



The Science of Self-Love

Guest: Dr. David Hamilton

Alex Howard Welcome everyone to this interview, where I'm really excited to be talking with Dr. David Hamilton. Firstly, David welcome and thank you for joining me.

Dr David Hamilton Thank you, it's my pleasure. I'm very excited to be here.

Alex Howard I'm very happy to have a fellow Brit! As much as I love talking to our American cousins, it's nice to have an interview in the UK time zone as well.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah!

Alex Howard So we're going to be talking in this session around, particularly, self love. David's also written a lot about the power of the mind, body connection and placebo effects. And some of that may also come out in this dialog as well.

Just to give people a bit of David's background, David has a PHD in organic chemistry and spent four years in the pharmaceutical industry developing drugs for cardiovascular disease and cancer. Inspired by the placebo effect, he left the industry to write books and educate people in how they can harness their mind and emotions to improve their health.

He's now the author of 10 books, including *A Little Book of Kindness*; *How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body*; *I Heart Me* - which we're gonna be touching on a little bit today. And the Amazon bestseller, *The Five Side Effects of Kindness*. He writes a regular blog on his website and occasional blogs for the Huffington Post.

David is the Kindness Tsar for psychology's magazines. Which I thought sounded really great. And he writes the kindness conversation and the kindness projects. He is also the Life Hacks' monthly comment columnist for Soul and Spirit magazine. And in 2016, he was voted best writer by readers of Kindred Spirits magazine.

David is featured in the award winning documentary, Heal. He appears regularly in the media and was recently featured on Channel Four's Live Show, Sunday Brunch in the UK and CBS Sunday Morning in the US.

Alex Howard So David, I'd like us just to start a little bit with some of your story. You had a successful career in the pharmaceutical industry. Earning a PHD is no small thing. So you'd worked hard to sort of go down that path and you walked away from that to go down a very different track.

Say a little bit about what was happening in you and what the sort of, what the draw or what the push was towards that change.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah, well, a couple of things really at the same time. I noticed the clinical results from some of the drug trials and I found it fascinating, extraordinarily fascinating, short and utterly fascinating, just how many people were improving on placebos.

But I wanted to know why. And I think what really triggered my interest was when I was growing up, my mom suffered from postnatal depression or postpartum as our American cousins would say, a postpartum depression. And I found a book in the library. Well, it sounds corny, it fell off the shelf when I was 11...

Alex Howard It's funny how that happens, isn't it?

Dr David Hamilton I know! When I was 11 years old, in the school library. And it was called the magic power of your mind. And I intuitively felt like it could help my mom. So I took it from the library. I didn't know you're supposed to join the library. You know, I just took it off the shelf.

Alex Howard So you stole it from the library?

Dr David Hamilton Yeah I stole it. Borrowed it. We'll take it back one day!

And I gave it to my mom and you know, it was great. It didn't cure depression in a day, but it gave her tools and strategies that she could use that absolutely helped her to navigate a course through some of the rocky seas and some of the difficult times.

So as I was growing up as a teenager, my mom would regularly say, "it's all in the mind, mind over matter, I can do it". And she was using back in the 70s; the late 70s, early 80s, she was using what we now call affirmations, but it really helped her.

And so my mom and I often had conversations about the power of the mind. So when I was a teenager, often, sometimes late at night, my mom and I are talking about the power of the mind. Anyway, I kind of put that to the side. Went through the formal university, you know, pathway, did my degree, my PHD in organic chemistry.

So a couple of years later, I'm building drugs and then the drug trial results come back and well, while all my colleagues are fascinated with how well the drugs are working, all I could see was a number of people who had improved on a placebo because they believed they were getting the drug. And I think that's what, because of the conversations with my mom, I think that's why I found that so interesting.

And I needed to understand why. So in my spare time, I was working with a company called AstraZeneca. And in my spare time, I delved into understanding exactly why and how believing something will have a physical impact on the brain and the physical and psychological impact on the body. And when I had enough data and understanding, you know, I couldn't hold onto it. I had to do something and I felt it was my calling. I always wanted to teach anyway. And so I decided one day I'm done.

