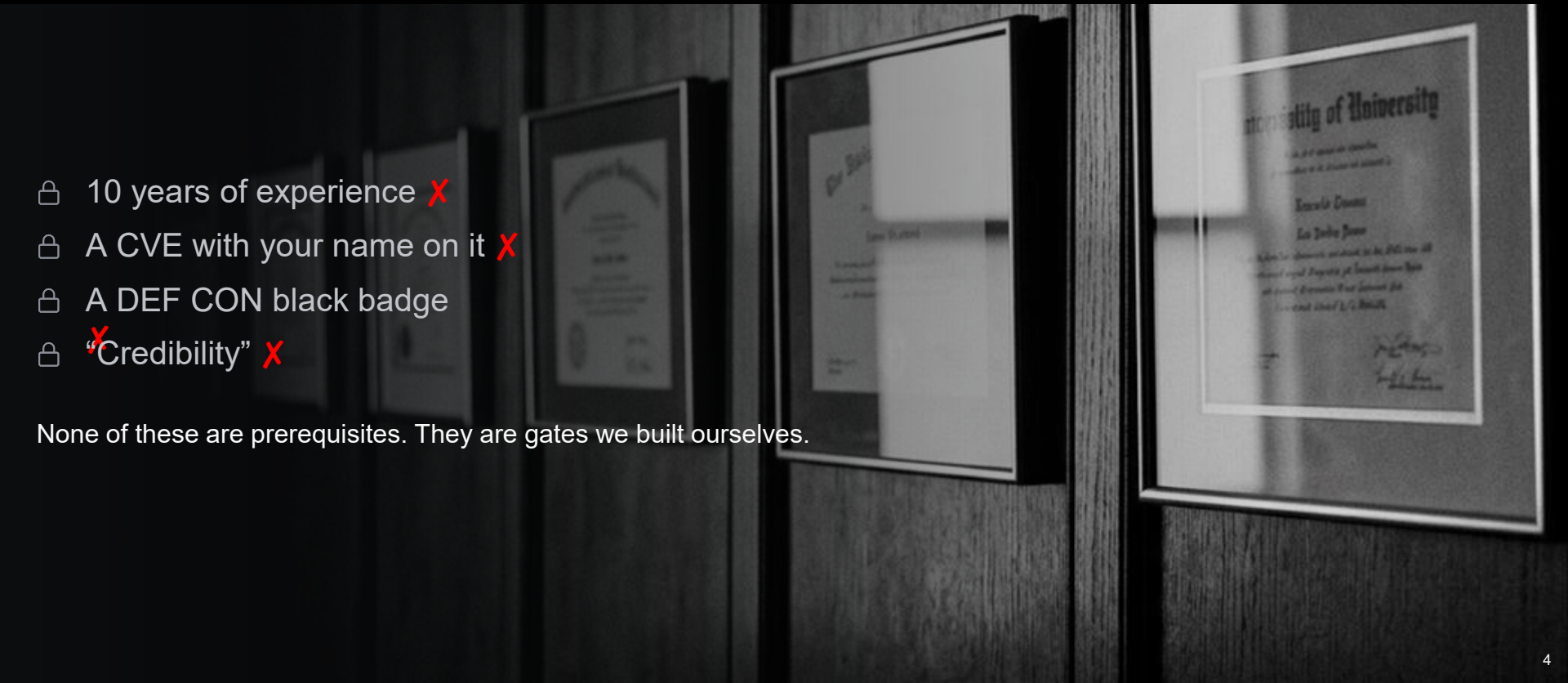
When did you feel you had “earned” the right to teach something?



Take your time.
Some of us are still
waiting for the feeling.

THE MYTH

“You need to be an expert before you share.”



- 10 years of experience ✗
- A CVE with your name on it ✗
- A DEF CON black badge ✗
- “Credibility” ✗

None of these are prerequisites. They are gates we built ourselves.

WHY WE GATE-KEEP

…AND WHY IT'S WRONG

I

PART ONE

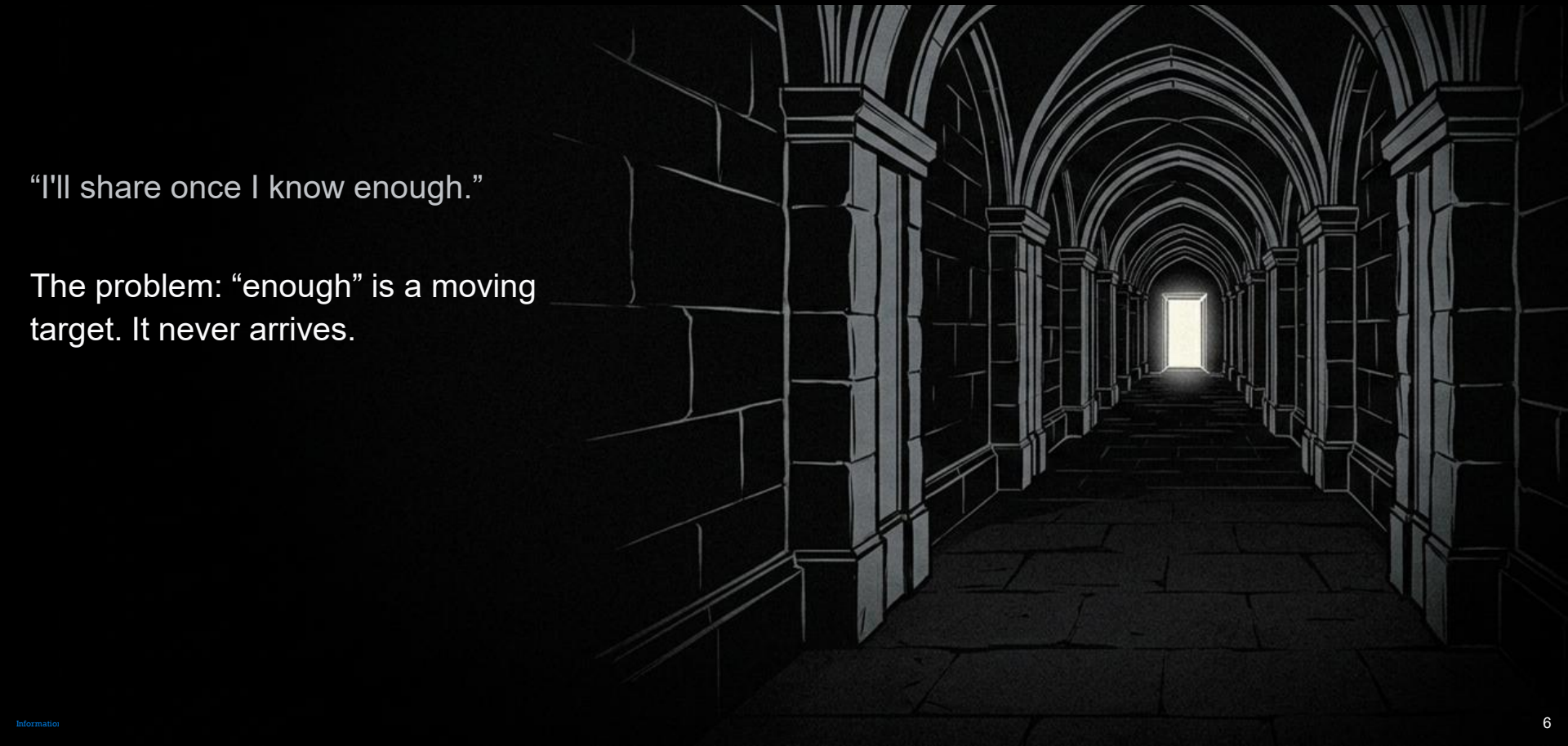
The villagers arrive with torches. They usually mean well.



The Credibility Trap

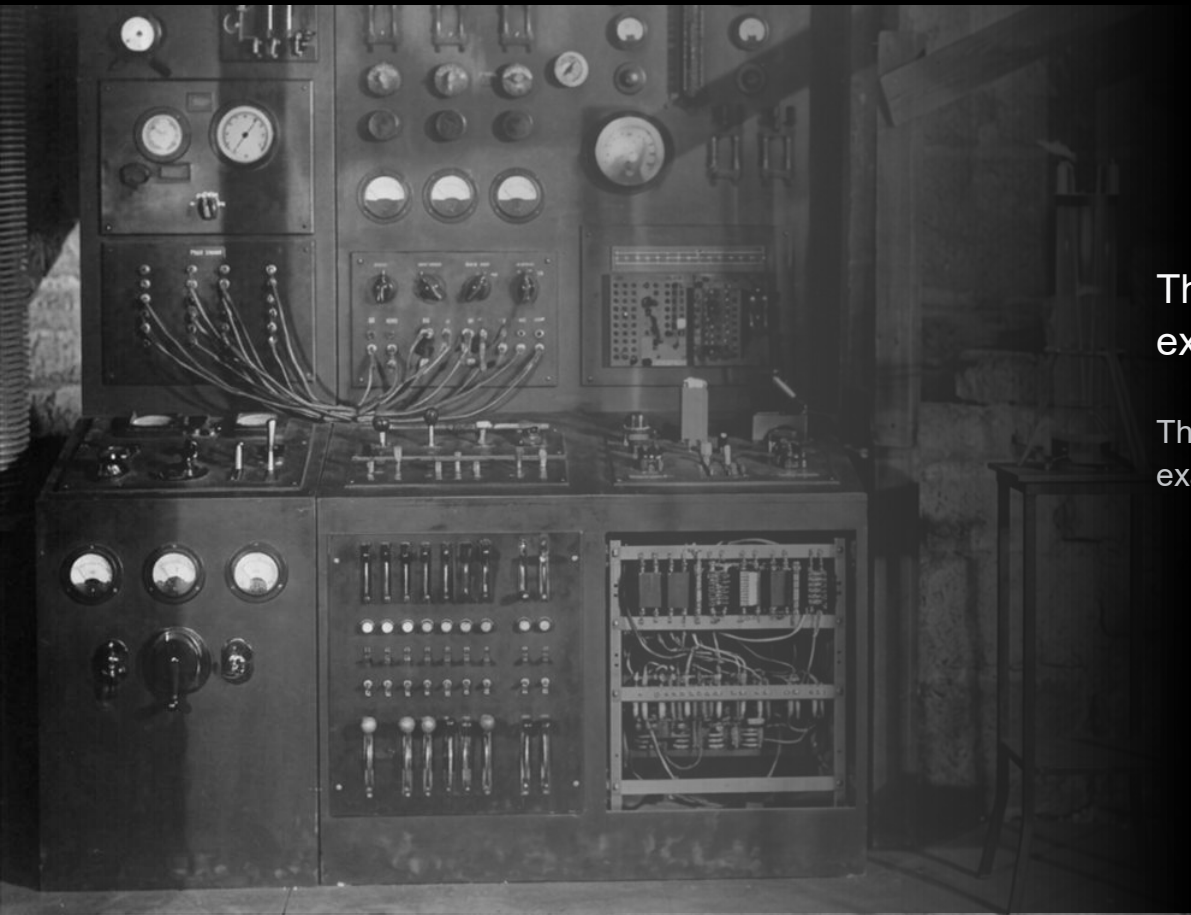
“I'll share once I know enough.”

