

# ...with Almuth McDowall

Lecturer at the University of Surrey

## One moment that changed the course of your career

Realising that I tend to absorb other people's feelings far too much to be a counsellor, and having wonderful lecturers who inspired me to go into occupational psychology – you know who you are!

## One book that you think all psychologists should read

*Families and How to Survive Them* by Robin Skynner and John Cleese. It's written as a conversation between a shrink and a client, and has countless episodes where you think 'yep, that's what family life is like...'

## One hero from psychology past or present

Ellen Kossek. She is the 'I am not worthy' scholar in my area of work-life balance. Ellen is hugely knowledgeable, a wonderful and engaging writer, passionate about making a difference to practice and living example that you don't have to be nasty to rise to the top in academia.

## One thing you would change about psychologists

Stop navel gazing! We are too introspective for our own good. We have to reach out to make an impact, otherwise happiness studies will continue to be done by economists.

## One curious thing about work-life balance

That people still think work-life balance only concerns people with families. Singletons or childless employees have just as much of a right to a good balance as parents do.

## One regret

The death of our first daughter – burying your child is the hardest thing a parent will ever have to do. But the experience made me what I am now, and gave me



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compassion and insight which I did not have before.

## One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

You have to love what you do, but look after yourself. Psychology can be surprisingly hard on people. A lot of our work is in our head, and it's sometimes tricky to switch all the thinking off. Find something to balance out all the mind work – for me, that's roller-blading!

## One cultural recommendation

Spot the psychology in

everything you read and watch. John Rust once said to our class when I was an undergraduate that we can learn as much about the human psyche from the reading great classics with a 'psychology hat' on as from much of the research we do.

## One alternative career path you may have chosen

Continued as a fitness instructor and set up my own gym. Still tempting!

## One problem that psychology should deal with

Why do so many high-profile dysfunctional leaders go right to the top?

## One thing that makes me laugh

The film *Still Crazy*. Bill Nighy is priceless.

## One inspiration

My maternal grandmother. She brought up two wonderful children during the Second World War. As my grandfather died in a prisoner of war camp her family was so poor that she literally had to forage for food in the nearby forest. Her strength and courage are what life is all about.

## One treasured possession

I grew up in a still divided Germany. I lived in the West, but close friends in the East gave me a treasured children's book which sits on my shelf looking rather battered. The book's characters were clearly based on communist ideology – but I still love the idea of the sum being greater than its parts. I turn to it when I need cheering up!

More answers online at [www.thepsychologist.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk)

### resource

Palmer, S. & McDowall, A. (2010). *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*. London: Routledge.  
'Coaching is my "sideline", which I am passionate about, as we need to nurture our relationships. It's my first co-edited book, and I am proud of the chapter I co-wrote with the late Lynne Millward.'

### coming soon

Articles on awareness during anaesthesia, episodic future thinking, the paradox of knowing, and much more...

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