



Interview with Dr Jenny English

Jenny English is registered psychologist with over 25 years experience working in university counselling services – from the School of Early Childhood Studies in the late 1980's to Melbourne College of Advanced Education then Melbourne University in the 1990's, Deakin University in the 2000's and finally as Manager of Counselling at RMIT 2009 to 2015. Jenny is now semi retired with a small private practise providing supervision to professionals and managers across the health, welfare and education sectors.

What are some psychological skills that can help academics thrive in their role?

I think the psychological skills that academic need to have to maintain their own wellbeing in their work is the capacity for self-regulation, to be able to set goals and stick to them, or to re-evaluate and keep motivated and their eye on that purpose. With that comes the need for self-awareness. You need to be able to understand what your stress points are and also to understand what energises and keeps you going.

I think, having good boundaries, really understanding what your role is and developing the skills to work effectively within that role, is very important. And to have good help-seeking skills so that when you do step outside, or feel that you are moving outside of the boundaries of your role, you know how to seek help to assist you to manage those situations.

I think it's also important to have a good work-life balance: to ensure that work has it's place in your life, and you also engage in meaningful other activities that renew and support your life.

And with that therefore comes resilience, which I think is a very important aspect of the academic's life, that ability to keep going and to bounce back. And resilience will grow out of the self-awareness, the self-regulation, knowing the boundaries, and keeping yourself focused and motivated.

What advice would you offer to junior or casual academic educators who have the extra stress of job insecurity?

I think this can be a challenging situation to be in and the academic needs to manage it by keeping their eye on the big picture, looking at where they want to go in their career and setting goals. And at the same time enjoying the present so that they are enjoying the role they are in at the moment and getting the most out of it. Looking for opportunities, networking, maybe getting a coach or a mentor in the role can help them develop the skills that ensure that they have a good future in their career.

What advice would you offer to mid- or later- career academics who may have lost energy and enthusiasm for their work?

Again this can be quite difficult. I think it's very important to set goals and to look at what motivates you to understand what gives you meaning in purpose and work. That might mean re-aligning those goals, once you get more experienced in the role. I think networking, participating in working groups and committees that bring new perspective and new people into your work is important.

I think it's important to look at perhaps putting more exercise into your life. This sounds strange but to do exercise before work in the morning can actually help with managing motivation and energy levels throughout the day. I think it's important to do what I call a "lifestyle audit" and to look at your health and wellbeing. So, to look at your sleep and eating habits, look at how you have fun. It's a really important thing that people often forget to pay attention to.

Look at your drug and alcohol use, look at what sort of exercise or meditation, yoga, look at your spirituality, how you spend time in nature, all of these things are important to examine to keep you eye on your wellbeing at times when perhaps your motivation at work is struggling.

What philosophy do you apply to managing your won wellbeing?

A useful thing I think for everybody to keep in mind is CARE. CARE stands for:

- **Connectedness.** That is maintaining networks and relationships at work. The team room is an important place to maintain your connection and focus with your colleagues.
- **Awareness.** That means understanding your stressors and understanding what energises you.
- **Resources** or resourcing. Managing your work-life balance. Use your resources to keep your energy on the work.
- **Effectiveness.** That's maintaining your professional development and your training and your supervision.

Where can academics turn for support if they are experiencing distress?

It's true that most people turn to their family and friends before they turn to professional help. So I think in the first instance it's really important for people to talk to their family and friends about how they feeling and get support from their loved ones.

After that, I think it's good to have a look at some of the online resources and the apps that are around, around maintaining mood, anxiety and depression. And then think about going to a professional for help if those don't help alleviate the symptoms, to a counsellor, a psychologist through a Mental Health Plan, going to their GP and getting a Mental Health Plan and a referral. Using their community resources to deal with it in a professional sense.

Dr Jenny English
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