The problem: “enough” is a moving target. It never arrives.



WHY WE GATE-KEEP

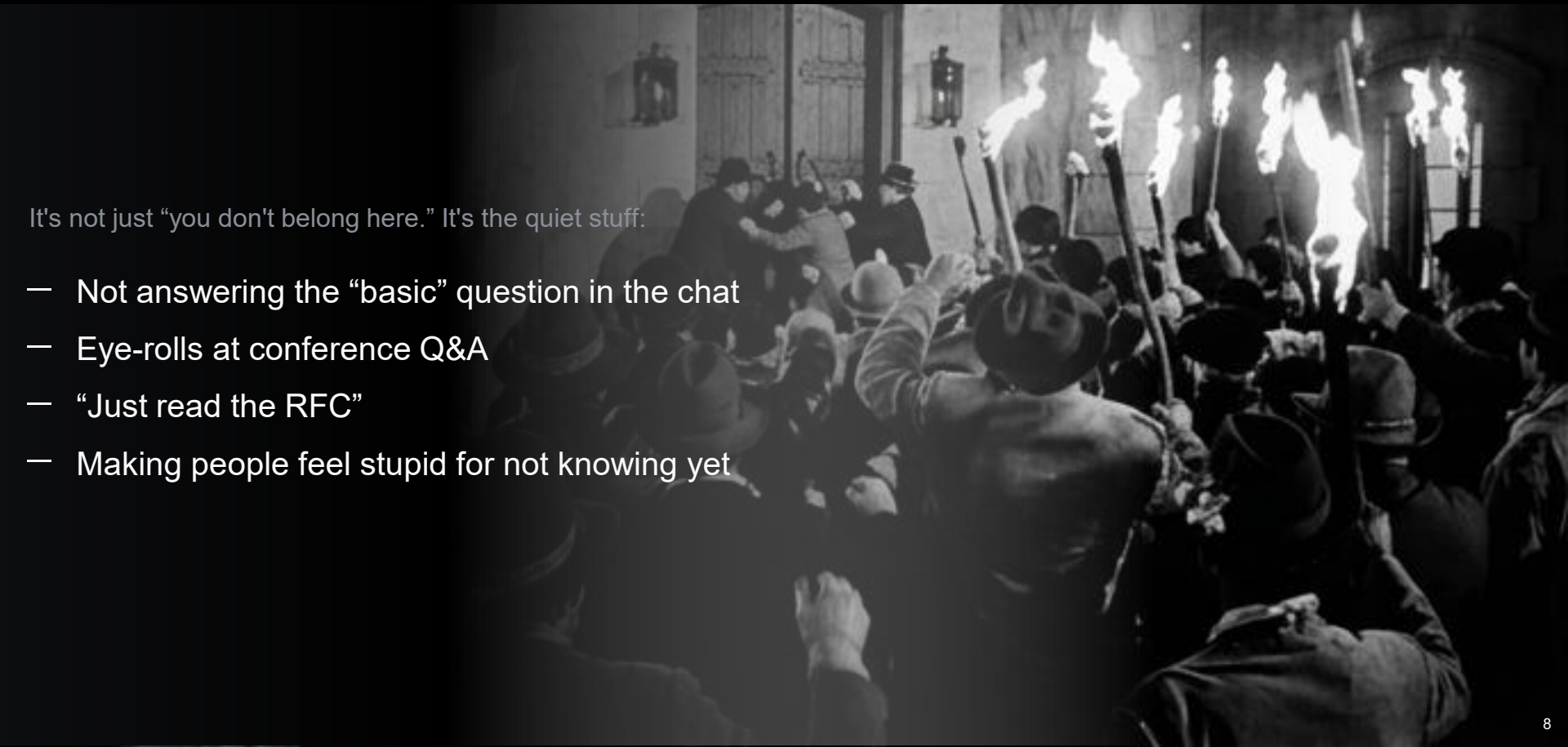
The Expertise Paradox



The more you know, the worse you are at explaining the basics.

The person who learned it last week remembers exactly what was confusing.

Gate-Keeping Isn't Always Loud



It's not just “you don't belong here.” It's the quiet stuff:

- Not answering the “basic” question in the chat
- Eye-rolls at conference Q&A
- “Just read the RFC”
- Making people feel stupid for not knowing yet

The Industry Has a Pipeline Problem



- The workforce gap keeps growing
- We need people who can think, not just operate tools
- Every person who quietly walks away is a net loss

We can't recruit our way out of this.
We fix it with better generosity.

Hoarding Knowledge Has Compound Interest - the Wrong Direction



- Techniques die with careers
- Communities fragment
- The same problems get re-solved every five years
- Institutional/community memory evaporates

RECKLESS GENEROSITY IN PRACTICE

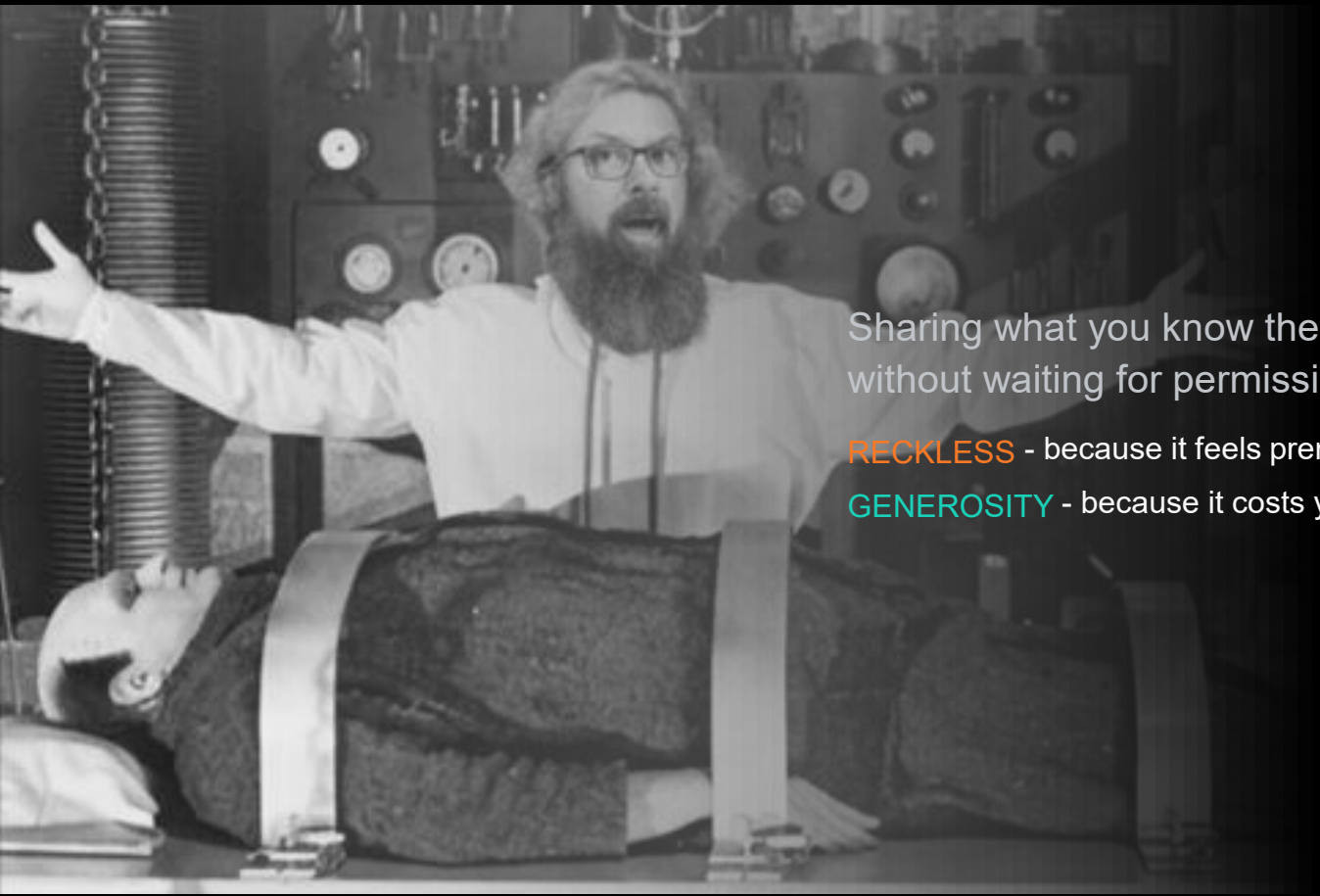
II

PART TWO

Throw the switch. It's alive.



Reckless Generosity



Sharing what you know the moment you know it - without waiting for permission, credentials, or comfort.