I'm just going to leave and I'm going to write books and I'm going to talk about and be a speaker. And I'm going to talk about the way the mind impacts a body and all the different aspects of that as it relates to health and life, etc.. That's kind of what did it for me.

Alex Howard It strikes me that you have a very curious mind, and when you go into something, you go deep into it. We were just talking about, before we started recording, that you wanted to understand more about physics and quantum physics. So you went off to get a degree in the subject as opposed to what most of us do: just read a couple of books and try and educate ourselves a little bit.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah, well, I'm halfway through the degree, I've just done my exam in quantum mechanics and particle physics and electromagnetism. It's heavily mathematical. But you're right, it was great because it's helping me to understand the subject on a much deeper, more intuitive level.

Alex Howard And so let's then come a little bit to this book, *I Heart Me: The science of Self-Love*. It's always interesting when you interview someone that's written 10 books and you're sort of thinking, well, where do we go and where do we explore?

And this subject partly interests me because I think it's obviously a really important one and I feel we haven't touched on it as much as I would like to in the conference. But I was also, I was touched reading the beginning of the book about some of your own journey to it, that this wasn't the easiest book for you to write in the books you've written because it was its own...

I liked the way you wrote about how there's two ways you write a book. One is, you sort of live a journey then you write about it. The other of which is you go on a journey and you're sort of discovering it in the writing process.

Say a bit about how, yeah, this sort of piece of your body of your work or piece of the body of your work started to unfold and came forwards for you.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah, great question. I had never in my life contemplated needing to work on self-love. I mean, it's funny, I'm published with a house and most of the time when I was speaking at a house conference and Louise Hay would always be the fourth speaker. Somehow I found myself doing something else when Louise was talking about self-love.

And somehow, you know what? I was distracted. Maybe I had to do like an interview or there was an important phone call. But somehow I found myself, when she was speaking, particularly on self-love, I found myself not paying attention.

And it was almost like maybe some part of me thought "I'm a guy and guys don't really need to talk and self-love. That's kind of touchy feely". And I hadn't really ever considered it.

But deep inside, I kind of knew that I was struggling a lot in my life and just kinda getting through, you know, in a number of different ways. You know, everyone has their own personal struggles that we don't always broadcast.

But that was how I felt on the inside. Even financial challenges, life challenges, career challenges, lots and lots of different things. And it came to a head one day, I was at his conference, it was the big arena in Scotland called the SECC.

And I was about to follow the late Dr Wayne Dyer. I was the next speaker on after Wayne. And I had a kind of, an anxiety attack at the side of the stage.

And it wasn't to do with being nervous about speaking. I'd spoken to audiences of that size, you know about a thousand people or so, lots of times.

It was a deep feeling of I'm just not good enough. What am I doing here? I'm a wee... I'm just a guy from a wee village in central Scotland called Banknock. What the heck am I doing here? Following Wayne Dyer and half the speakers at the conference have been on Oprah. And then there's me. And what am I doing here?

And it was a deep sense of insecurity. And I got a flashback of being at school actually, when I was a six-year-old child. Funny how things pop into your mind at the weirdest times. And here I am being punished by the school teacher because I didn't bring in five pounds for a school trip and everyone else did. And I didn't bring it in because my mum and dad were very poor and my mum had been upset a lot, struggling financially.

And I didn't want to ask her for money because, you know, when you're a six-year-old child, five pounds, I could have been asking my mum for a week's salary. And so I got a flashback of the teacher saying, well if David Hamilton isn't good enough to bring his money and then the rest of the class will go on a school trip and he will stay here himself.

And they all get presented with a yellow badge. And I didn't mind about the school trip. I was devastated about the yellow badge, because when you're a child you only get a badge on a special day.

Alex Howard Yeah...

Dr David Hamilton And so in my mind, at that point, everyone else in the class was special except for me. And here I was remembering that at the side of the stage. And it felt to me that Wayne Dyer and all the other speakers were wearing a yellow badge and I was the only one without one. And I felt exactly the same.

