



Dr Jennifer Quaid

In this podcast, **Dr Jennifer Quaid**, a criminal law researcher in the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Law, discusses the importance of developing your communication skills, being open-minded and making connections with mentors.

Break the **podcast** down:

00:59: Hello Jennifer, welcome to the Futurum Careers podcast.

How are you this morning?

I'm well! Thanks for the invitation, glad to be here.

Yeah, it's good to have you. I start these podcasts with three quickfire questions to get to know you a little bit better as a person before we get stuck into your research and your career. So, the first question is, what's your favourite thing to do on the weekend?

My favourite thing to do on the weekend depends a little bit on the season, but in the summer it's to go swim in a lake with my friends and in the winter it's to go cross-country skiing.

Nice. If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

That's a hard one. I don't know! I suppose if I had a superpower, it would be [to be] able to transcribe what I'm thinking into writing because I'm not a very good typist and sometimes I think faster than I write. That would be helpful for me.

Yeah, you'd save some time. And then the last question is, if you could be any animal, what animal would you be and why?

I think if I harken back to myself as a kid and things I loved to do, I probably would want to be a cheetah because I love to run, and I don't run fast anymore, but I did at one time.

Nice. That's a good answer.

02:10: Cool. So, you study the laws around economic crime and corruption. And in particular, you've recently been studying remediation agreements in Canada. So, could you give our listeners just a brief overview of what a remediation agreement is and how you've been studying those?

'Remediation agreement' is a very unfortunate name because it can

be confused with circumstances when we talk about remediating land after there's been damage. So, it's not that. But the basic idea behind a remediation agreement is that when you have groups of people and structures that are either in business or doing something together – it can also be a charity, it can also be a municipality – things can go wrong, but it's not quite as straightforward when the time comes for accountability to just sort of say, "well, we're going to give you a consequence that's really harsh."

There are a couple of reasons why these negotiated settlements – because that's really what they are, it's a negotiation to resolve a situation that otherwise would be solved by a prosecution and maybe eventually a conviction – [are less straightforward]. First of all, economic crime is hard to detect. You don't have the classic signs which say, "oh yeah, something happened, somebody died, something's missing," and so you don't know when to investigate. So, a lot of these things only get discovered because someone reports them.

The second thing is that, in some ways, having a direct effect on a collectivity of persons is not quite as straightforward as [having a] a direct effect on an individual person. And the final thing is that actually for investigators, these are very complicated cases to put together even if you know something's happened.

All these factors combine so that you may have situations where you know something's going on. The company would like to get out of the darkness and come back, but doesn't want to expose itself to the uncertainty and the, honestly, uncontrolled nature of a prosecution with secondary effects like bad publicity and reputational hits. There are a lot of impediments to going the traditional way of resolving criminal charges.

So, there was a mix of factors but that was really what we were →



getting at is, recognising these are crimes that are hard to know about, hard to investigate and prove, and they often have effects that go beyond maybe what was intended. And so, these negotiated tools leave more flexibility and more room to come to an arrangement. But the ultimate goal is to get the organisation from a state of being in an illegal state of affairs to a compliant state of affairs.

04:44: Great, thank you. Now I'm wondering if you could explain to our listeners what a typical day of work looks like for you, the kind of things that you get up to on a day-to-day basis.

My typical day will sort of depend on whether we're during the teaching semester or not. But when I'm mostly just doing research, then I read a lot. Then you actually have to think about what you've been reading. So, it's not just that your reading and writing; I think you have to think about what you've done before you start writing about it. You have to figure out, well, what does this mean? Or what does it say?

But you also have to have a certain amount of open-mindedness and not be too fixed in where you're going, because then you can sometimes... and we're all vulnerable to this, this what we call 'cognitive bias', where you're only looking for the things that confirm what you think, as opposed to the things that might challenge what you think. And in the humanities, this is a lot more intangible than in the sciences. Scientists can argue about things, but there are some things they can't argue about, like gravity. And in the humanities, we have less things that can be taken as absolutes. So, there's a lot more room for opinion or interpretation of what we see and observe, because we're talking about people. And so, those things are not absolute certainties.

But I do find that that's sort of the way that my average day would be, I try to do my reading and thinking in the morning. And then in the afternoon, I might have some meetings, I might talk to students, I might speak to other colleagues who are working in these areas. Or sometimes I speak to journalists, because actually that's a really useful way to find out about how people who are not deep inside these questions... well, they see something happen and they say, "hey, how does that relate to what you're studying?" And I think, "oh, well, I hadn't thought about that." And so, for me, it's a kind of way to keep connected to the real world. But every day is slightly different, I would say.

06:40: Yeah, it sounds like there's quite a lot of variety in the work that you do. I'm wondering what kind of traits or skills or characteristics you have that have helped you be successful in your career?

Well, a lot of my job is with people. So, I was talking about the research side, but a big part of my job is also communication. And it's very relational. So, I work with colleagues, I like to exchange ideas with colleagues. I work a lot with students. I have student research assistants. I teach students in the classroom, I supervise them. And so, a lot of my work is not just about me thinking about things, it's also about recognising when I need to talk to other people and maybe figure out some things with them, and being openminded, because [in] academia, you have to be humble.