RECKLESS - because it feels premature

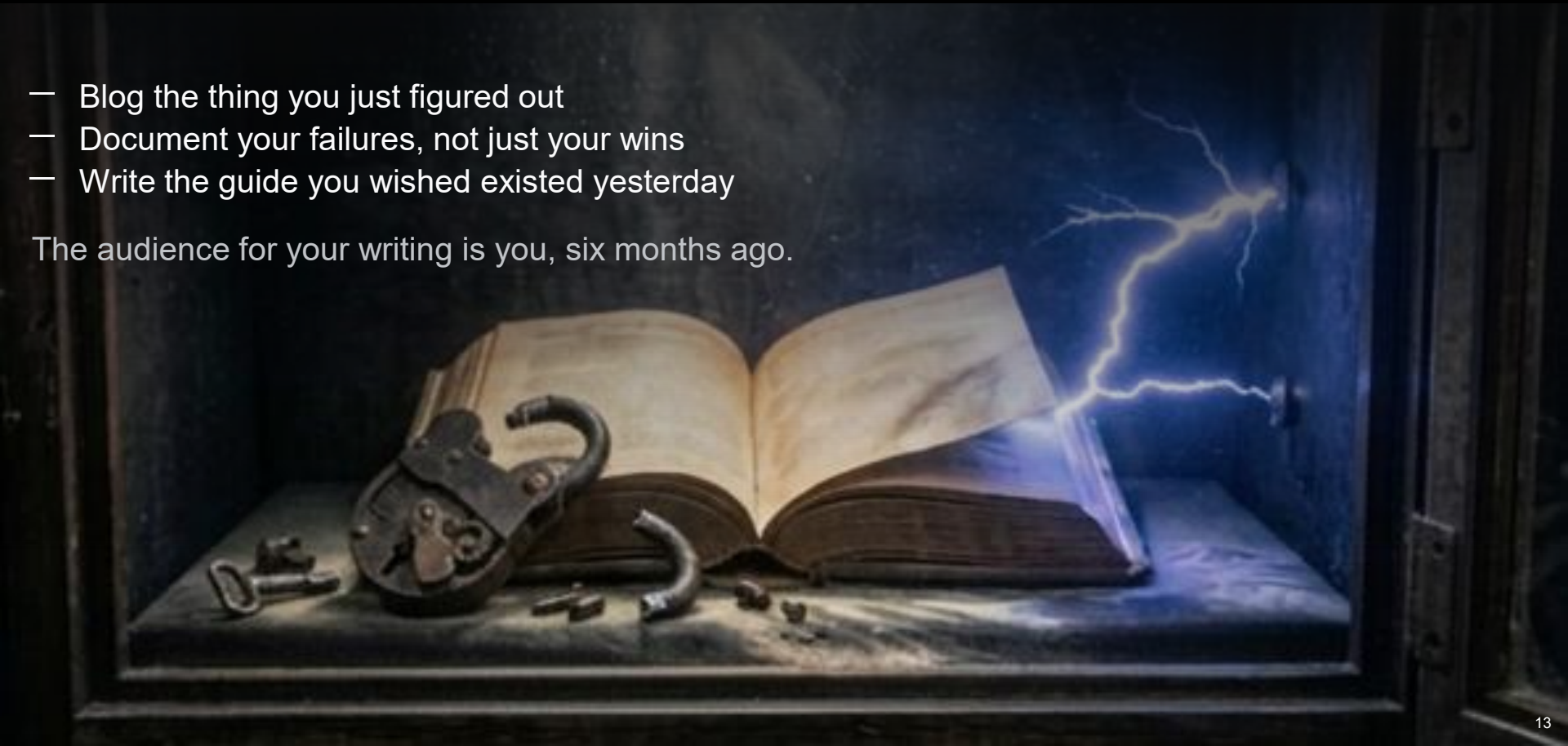
GENEROSITY - because it costs you time with no guaranteed return

PATTERN ONE

Show Your Work

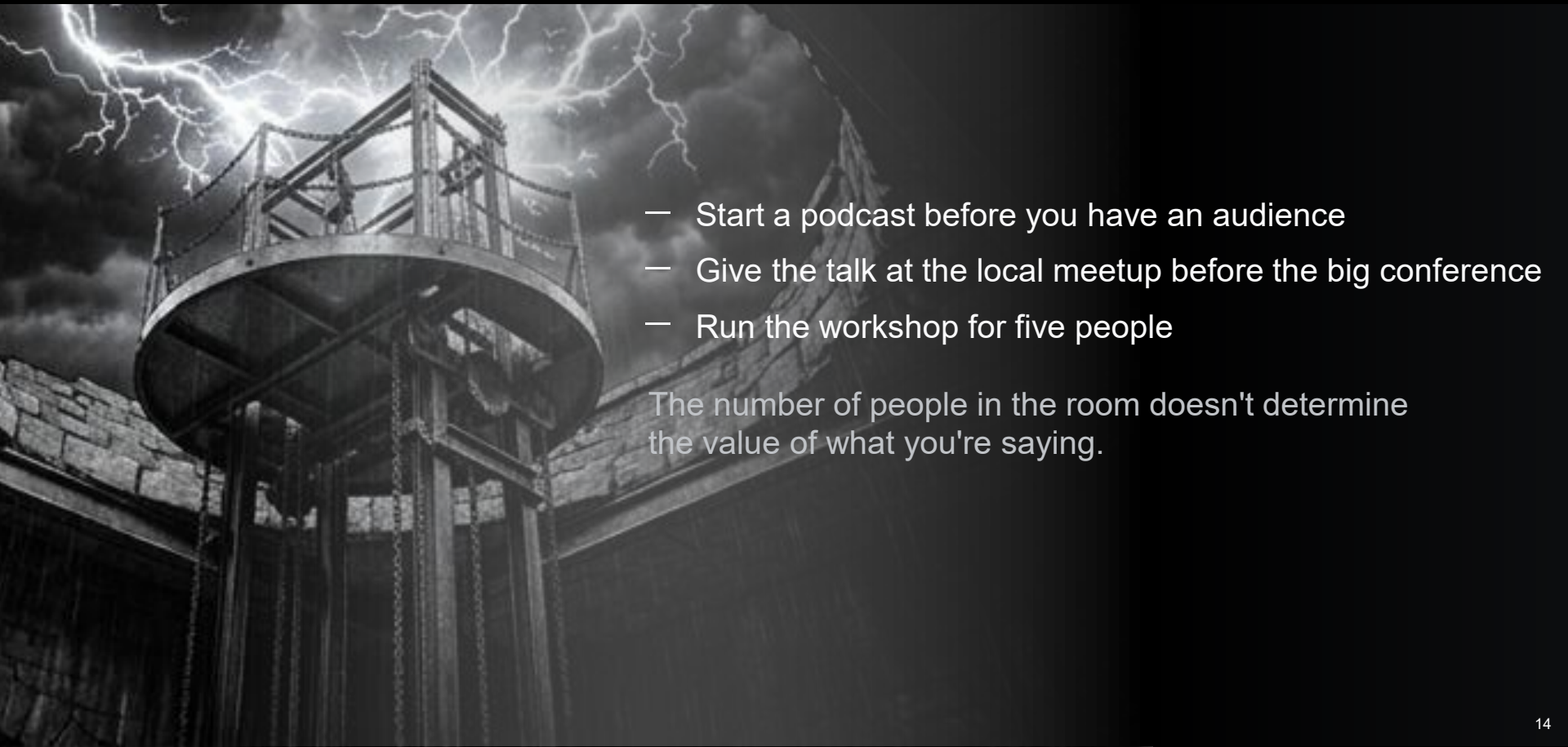
- Blog the thing you just figured out
- Document your failures, not just your wins
- Write the guide you wished existed yesterday

The audience for your writing is you, six months ago.



PATTERN TWO

Teach in the Open

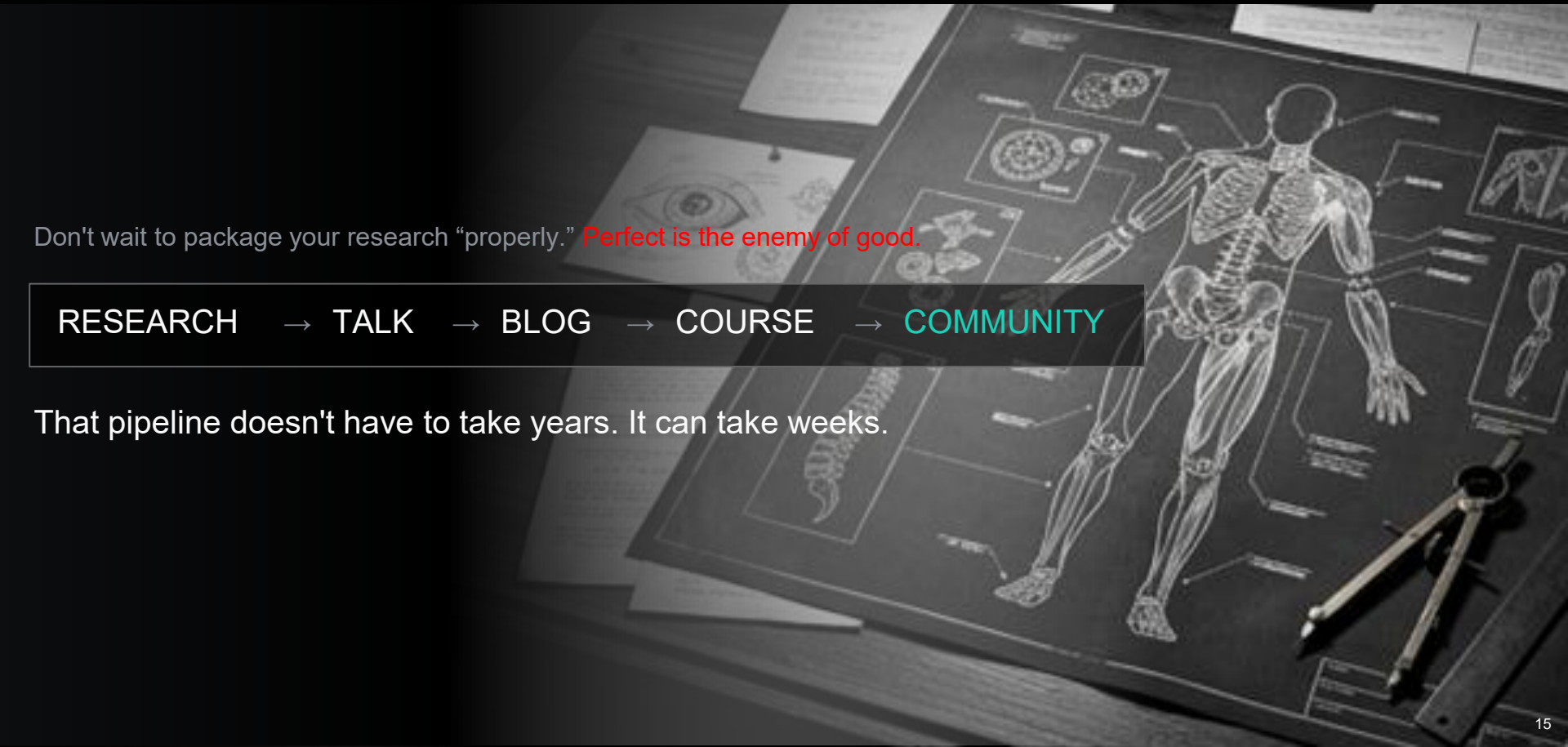


- Start a podcast before you have an audience
- Give the talk at the local meetup before the big conference
- Run the workshop for five people

The number of people in the room doesn't determine the value of what you're saying.