And I think we often remember other times in our life where we felt pretty much the same. And I swear to you, I wanted to cuddle, grab hold of the curtain at the side of the stage, lie down in a foetal position and I wanted to cry. I just couldn't function. And in my mind, despite all the books I'd written and all the signs I have, I felt I had nothing to say.

I mean, it wasn't just an intellectual thought. I really felt, deeply, I have nothing to say and to contribute. And if it wasn't for the fact that I had to go on and the events director, he pretty much had his hand on the small of my back and escorted me to the stage, thinking David looks quite nervous.

It wasn't 'nervous'. I was just feeling so deeply lacking and feeling that I didn't have any value. I went on stage, you know. And within a few minutes I was comfortable again, but it was so hard.

And that's the day when I realized that this is a recurring problem for me. Feeling not good enough despite the mask I would present to the world and how you can sort of get by without people really knowing what really you're struggling with.

I realized that I need to now deal with this because it's beginning to... That inner feeling is beginning to negatively impact all of the important areas of my life. And that was the day I decided I have to deal with it. And that's when I started writing the book because I thought if I write a book, I'll have to do the work.

Alex Howard Yeah, and it's a powerful example as well of how childhood traumas and experiences impact us in our lives now. And I really appreciate the sincerity of what you're talking about, how even when people can be in positions of apparent success, where people think, well they couldn't possibly have any of the issues that I have because they've achieved all these things and they're on that stage.

I think it's helpful for people to remember that we're all on our journeys and that we're all impacted by the traumas or the difficult experiences that we've had, that have come to shape who we are.

And I thought... Something else I thought was really helpful was you talk about, in the first part of the book, 3 stages of Self-Love. I thought that was a very kind of, helpful way of kind of understanding kind of what it is. So maybe say a bit about what self love is or what those stages to self love are.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah. So these kind of stages were born out of my own experience. And I realized early on that what I was actually lacking was an inner sense of worthiness and value. See, there's two different types of self-love. Or call it self-esteem, if you will.

There's the external stuff where we derive our sense of worthiness and value from successes and achievements in our lives and from people having a positive perception of us, the views of our books, all this kind of outward stuff.

And I realized that, how can I be struggling with self-love when I have quite a lot of that? I've had a lot of successes. I've written these books and, you know, I've had a lot of good reviews and stuff.

And I thought, well that can't be self-love, because I think I have that. And I think that's why a lot of people in life go through thinking they're high in self-esteem when they're really not.

Because the inner stuff is maybe what you would call self-love. It's an inner sense of worthiness and value that is not dependent upon successes and achievements in life. And it's not dependent upon people liking you. It doesn't mean you don't want to achieve and it doesn't mean that you don't want people to like you. It just means that your sense of worthiness and value isn't dependent upon those things.

Those things can change. But you have an inner knowing and an inner glow, a warmth, a resilience inside that knows that no matter what, I've got this. I'm okay. Here I am. And so I swiftly realized that's what I was missing. And so as I went on this journey, what came out of it was three really obvious places I found myself and like actual solid platform steps, that I stayed at for periods of time.

And stage number one I would say, most people that I know occupy this stage a lot of the time without realizing that they're really occupying the stage. And it's an inner... It's a sense of, I am not enough. Whether it's, I'm not good enough at this and I'm not good enough at that. Or I am just fundamentally not enough. So we go through life trying to be enough, trying to present to people, look at what I've achieved, etc etc. But it's really coming from, because I don't feel it myself.

Alex Howard Yeah, it's a lot of compensatory patterns that go in. Yeah.

Dr David Hamilton Compensatory patterns yeah. And I occupied that step for most of my adult life until I began on this journey. And then after a little bit of work, I found myself emerging in a clearly different space.

And I thought, I've done it. That's me. I've got Self-Love. But I hadn't. I was only halfway through. I was at the place, I've had enough. So I've gone from, 'I am not enough' to 'I've had enough' and that's stage two.

It's when you realize that many of the difficulties and challenges and problems in your life have something to do with how you feel about yourself. And you've had enough of the way things have been going. But you've also had enough of feeling this way about yourself.