People may tell you things that you wish you didn't have to hear, but you do have to hear. Like they say, "hmm, I'm not sure that that works," or "did you think about this," or "I think you missed this point." It's important to be open to that feedback. So, you do have to have good communication skills. I do a lot of, for lack of a better word, networking in the sense that I stay in touch with people.

I stay in touch, not just with university researchers, but I know prosecutors, I know defence counsel, I go to conferences where there are not just academics, but also people who are in practice, people who are working and advising companies. And that way, I also make sure that I'm not in an echo chamber where I'm only hearing one side.

So, I think my view has always been to try and see whether I can reflect what's being said around there, because I don't take the position that I have all the answers. And I think it's important to know what's going on and to listen to what others have said, because without consensus, you don't get anything done. And so, you do have to be willing to compromise sometimes, even though we all would like to have our own way.

08:30: Yeah. So, you mentioned there having to compromise and having to be open to receiving feedback and maybe hearing things that you don't want to hear. So, I'm wondering what kind of challenges have you come across during your career? And how have you overcome those?

I always say to my students, and like every generation before, they say, "well, so what's the secret? How do you make it?" And I say, "well, the first thing you have to know is that what's in my CV and my published bio are only the good things. But all the things that didn't turn out perfectly are often more consequential in terms of your evolution."

So, some of the challenges that I had to overcome... I think that one of the first ones was realising that maybe the image I had of what I wanted to do when I graduated was not actually lining up with what I wanted to do. And so, I had this idea I was going to be a litigator (so, someone who goes to court, a barrister in UK terms) and that I wanted to be a partner in a big law firm. And, you know, this was kind of the way it was. And I'm someone who graduated in the early 90s. And so, in that day and age, certainly the pressure from parents of my generation was to say, "okay, you're going to lock into a job, and you're going to have that job for a long time, ideally for life," right?

Nowadays, I would say that a career is a long time, there are a lot of twists and turns. You're going to make some mistakes. You're going to launch into something where you're like, "hmm, yeah, maybe this is not what I wanted to do. Now, what do I do? How do I get out?"

So, I think that that's part of the experience is that you... it takes a while to figure out, well, A, what you want to do, and B, there is the very real likelihood that as you move forward in life, and your circumstances change, what you want to do will also change. Maybe your fundamental interests won't, but how you're going to do them, or what kind of job you're going to do does change. So, yeah, it's being open minded and a little bit prepared for missteps, I would say. ➔

10:36: Yeah. And you're talking there about finding yourself in a situation where it didn't match what you had expected. And yeah, you're stuck in a situation that maybe isn't ideal. In those moments, how are you navigating the next place to go? Is it instinct? Is it talking to people who... mentors or something? How do you decide if you're in a position like, "oh, this isn't really working"? Do you have any advice on how to figure out where to go next?

I think talking to others is important. And that is where I would say, accept mentorship that is offered to you. And I think there is a really important component for younger people, especially because right now, people are finding it hard to get in anywhere. Develop those relationships early when you don't necessarily need something. So, my superpower is – I shouldn't say it, but I'm going to – is the Thank You Note. So, when you meet people, when they do something for you, the opportunity to connect is to say, "that was really great. Thank you very much," or whatever, rather than when you need something.

So, I find that it's important to build those connections with mentors or with others – they may not be mentors officially, but even just contacts – when it's neutral or when you're actually in a position to give something. And when you're young and you don't have a lot of experience, what you can give is your politeness and your appreciation for efforts that others have made. And people remember that.

So, if you're going to build a network of people you trust, it's also important to do it at a stage where you don't necessarily need anything yet. And you've built that sort of relationship of trust and interaction. And then later on, you can really say, "these are people that we've built our connection not on need, but on mutual respect." That's very valuable. And anyone can do that. You just have to have a little bit of courage to not be fearful to send a message to someone and maybe they don't respond. I mean, so they don't respond.

12:43: Yeah. I think that's all really good advice. We've been talking a little bit about the challenges and maybe some of the difficulties about this career. I wonder if we could end by you telling us what it is that you love most about your job and what really energises you to do this kind of work.

That's a good place to end. I think that the moments that are sort of the most fun for me... I like learning about new things. I've always liked learning about new things. And I like it when I have something intriguing and I'm trying to figure it out. So, I think it's that sense of discovery and believing that discovery, curiosity and I guess the pursuit of understanding can lead somewhere and is positive and is worthwhile. We all want the world to be a better place, and we're all doing our little part to make it work. So, when you get those concrete moments of like, "wow, I discovered something new" or "I just had a new idea" or "I just learned something amazing from someone I talked to," that's what keeps you going.

And I really enjoy the interaction with the next generation. I mean, there's what I can do, but to me, there's far more potential in what the generations to come will do. So, being part of that refuelling and re-energising of society is also really important.

Great. That's really a nice, positive way to end. So, thank you very much, Jennifer, for joining me today.

Thanks very much, Joe. This was a lot of fun.