PATTERN THREE

Build the Course From the Research



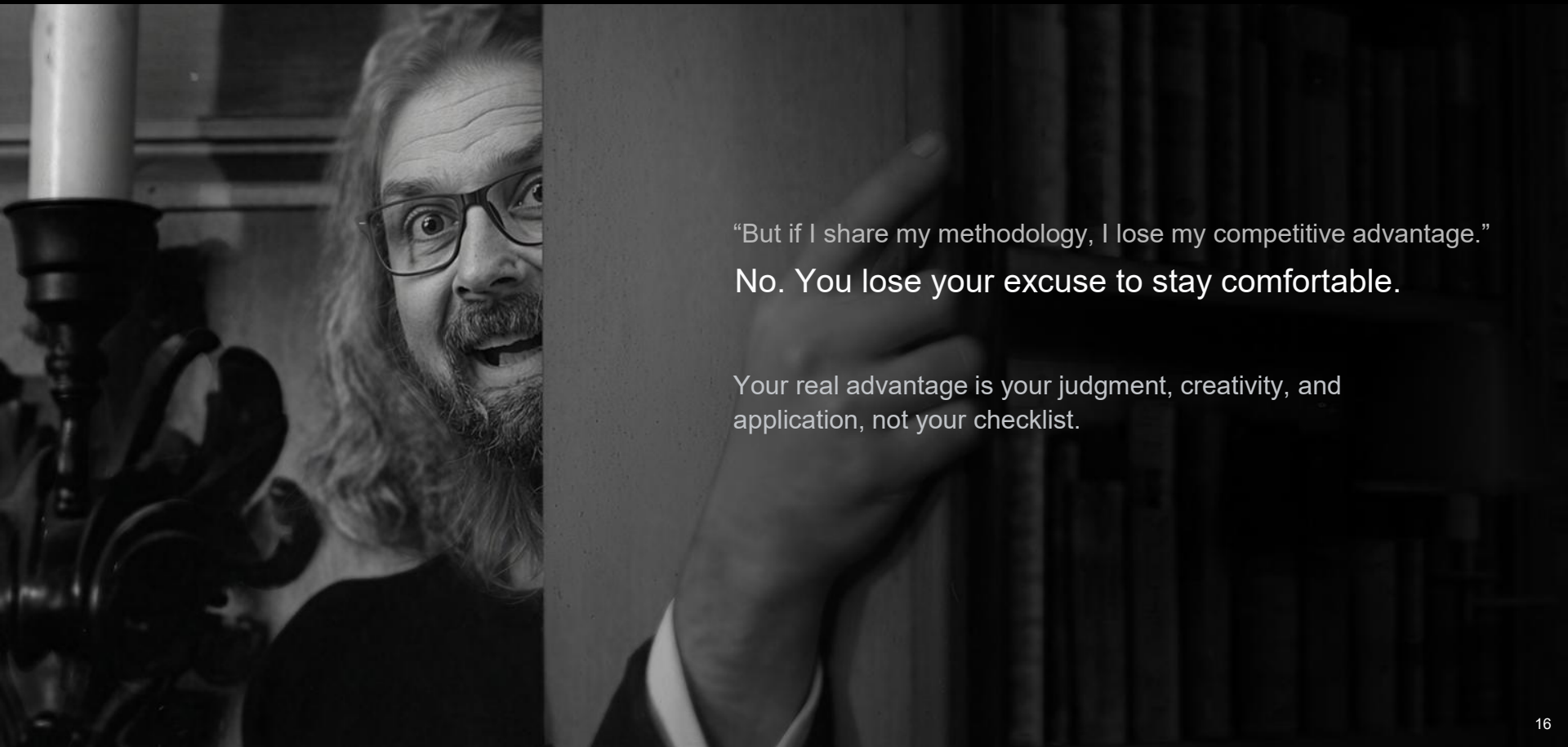
Don't wait to package your research “properly.” Perfect is the enemy of good.

RESEARCH → TALK → BLOG → COURSE → COMMUNITY

That pipeline doesn't have to take years. It can take weeks.

PATTERN FOUR

Give Away the Methodology



"But if I share my methodology, I lose my competitive advantage."

No. You lose your excuse to stay comfortable.

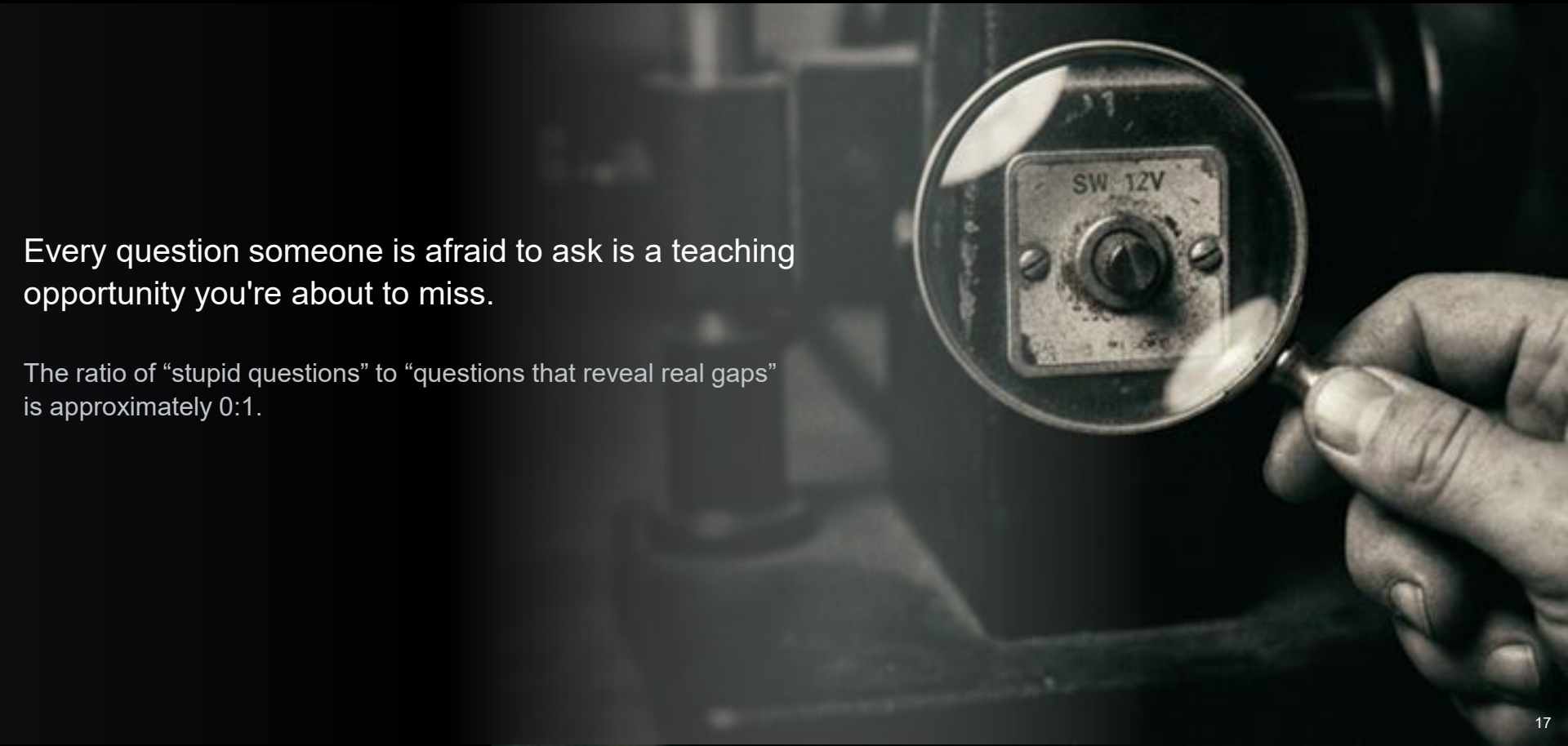
Your real advantage is your judgment, creativity, and application, not your checklist.

PATTERN FIVE

Answer the “Stupid” Question

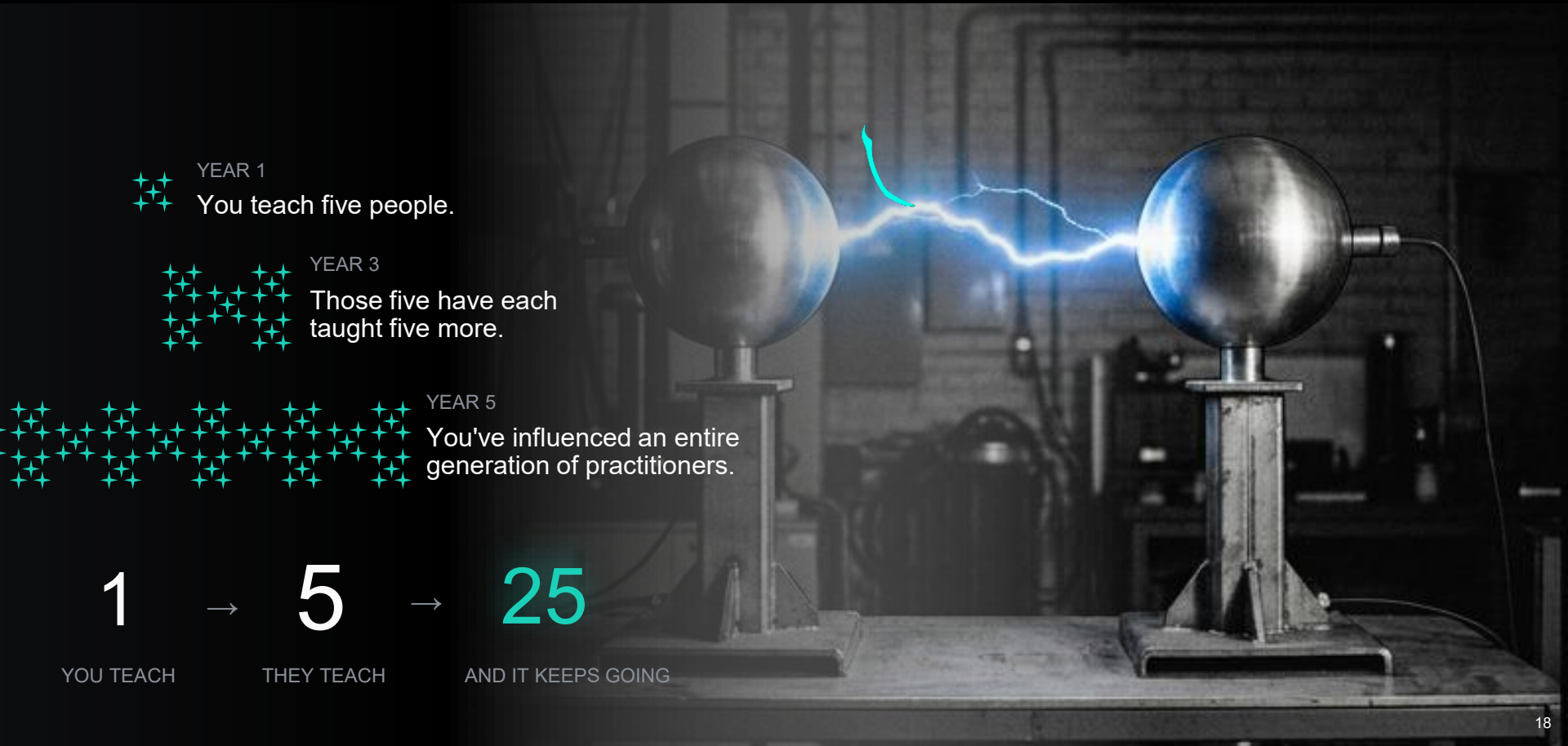
Every question someone is afraid to ask is a teaching opportunity you're about to miss.