Dr David Hamilton So stage two is characterized often by significant changes because you've decided, I've had enough.

So we make sudden changes to things that we were doing in our lives. People sometimes... this is a point where people sometimes leave our lives. This is a point where we take leaps forward. We say this is what's important to me. And it's a time of change.

But I also found for me, it was a time of confrontation because I'd always been afraid of confrontation. I'd always been afraid of people, you know, and trying to please people. And it wasn't trying to please people out of kindness. Some of the time it was. But oftentimes I would try to please people because I didn't want confrontation or, you know, to rock the boat kind of thing.

And I suddenly found myself, I've had enough of all that. And I found myself being more confrontational with people, even on social media. Someone said something negative, 'well, if that's what you think...'

And I realized after a little bit of time that that's not really me. I don't want to be that person who literally wants to fight with people. But it's coming from a space that I've had enough of being pushed around. I got bullied a lot when I was younger, high school, related to the self-esteem issue that I had.

And all of a sudden it was like I was perceiving a lot of things as threats. But I've had enough. So here I am standing up for myself. It's stage two. I've had enough. But I became uncomfortable because I thought, that cannot be self-love.

It's a much, much better stage than I was in previously, but that can't be it. And I suddenly realized that this... I am a naturally compassionate and kind person. So there must be another place that I've not found yet.

And the moment I was aware that there must be another place, I found myself being drawn through to it. And I seemed to lose interest in confrontation. And what came out of it was what I called the inner sense of worthiness in value.

But it didn't really matter what people thought. And it really didn't matter the way that it had before what people thought. And that's why I call stage three. I am enough. So you go, I'm not enough; I've had enough; I am enough. And that was the transaction that I noticed in my own journey.

Alex Howard And can you say a bit more about what that Stage three place feels like? So when you're coming from a place where it's like, I'm enough. How does that feel? Because I think in those previous two stages, it's quite a lot of efforting that's going on. Either of, kind of constantly trying to prove oneself, or having to sort of stand up for oneself. And it sounds like there's a sense of ease that also comes in.

Dr David Hamilton Absolutely, you're absolutely right, Alex. It was a sense of... It was an alien feeling to me, actually. If someone had said 'what does I am enough feel like?' a few months earlier, it would be like trying to describe a color that doesn't exist.

I had no real practical experience of it. So what I noticed was an ease and a lovely feeling of not being overly concerned with whether people liked me or not. Which is always something I had a lot.

And it was almost like a sense of freedom. Like wow, sat back in my chair. I don't care. But it wasn't like, oh, here I am. I've made it. It wasn't like that. I also felt highly motivated and inspired to do what I do. In fact my work career increased because I felt actually inspired and I wasn't held back then with, 'I better not write that or I better not do that in case people judge that I think about it'. I decided this is who I am and I have to now present to the world, Me.

And all different sides of me and aspects of me. And it doesn't really matter. And there was a freedom in that. And I said, so my work rate went up. I started writing books that were different from what I'd written before.

I was speaking slightly differently. I was posting different things on social media because I wasn't bothered and I thought, part of self-love is deciding that this is who I am and I won't shrink back and turn my dimmer switch down. I'm going to turn it brightly up and just be myself.

And I say that to a lot of people about self love. Living it is choosing to be yourself because what actually happens is, you're living then a demonstration of self-love. And that has a knock-on effect on everyone else.

Alex Howard Yeah. That's beautiful. I want to come in to, in a bit, some of the things people can do to help cultivate self-love. But before we do, maybe just say a bit about how either lack of self-love or indeed the cultivation of self-love, how that actually impacts upon our body. Because when we're in a constant state of not feeling enough, that can be very depleting.

Dr David Hamilton Absolutely. In fact, one thing I've written, spoken a lot on, is what I call the four components of emotion. We often think of a feeling, for example, as if it's just a subjective experience.

But in actual fact, there's four parts to that. You cannot disentangle a feeling from the corresponding biochemistry of the brain. And the biochemistry of the brain will follow in real time, moment by moment, second by second, how you feel at any one moment.

