

...with Cary Cooper

Distinguished Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University Management School

One moment that changed the course of your career

I was a master's student at the University of California, Los Angeles when I met a visiting professor from Leeds University who invited me to England for a year. I've been here ever since!

One book that you think all psychologists should read

Joseph Heller's *Something Happened*. It's fiction, but it describes in psychological detail, with wonderful humour, how people behave in the workplace. It is frighteningly close to what the science of occupational psychology tells us about work.

One way to raise mental capital

Never put other people down, see their positive attributes and try to be kind and supportive. Mark Twain got it right when he wrote: 'Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that

you, too, can somehow become great.'

One source of energy

My children. They have always kept me grounded, active and I have worked hard to make them proud of me. Also, coming from a family that had to leave the Ukraine and Romania in desperate straits because of the anti-Semitism they experienced, some of my energy comes from an inherited insecurity.

One way organisations could reduce stress overnight

Carry out an annual stress audit and then publish the headline results in their annual report. There is a move afoot in the HR world for sickness absence rates, corporate job satisfaction scores, etc. being reported in annual reports, so we may get there one day!

One thing I would change about psychologists

Engage more with the media, to show the world we have

something very significant to contribute to society, which is far more important than pure economics: it is about the human condition, particularly during hard times like today.

One challenge occupational psychology faces

Individuals, small businesses and others will face huge survival pressures over the next few years – we need to help, and we have the skills to do it.

One cultural recommendation

Schindler's List means a great deal to me, not only because I come from an Eastern European Jewish background where members of my distant family perished, but also because it highlights all human behaviour, from the dark side to the heroic. We see in this work so much of the human spirit, man's ability to withstand the worst atrocities and above all the bravery of one man to do something for others without personal gain.

One regret

Not having spent as much time as I would have liked with my two kids from my first marriage. I was starting my university career at the time, working long hours, going to conferences, etc. One should never miss those precious early years of childhood: you can never recapture them.

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Be on 'Receive' and not on 'Transmit' mode: We have a lot to give as a profession but it is important that we 'listen' to others and not assume we



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know everything there is to know about human behaviour. With every day that passes, I learn more just by watching and listening, whether in my professional or personal role.

More answers online at www.thepsychologist.org.uk

resource

Cooper, C.L., Field, J., Goswami, U., Jenkins, R. & Sahakian, B. (2009). *Mental capital and mental wellbeing*. London: Wiley-Blackwell. 'Based on a government Foresight project, it represented two years of work with great collaborators. I am proud of what it could achieve.'

coming soon

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