The ratio of “stupid questions” to “questions that reveal real gaps” is approximately 0:1.



THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH

Teaching is not an act of charity. Knowledge sharing compounds.



YEAR 1

You teach five people.

YEAR 3

Those five have each taught five more.

YEAR 5

You've influenced an entire generation of practitioners.

1 → 5 → 25

YOU TEACH | THEY TEACH | AND IT KEEPS GOING

Perfection Is the Enemy of Generosity

Your blog post doesn't need to be perfect. Your talk doesn't need to be polished. Your workshop doesn't need a workbook.

Ship it. Improve it later.
Or don't. It's still more than existed before.



BUILDING THINGS THAT OUTLAST YOU

III

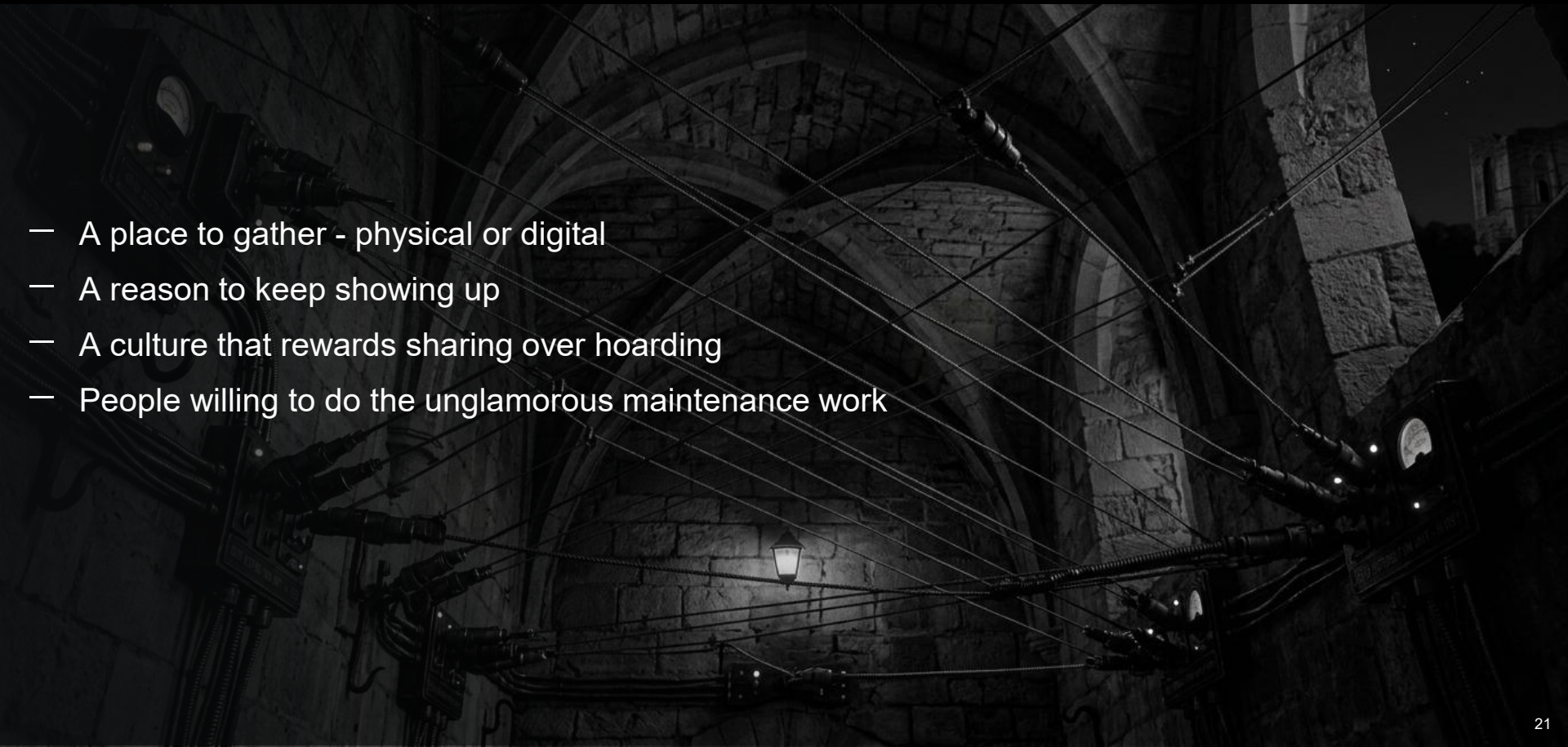
PART THREE

It walks out the door on its own.
That was always the plan.



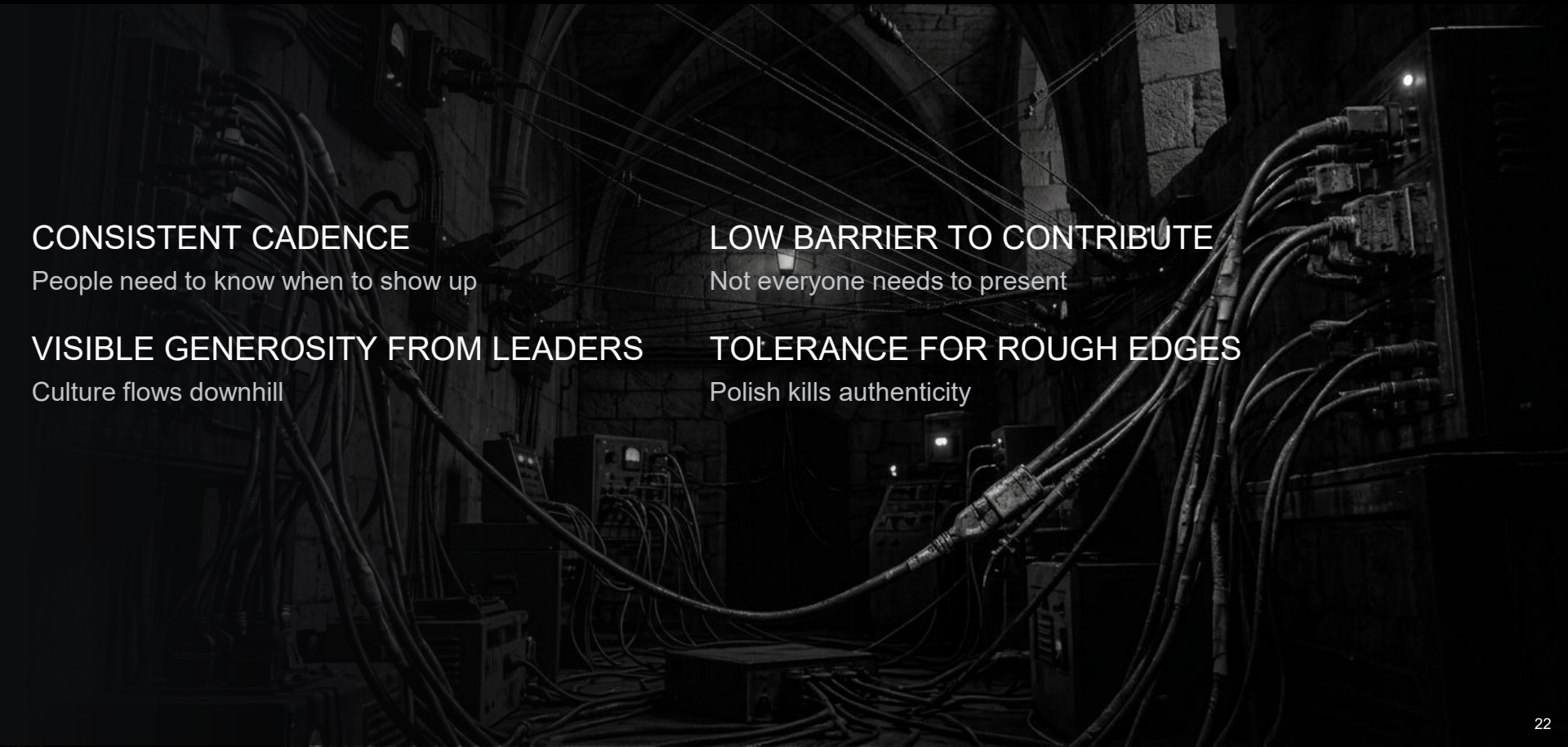
Information Classification: General

Communities Don't Build Themselves



- A place to gather - physical or digital
- A reason to keep showing up
- A culture that rewards sharing over hoarding
- People willing to do the unglamorous maintenance work

What Keeps a Community Alive for 10+ Years?



CONSISTENT CADENCE

People need to know when to show up

LOW BARRIER TO CONTRIBUTE

Not everyone needs to present

VISIBLE GENEROSITY FROM LEADERS

Culture flows downhill

TOLERANCE FOR ROUGH EDGES

Polish kills authenticity

This Won’t Work Without Me!

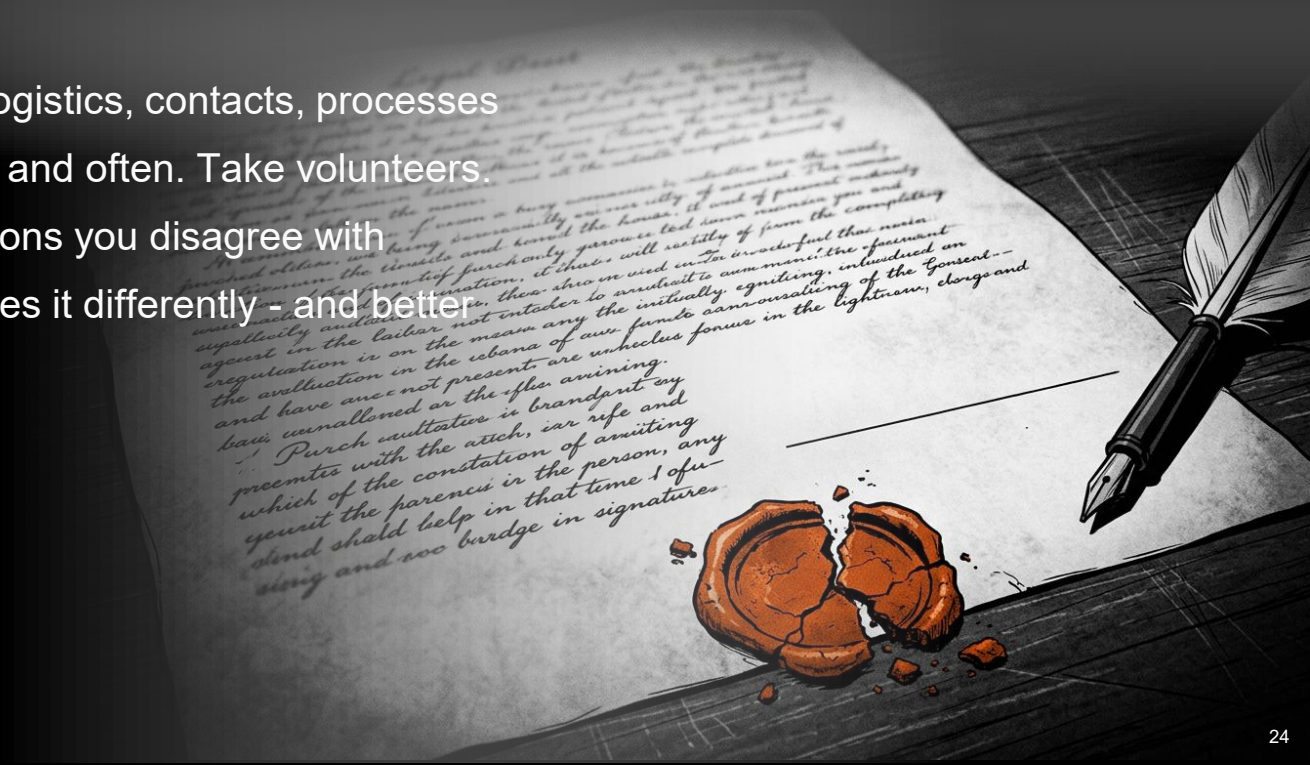


If the community dies when you leave, you didn't build a community.