For example, if you feel stressed, there will be stress chemistry, you know, adrenaline, cortisol, activation of particular brain regions like the amygdala, for example. If you experience compassion or think kindly of someone, you produce oxytocin, dopamine, there'll be activation in frontal regions of the brain, slightly biased to the left hand side. And so the brain chemistry and activation follows how you feel in the moment.

At the same time, you cannot disentangle how you feel from the impact on your autonomic nervous system, which then feeds all of your organs. And a lot of your cells. And at the same time, you cannot disentangle how you feel from your muscles.

When you feel stressed, you naturally tense up. You don't remember to tense. You don't say, you know I feel really stressed just now, what is it I'm supposed to do with my face again? You don't remember to do that. It's a reflex reaction because how you feel projects onto your face.

When you feel relaxed and happy, there's a relaxation here, here, here and also throughout the body. So moment by moment, and particularly if you feel a certain way for a long time, there can be a physical counterpart as the body learns to be in the same space physiologically as you are emotionally.

And so as we make changes in how we feel about ourselves, then it's no surprise that oftentimes there are changes in the physical body that follow in real time, the changes within ourselves.

Alex Howard And I think it's very interesting, that sort of loop that goes both ways, right? Because if one is cultivating that state of self love, the body changes. But also, as the body is impacted, that also then changes how we feel towards ourselves.

Dr David Hamilton Absolutely. Yeah absolutely. In fact that was the first, that insight led to a massive breakthrough for me and my self-love journey. It was recognizing that there is a relationship between, you know, it's this two way relationship. I was reading some research

by Amy Cuddy at Harvard, about the power pose, standing as Wonder Woman, for example, or Superman.

And she was measuring hormonal changes related to stress or confidence, self-esteem, and realizing that how you held and moved your body has an effect. If you stood like Wonder Woman, for example, it massively reduced stress hormone levels and massively elevated hormone levels associated with confidence and self belief and self-esteem.

And I was captivated with that and I relentlessly put that into practice. But not just as a daily Wonder Woman pose in the morning. I did that for a few months.

Alex Howard I like the image of you as Wonder Woman, by the way, David.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah, well, I have something to dress up as well! But what I did relentlessly, is I lived that. Over the next two to three months, in my daily life. Meaning, it didn't mean I was walking through the street then stop and do that. But what I would do, is recognizing that there's this two way communication between your muscles and how you feel. Like if I feel happy, I'll naturally smile.

But if you use your muscles, you can make it go the other way. You can on purpose, choose a posture, how you hold and move your body. And that feeds back into the brain so that you start to feel the way that you're holding, according to how you're holding and moving your body.

So I relentlessly, over the next couple of months, several times a day, I would just notice how I'm sitting, standing or how I'm walking. Even when I'm communicating with people I would notice, if for example, I was in a challenging situation that normally I would feel small and I'd want to shrink down.

Even if it was confrontational. I'd noticed myself doing that and instead I'd open up, lengthen my spine. You know, I found a really powerful exercise was to imagine my spine being inflated like you're pumping a bicycle pump and my spine just lengthening by a few centimeters. And then, in a sense, you're standing tall.

And I found that when I did that, my shoulders naturally went back and dropped. And it was an amazing way to massively tweak my posture in the moment. So relentlessly, over a couple of months, I tweaked my posture several times a day whether I was in the queue in the coffee shop, carrying my shopping, sitting in a chair, watching TV or in a social situation.

And it was like magic. Because what happens, if you keep moving a muscle repeatedly, what it does, it begins to shape the brain through neuroplasticity. There's great research at Harvard where they went and got volunteers to play piano notes for two hours and five days, massively shaped the circuits of the brain.

And I realized that the same thing happens with any muscle. It's how exercise shapes muscles. So I thought, if I can shape my postural muscles, relentlessly, several times a day, so that my brain learns: this is how I stand. This is how I sit now. This is how I hold myself

when I'm communicating with people. When I'm speaking on stage. When I'm in a challenging situation, this is what I do.