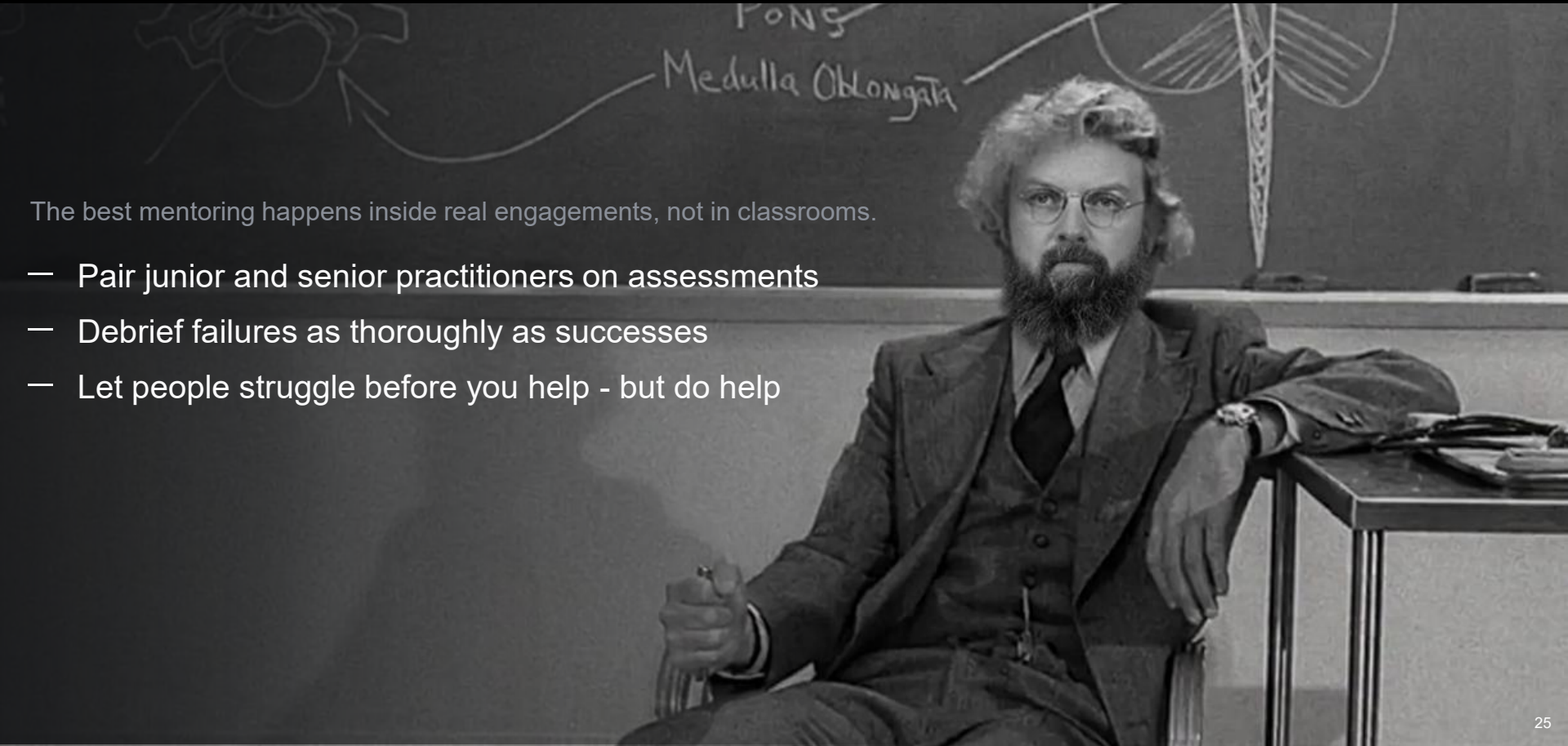
You built a dependency.

Building for Succession

- Document the boring stuff - logistics, contacts, processes
- Rotate leadership roles early and often. Take volunteers.
- Let other people make decisions you disagree with
- Celebrate when someone does it differently - and better



Teaching on the Job



The best mentoring happens inside real engagements, not in classrooms.

- Pair junior and senior practitioners on assessments
- Debrief failures as thoroughly as successes
- Let people struggle before you help - but do help

MENTORING BEFORE YOU'RE "READY"

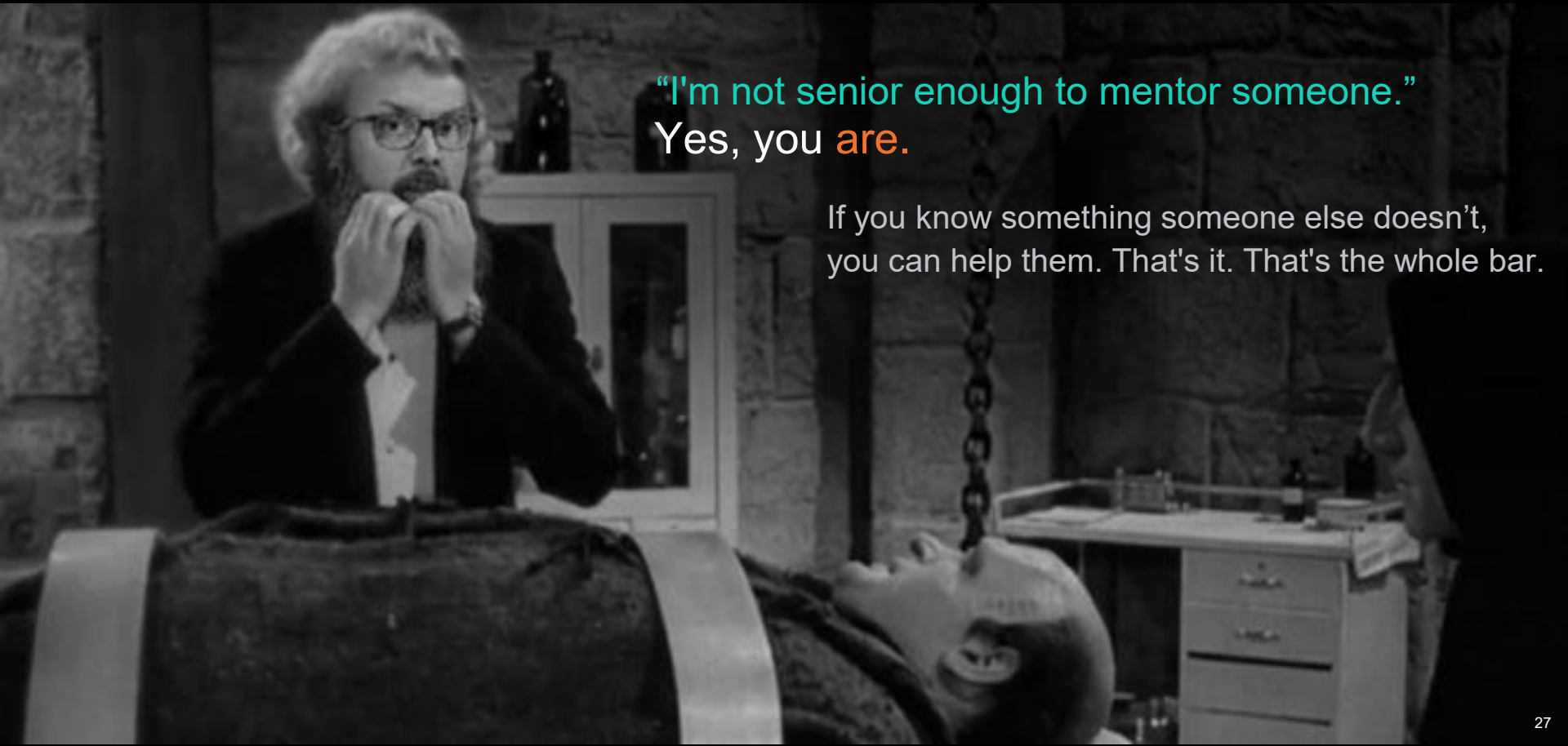
IV

PART FOUR

Tuxedo over the stitches.
Present it before it's polished.



I’m Not Worthy

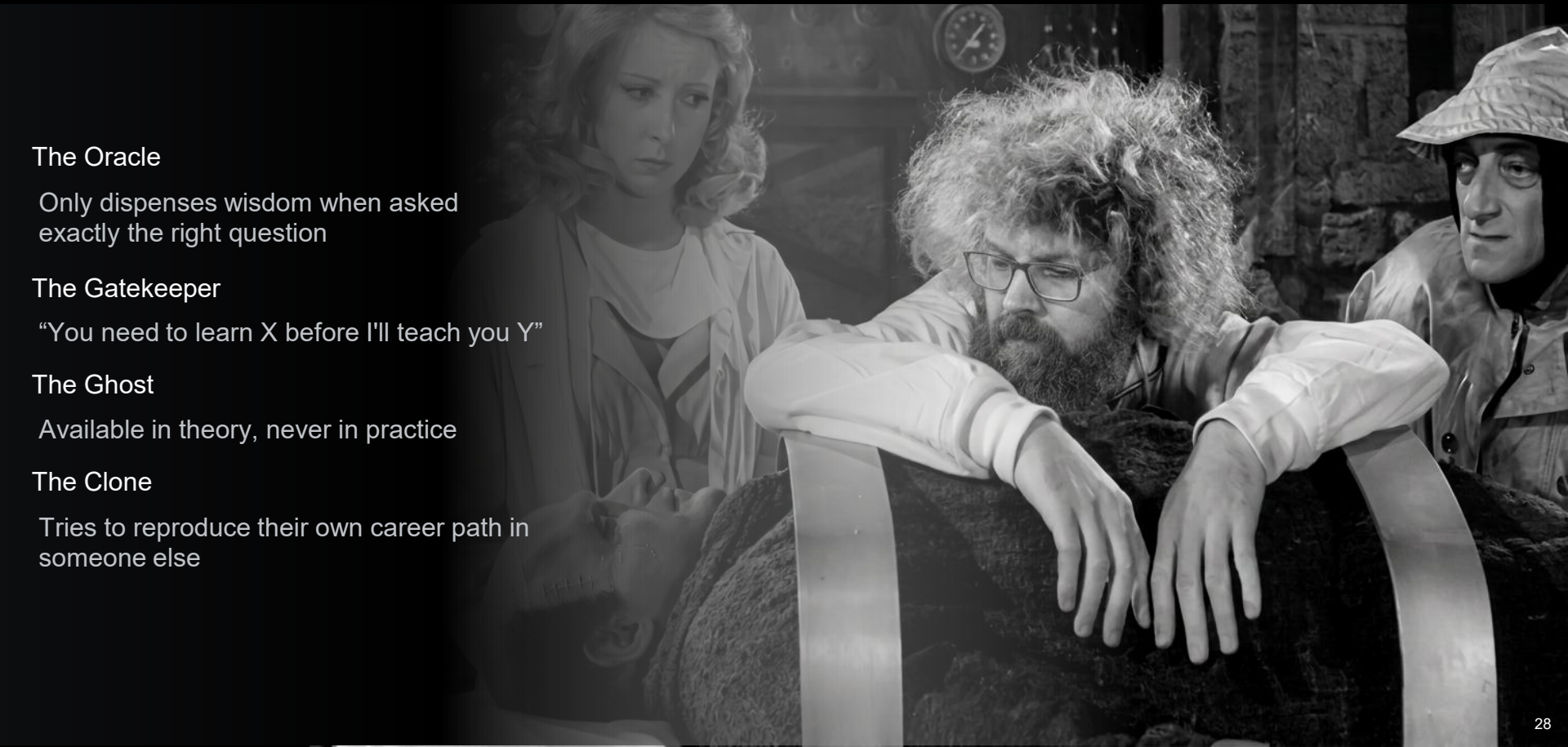


“I'm not senior enough to mentor someone.”

Yes, you are.

If you know something someone else doesn’t, you can help them. That's it. That's the whole bar.

Mentoring Anti-Patterns



The Oracle

Only dispenses wisdom when asked exactly the right question

The Gatekeeper

“You need to learn X before I'll teach you Y”

The Ghost

Available in theory, never in practice

The Clone

Tries to reproduce their own career path in someone else

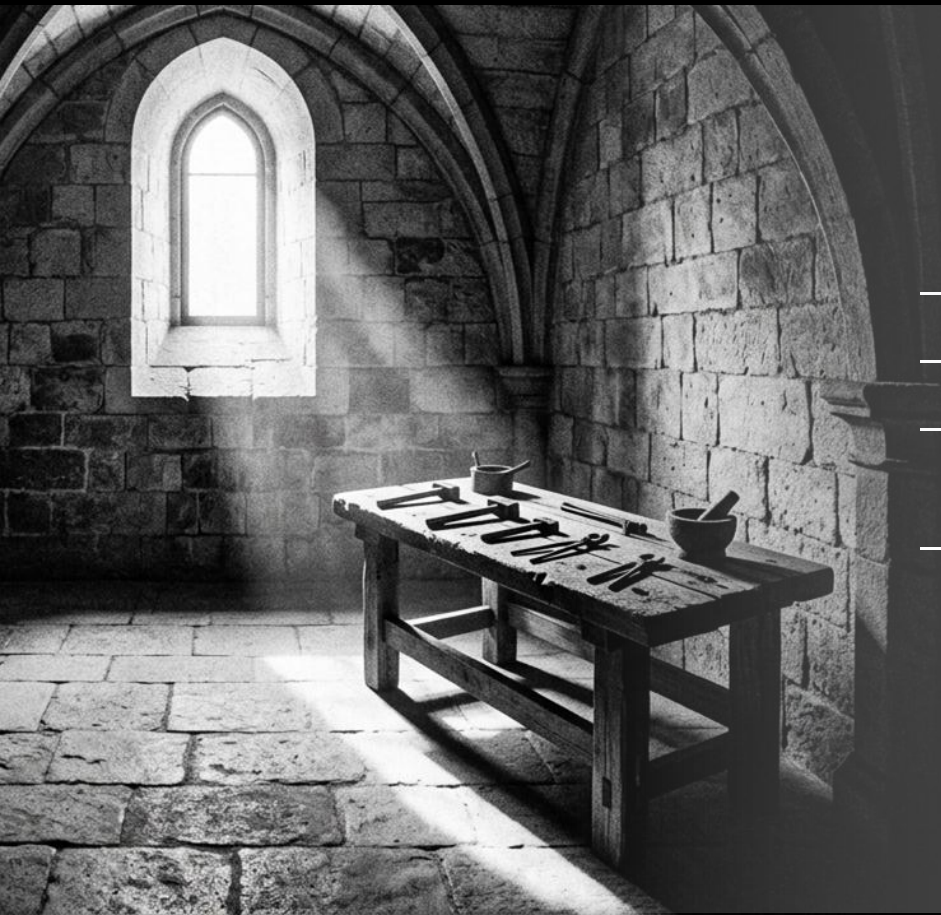
What Good Mentoring Looks Like



- Proactive, not reactive
- Tailored to what they need, not what you know
- Honest about your own gaps and failures
- Focused on building independence, not dependence

The goal is to make yourself unnecessary.

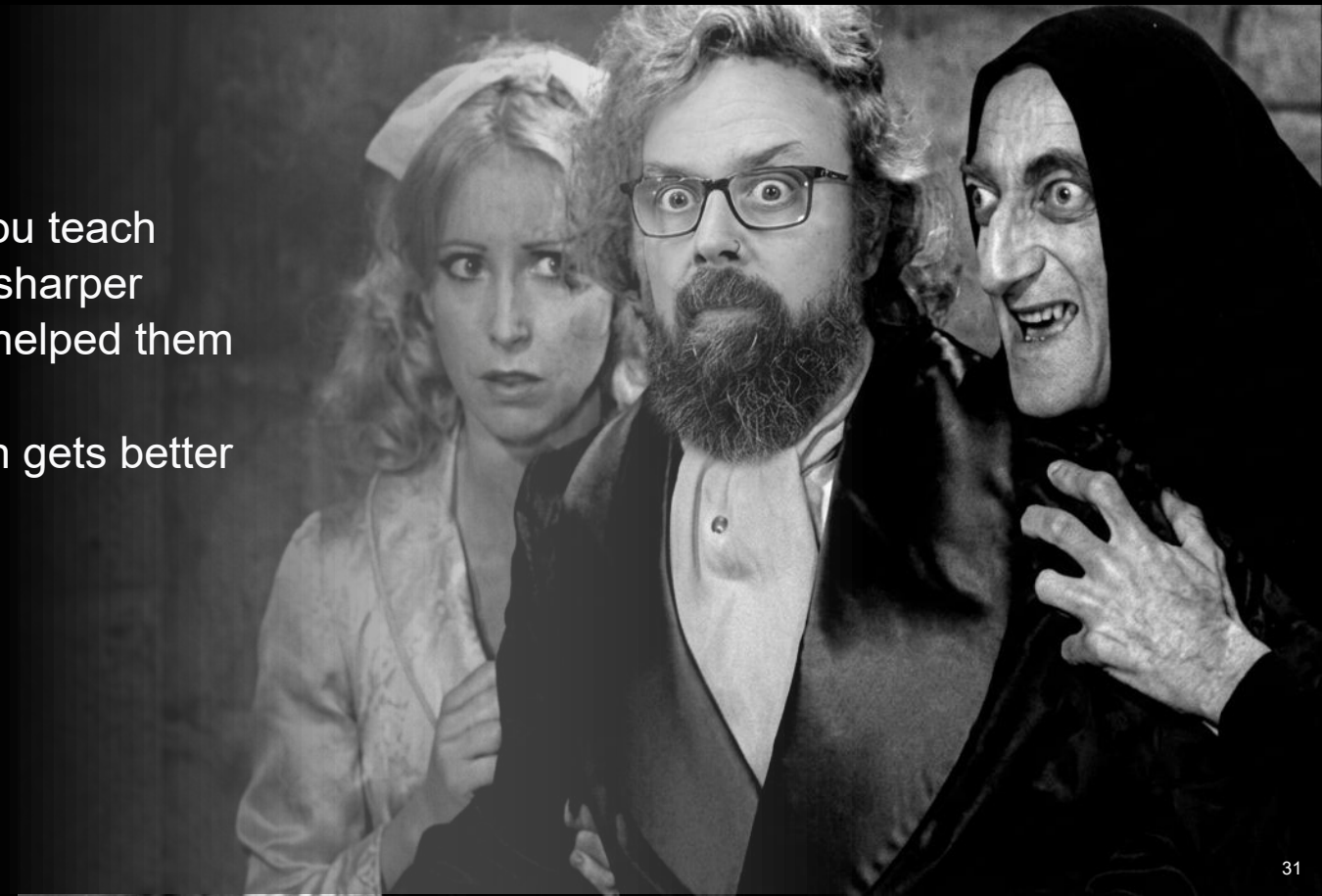
You Don't Need a “Mentoring Program”



- Invite someone junior to shadow an engagement
- Co-author a blog post with someone newer
- Give someone your conference talk slot or invite them to co-present
- Introduce people to each other (the underrated one)

The Selfish Case for Mentoring

- You learn more when you teach
- Your own thinking gets sharper
- People remember who helped them
- Your network grows
- The industry you work in gets better