Then it would be actually shaping the circuits of the brain. And it literally was like magic. For me, it was completely transformational. It absolutely transformed how I felt on the inside. It was the first really massive gain I made in my self-love journey.

Alex Howard And I think that that's important, isn't it. When you're on a clearly defined path, for example, you've identified this issue around self-love and you're working on it and then you actually, you start to feel a difference.

I think that often is the fuel that we need to continue on that path. I'm curious as to what then came next? What was some of the other lessons that you learned, things that you noticed were helping shift this relationship with yourself?

Dr David Hamilton Yes. So the next really massive thing for me was, you could say it's more subtle. So the first one was very much a powerful exercise.

The next one was more of an insight into learning about the importance of being myself. And the doorway into that was the actual feeling and experience of vulnerability.

Now everyone has their own doorway, their own way into being themselves. But one of the most powerful aspects of self-love is to choose to be yourself. It's a choice that this is how I am. You may or may not like it. This person might like it. That person might not. But it doesn't matter.

What is important is that I am true to myself, whatever that is. And the doorway I had to go through to find that space was the experience of vulnerability. And that came through a very challenging time when I lost my dog, Oscar, he was only two years old, gold/yellow Labrador. He had bone cancer.

And through the experience of him being diagnosed with bone cancer and being told by the orthopedic surgeon, the vet, that there is nothing you can do, that he's in his final months of his life now. And it's already progressed. There is no, there's nothing. All you can do is extend his life a little bit. But you, that's it, you're going to lose him.

And that was devastating. And I found myself, among family, friends and publicly, not trying to man up in the way that I'd always manned up. People say to you, man up. I learned that as a child, growing up in a small miners town. The village I grew up in, one of the main professions was coal mining in that village. So it was very much strong men.

So I grew up with that stereotype that you man up, that men don't cry and all of that. And I found myself struggling emotionally and even publicly.

I couldn't pretend that Oscar didn't mean as much to me as he did and I couldn't pretend that I wasn't hurting and I thought, I am. And even after we lost him, I thought... I remember being on stage one time. It was a big, big event. It was shortly after the book was published because Oscar came into my life two days before I started working on my Self-Love book. And he passed away two days before it finished.

Alex Howard Wow

Dr David Hamilton He literally was in my life for the exact duration of time that I worked on that book. What helped me get through it was believing that he came for that reason. And so the book came out not long after he passed away, really. About three, four and a half months later.

Alex Howard I thought it was very touching, the afterword, actually, where you where you kind of spoke about that. And I think that there's something about that, because I think when we reject our vulnerability, when we aren't willing to share it, what we're really saying is, this part of me is not okay. This part of me is not lovable. So I can't express it to the world. And it takes a lot of courage, actually, to show those places that feel more delicate or more vulnerable.

Dr David Hamilton Yeah, because deep inside of us, we're biologically, genetically wired for connection. This is the root of many people's adult challenges with self-love, we are wired for connection. We're genetically, biologically wired to connect.

In fact, one of the oldest genes in the human genome is about connections. About 500 million years old. It's actually the kindness gene or the gene for the kindness hormone. I've written about that. It's the oxytocin receptor gene, for anyone technically interested. It's about 500 million years old. I'm three days, not three days...

Alex Howard I'm impressed!

Dr David Hamilton But connection is deeply ingrained in us, we need connection to literally not just thrive, but to survive. The human biological system thrives and needs to survive by bonding and connecting.

So we somehow in our journey in life, come to believe that if I get people to like me, then I will connect. And it's not just about thriving. It's surviving on a deep level.

We know that we need to connect and bond and connect to survive. So somehow in our journey, we start to believe that if people like me, then they will connect.

And so what happens is that gets a wee bit distorted as we go through our teenage and adult lives. And then we start to only present the best parts. Because if I show them the other parts, the wobbly bits, they're not going to like me. And then that's a threat to my survival. And that gets buried so deep in us. And it takes a lot of unpacking. Part of this breakthrough I made is in actual fact, connection is truer and more powerful if you show your wobbly bits.