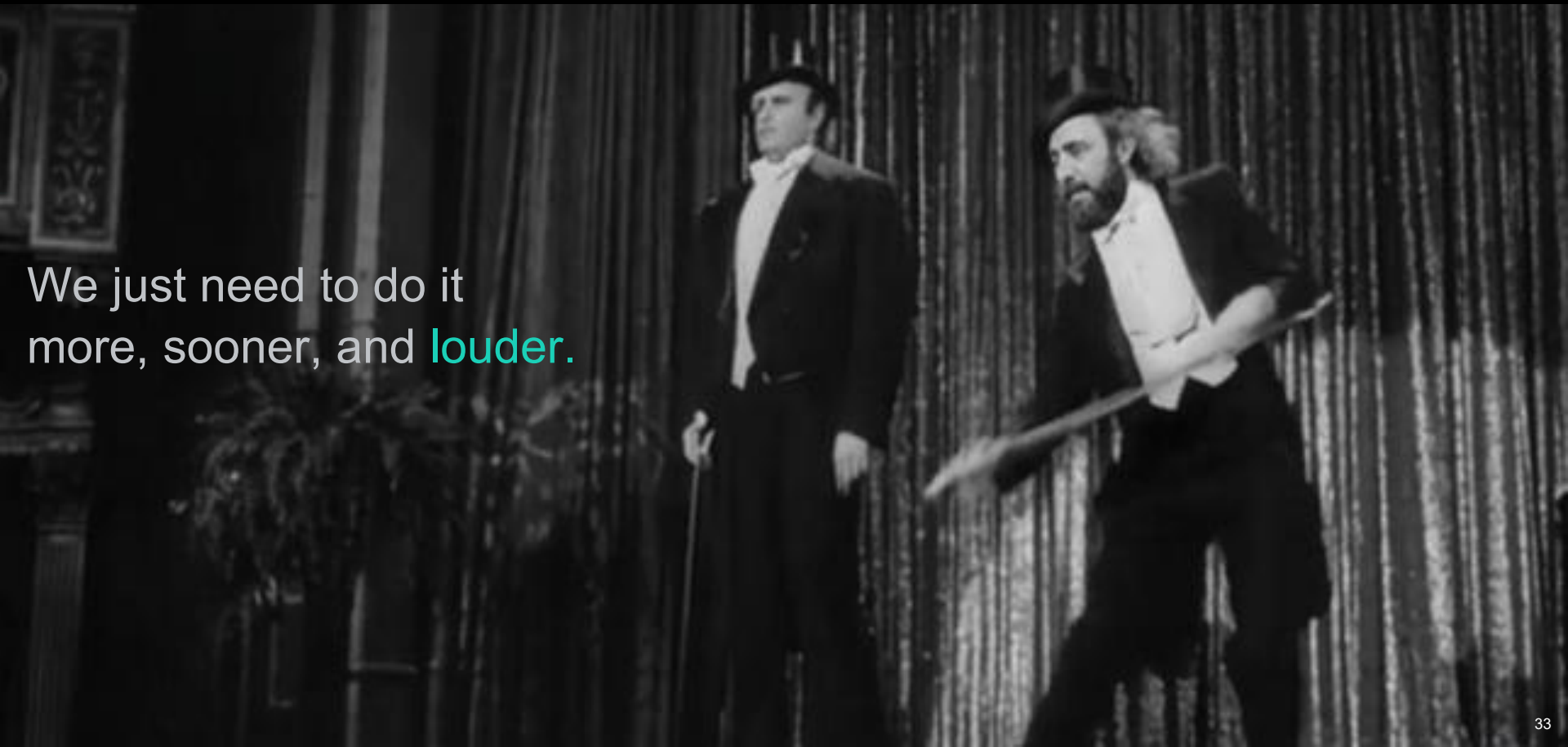
Do This Week

1. Write down one thing you learned recently
2. Teach it to one person
3. Don't wait until it's polished

That's it. That's the whole framework.



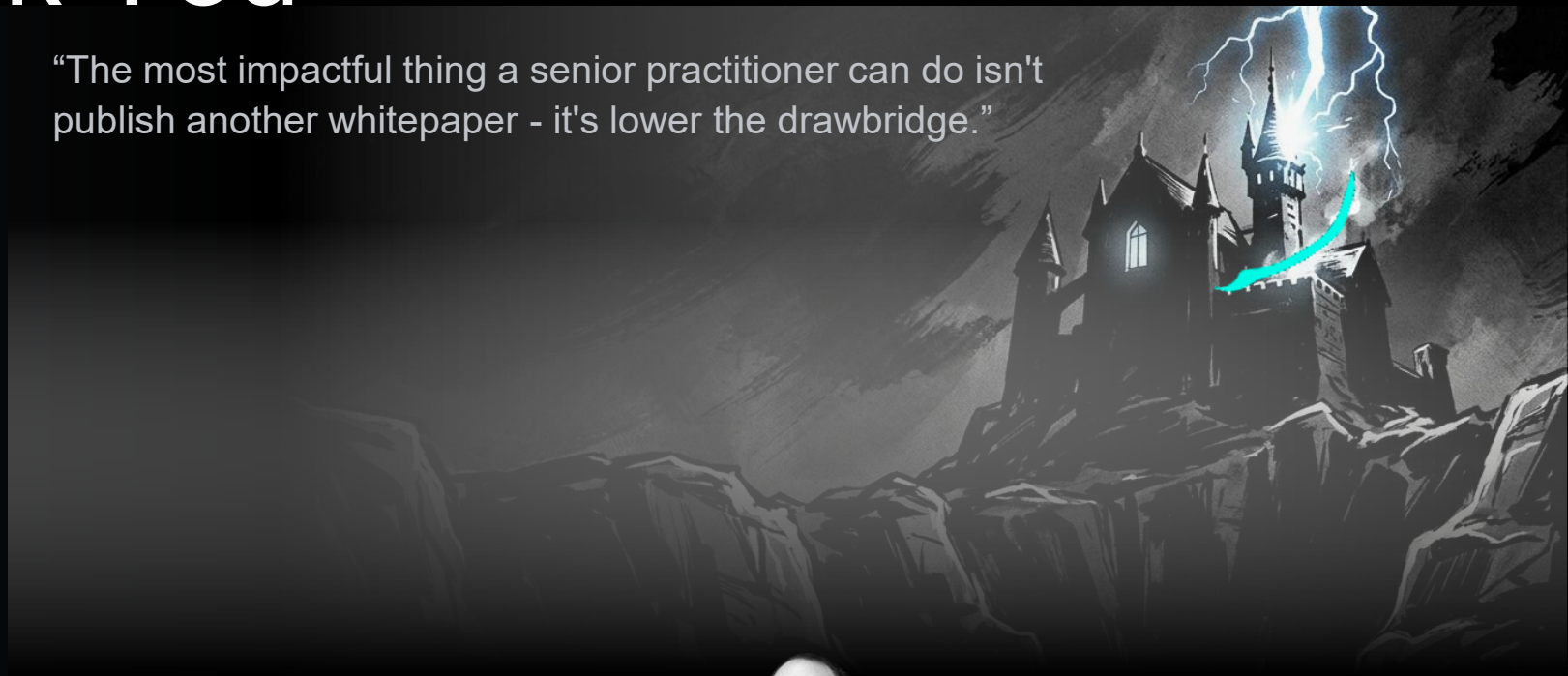
The hacker ethos has always been: show your work.



We just need to do it
more, sooner, and louder.

Thank You

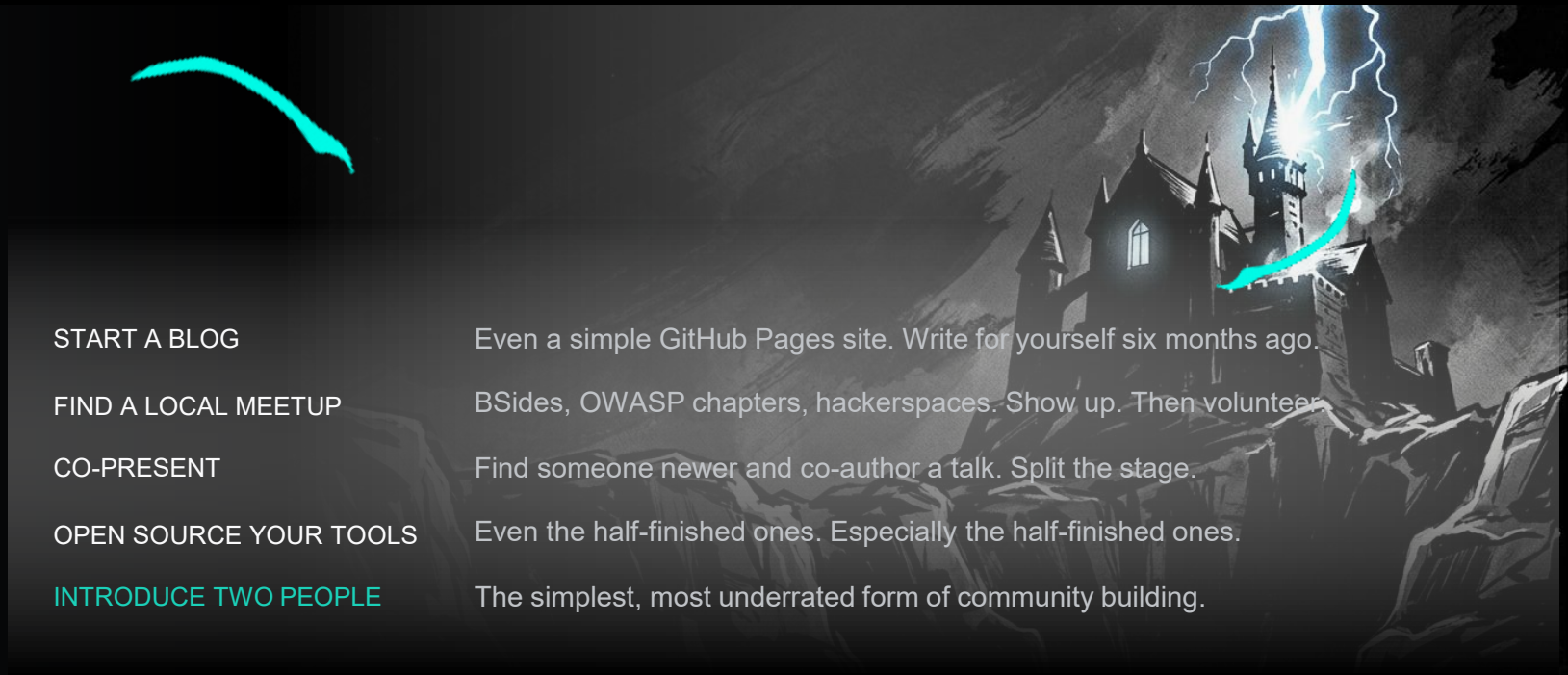
“The most impactful thing a senior practitioner can do isn't publish another whitepaper - it's lower the drawbridge.”





Larry Pesce
Executive Director - Research, Secure Ideas
SANS Senior Instructor
@haxorthematrix

Start Being Generous This Week



START A BLOG	Even a simple GitHub Pages site. Write for yourself six months ago.
FIND A LOCAL MEETUP	BSides, OWASP chapters, hackerspaces. Show up. Then volunteer.
CO-PRESENT	Find someone newer and co-author a talk. Split the stage.
OPEN SOURCE YOUR TOOLS	Even the half-finished ones. Especially the half-finished ones.
INTRODUCE TWO PEOPLE	The simplest, most underrated form of community building.