Because there's not one person's life that doesn't have wobbly bits, emotionally. And so by presenting them as, presenting your own and not being afraid to do it. All of a sudden other people start doing the same and sharing bits that they've held back and all of a sudden everyone starts to connect a little bit better.

So recognizing that this need to get people to like us is so that we can connect. In actual fact, if you reveal the truth of yourself, then you're more likely to get connection. And it's just

that little psychological tweak we need to make. That real lasting and true connection actually comes from presenting your whole self just as you are. And that's why earlier in the interview I said I felt suddenly more inspired because I wasn't afraid then of whether people like or judged things that I say.

I remember on stage at an event as I was saying a few minutes ago, I found myself breaking down in tears in the middle of a talk. And I'd happened to talk about Oscar and it was still a bit kind of raw and I found myself crying and the thought went into my head that I'm giving a talk here at an international conference. If people see me crying, no one's going to buy my books. And they're all going to think, well, he's not a very good teacher because he should have it all together. He should be telling us. And here he is crying because he lost his dog. And that thought went into my mind and I found myself, you know, when you're trying not to...

Alex Howard Which only makes it worse!

Dr David Hamilton Yes. And then I suddenly got that wave of insight. It came with the words, fuck it!

Alex Howard That's often a good entry point, isn't it?

Dr David Hamilton Yeah. It was, I don't care. I'm just going to be myself, because that's what I learned from Oscar.

That's what he taught me about being myself. So I just cried openly and I said, you have to give me a moment if that's alright. Sorry. Oscar passed away. And I cried for I don't know how long. And someone ran up the stage and gave me a hug.

Anyway, it turned out to be one of... People were saying it's one of the best talks they'd ever been to. My book sold out in like three minutes.

They were sending people to bookshops in London because they had none left. And it was the complete opposite from what I had expected. I thought that I need to present the powerful best bits in order to get the best reception. But when I let that go and just decided to be myself, even if that self-doubt aspect of myself I was presenting at that moment didn't have it all together. It was actually a better teaching than just the words I was saying because I was demonstrating. I didn't mean to.

I was demonstrating practically and accidentally that this is me being me. And it doesn't matter to me. I'm just going to do it anyway. And it was a great breakthrough for me.

Alex Howard I think what's really... It's a touching story, and I think what's particularly interesting is the 'fuck it' moment. Because there's something in... Often what happens when we get into sort of personal development and self-help is we understand more and more things intellectually, but things don't really change until we do something different.

And there's often these moments where there's the choice of the habitual path or there's the choice of taking a bit of a risk and doing something that we believe in our mind might help. But it feels scary in the body to just have that courage to just take that step.

And I wonder what you find supports people. What supported you in that moment or what helps people kind of take that step when it's scary in that moment?

Dr David Hamilton For me, it was, I had realized that it was so important to take that step. That part of growth, going through life is growing. I mean, as we move through life we're growing and learning and growing all the time. And realizing, my support in that was realizing that the journey in life for me as an author and writer isn't about how many books I sell or how many books I write.

It's about me growing into myself. And I remember at that point on stage, realizing that the most important thing I can do right now is be myself, regardless of the consequences. Because being myself is the most important part on my journey at this present time. And so that was my support was knowing that this is actually what I have to do in the grand scheme of things.

And it's the detail isn't important. What is important is that I move in the direction that I have to go. And I just will have to trust that the details will, the deck of cards will fall in whichever way it needs to fall. But this is the direction I have to go in. And let's see what happens.

Alex Howard Yeah. And I think when one takes those risks and it works, right, in that moment then you had the affirmation of, wow, this is one of the most positive responses I've ever had from an audience. It becomes easier the next time to be vulnerable in that way.

Dr David Hamilton Exactly. And that was really helpful for me, suddenly realizing that people are not judging me anyway.

They're actually saying thank you because I've now decided to open up and I'm now being myself in a way that I've never been before. And I'm being vulnerable in a way that I've never been before. And it was having a ripple effect. And it was like when you drop a pebble in a pond and it creates a lot of waves.

Well, when you choose to be yourself and be your whole self, not just the shiny bits, the wobbly bits, then it sets the waves in motion and wee lily pads rise and fall on the other side of the pond because of the waves that we set in motion. But these waves can be set in motion by you choosing to be yourself and present all parts of yourself, not just the seeming best bits.

Alex Howard I'm mindful of time, but I think it would also be helpful just to say a few words about the power of visualization as another sort of kind of practical strategy that people can use.

Dr David Hamilton Yes. You know what I've talked about here, it sounds like I just did this in a few months, but this actually took me two years. It's the longest I've ever taken to write

a book. Because, as we said at the start, these are the two ways to write a book. The latter being that the book writes itself as it mirrors your journey. And so the book took longer than any book I've ever taken to write because I was learning.

So what sounds like a few things that I did... Like I did power pose one week then break through the next! It was actually, that covered almost a two year span. The time of Oscar's life really. But for me, I forget what I was....

Alex Howard Visualization.

Dr David Hamilton Visualization. Yes. Because amid, in the middle of this, one of these strategies I found immensely useful was visualization, but not in the classic way that you would visualize. For example, let's say you were going to do a presentation and many people would visualize in the presentation, what they would visualize is the audience applause at the end.

But if you want to build self-esteem, self love, given the relationship between your muscles and how you feel, then what you actually have to visualize, you can visualize the end if you want.

But what you have to give more attention to is how you got there, the movement of your muscles. So visualize how you get off the seat and how you're holding your back and your spine and your facial muscles and your shoulders. And imagine the feelings and sensations of walking to the stage feeling like, I've got this.

And imagine yourself speaking at the cadence that reflects how you feel about yourself. And imagine the relaxation in your face, the passion as you get too passionate. That's all it has to take, two or three minutes of visualization. But what you're visualizing is not just the end, but how you got there.

Now take that same technique and now roll it into a scenario that would normally be very difficult for you and would normally show up to yourself where you're lacking in self-love. So for me, it was confrontational situations would be red flags for me. And normally I would find myself stepping back and becoming smaller, which is just a normal reaction. And so what I would do, I'd visualize such scenarios, but I'd visualize myself. With my posture standing tall, stretching my spine, shoulders dropped. I'd visualize myself breathing and then visualize not just what I'm saying, but visualize how I'm saying it. The cadence, the way in which I put it across.

And I do that like five or 10 times in a row, maybe two or three times a week, leading up to perhaps a situation I knew that I would probably find myself in. And by visualizing moving your body in that way, you wire into the brain, in the same way that you would do if you are working at a muscle gym.

Research shows that in many ways the brain cannot distinguish between whether you're moving the body or whether you're imagining moving a part of the body. All athletes use this to enhance, to get that extra little bit over their competitors.

Everyone visualizes their most challenging shots or movements, for example. And relentless visualization codes it or wires it into the brain, almost to the same degree as actually doing the thing itself.

Research shows people getting physically stronger by imagining lifting objects and there's not too much of a difference in strength or flexibility gained through imagining vs. actually doing the thing, the best is both. The best way is to do both. So I visualized particular challenging situations and I visualized not just the outcome, yes, the outcome, but I visualized mostly how I obtained the outcome through imagining how I was holding my spine, my shoulders, how I was breathing and how I was speaking and it's such a powerful exercise.

Alex Howard I think that's a great place to end. I know that in your books, you talk quite a bit about how people can learn a bit more about visualization, which I think is a good place to say to people that want to find out more about you and your work, David. What was the best way to do that?

Dr David Hamilton Well my website, DrDavidHamilton.com is probably the central place where you can access the titles of all my books. My talks I'm doing online and physically after lock down and even my online courses. And all my social media channels, they're all presented on my website. It's probably the easiest place for people to get to.

Alex Howard Fantastic. Particularly if people want to go deeper into this piece, then *I Heart Me: The science of Self-Love* is a great place to start with that as well. David, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. It's been a really good interview, thank you.

Dr David Hamilton Thanks very much, Alex. My pleasure.