

Mental Health Champions: Why & How Jennifer Michelle Is Helping To Champion Mental Wellness

An Interview With Michelle Tennant Nicholson; Authority Magazine

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

As a part of our series about [Mental Health Champions](#) helping to promote mental wellness, I had the pleasure to interview [Jennifer Michelle](#).

JENNIFER MICHELLE is an author, professional keynote speaker, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC), and an entrepreneur. She opened Family Counseling Services, a community mental health agency, in Meridian, Idaho in 2008 and is about to publish her first book in the months to come called the Light Bulb Effect. You can follow Jennifer's journey with the Light Bulb Effect by visiting www.LightBulbEffect.com

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit. Can you tell us a bit about how you grew up?

Thank you for having me here today to talk about the importance of mental health in our society. I grew up in a town just outside of Portland, Oregon, raised by mom and stepdad. I also have one younger brother. Growing up I enjoyed ice skating... which I am terrible at now, and spending time with friends. I moved to Idaho in 1997 right after high school to go to college and have been here ever since.

You are currently leading an initiative that is helping to promote mental wellness. Can you tell us a bit more specifically about what you are trying to address?

Absolutely! I am taking a two-fold approach to try to address and promote mental wellness in our society. First, I am the owner of Family Counseling Services in Meridian, Idaho. This is a community agency where the staff and I focus on providing quality care to all individuals. It is highly important to me that the mission of this agency not to discriminate based on race, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other quality that might make individuals feel left out is adopted by all the staff who chooses to work for me. Secondly, I am writing a book all about how to care for your mental health called *The Light Bulb Effect*. The premise of this book is a metaphor about how in life we all start out whole, just like a light bulb. Through life's journey, we get scratches, scars, and even break, but there is so much beauty and healing in the pieces. The book is about find peace amongst your pieces. Trying to promote individual and community mental health is of utmost importance, and no one should be left out of being able to find that care. This care could be found through professional service like counseling, or through picking up a book that sheds light and provides you with hope and strength to get through the difficult parts of your journey.

Can you tell us the backstory about what inspired you to originally feel passionate about this cause?

No one like to feel left out. Everyone can relate to that feeling, and when we are alone and feeling isolated, negative beliefs can grow. What inspires me to originally feel passionate about this cause is my own experience of having someone come in my life, walk the journey with me, and provide me hope and inspiration of a future for myself that could be different than where I was heading. Everyone needs to feel cared for and in that loving and accepting environment is where we can fight against the negative effects and stereotypes around mental health.

Many of us have ideas, dreams, and passions, but never manifest them. They don't get up and just do it. But you did. Was there an "Aha Moment" that made you decide that you were actually going to step up and do it? What was that final trigger?

In high school I was never one to even believe I would go to college and then a mentor of mine suggested it to me. That idea began an educational journey that opened doors I would have never been able to walk through had it not been for someone who cared about my future enough to guide me through that first door. From the time I decided to attend college I had mentors come into my life at just the right time. I do understand not everyone is lucky enough to have a mentor to show them the way, but it was in my follow through that success was found. Though you may not have a mentor to show you how to get there, if you never stop believing you can make it, you will discover your path. The secret is not in the dream, the secret is in the follow through. Good intentions and having dreams are just the beginning, but without you following through, no one else will do it for you. Each step of my journey led to another open door. I did not know where I was going, or where I would end, but when an open door of opportunity came, I often took it out of curiosity as to where it would lead me and how far I could go. For me the "aha moment" was being curious. I took the approach with each open door that I would go as far as it would take me and figure out the rest as it came. I did not like failure, but I did not let the fear of failure stop me from trying.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company or organization?

The most interesting thing that happened to me since I began leading my organization is the unexpected growth and humility I have experienced at the hand of both my own mistakes, and the grace people have afforded me. Since my master's degree is in counseling, I had to learn some difficult lessons as I was learning how to run a business. Some of my decisions did not go the way I anticipated and when I made a mistake, it was very public to the staff who trusted me, as some of my decisions would obviously affect them. What I learned in making mistakes is that the more open I am about them, the more the team feels the honesty, and trust is then built. Through recognizing this process, I then began to experience a lot of unexpected confidence in my own leadership skills as well as a lot of becoming comfortable with admitting my mistakes. The lie that we believe is that we must cover up our mistakes, when in reality, if and when we are honest about them – it is there that success can be found in the leadership role. I now believe the best leaders are those who are transparent, especially with their mistakes, and I appreciate leaders who serve those they lead. Once I realized that as a leader it was now my job to serve my employees, business began to thrive. Thus, each time we bring on a new employee I take the approach that I now work for them. It is now my job to make sure they have what they need to do the job I hired them to do. It is my job to make sure they have the training, supplies, and support they need, and in that approach we have found great success.

None of us can be successful without some help along the way. Did you have mentors or cheerleaders who helped you to succeed? Can you tell us a story about their influence?

I was lucky to experience a mentor at almost every step through my journey of life up to this point, and when life did not naturally present a mentor to me, I actively sought out people who would fill that role. I have always recognized I could not reach the heights I wanted to on my own and I needed someone in my life to brainstorm with, to guide me, and to keep me on track. In my high school years the person that filled this role with my youth minister, Jim Putman. Jim later went on to invest his time and efforts by planting a church up north in Idaho. His church is now over 10,000 people. I feel lucky to have him as my first mentor.

In college, again, life put another mentor in my life: Jamie Lambert. Jamie was a co-worker who guided my path and taught me a lot about responsibility in the professional world. My final mentor I sought out myself after years of doing things on my own: Dr. Taylor Clark, who owns All About You Dental in Meridian, Idaho. Dr. Clark is a very successful business owner and entrepreneur who to this day still continues to meet with me monthly to deepen my knowledge of the business world, and the world around me. I will always be grateful for these main mentors in my life.

According to Mental Health America's [report](#), over 44 million Americans have a mental health condition. Yet there's still a stigma about mental illness. Can you share a few reasons you think this is so?

Having a mental health condition is much like having a medical condition that you can not see. If you look at YouTube you can see videos of people getting mad at those that look healthy for parking in a handicap space, not knowing that the person parking there actually does have a medical condition that makes it difficult for them to walk great lengths. Mental health is similar. People can not always see the condition so it can be difficult for those that have never experienced it to empathize. This is a sad commentary about our current society, but I have hope we are moving in the right direction to support those that need and benefit from an openness of acceptance.

In your experience, what should a) individuals b) society, and c) the government do to better support people suffering from mental illness?

In my experience support first starts with compassion. For the individual who would like to support someone in their family that might be struggling with a mental health condition the first advice I would give is make space. If that person who is struggling wants to talk, let them talk. Just listen. Do not try to interject your own opinion, or your own experience, and make sure not to interrupt. Just make space and allow that space to be filled right with compassion.

Society is a bit different when it comes to the question of how to support those suffering from a mental illness. The lack of attempted understanding and lack of respect we are experiencing in our modern world right now is highly concerning. We have lost the togetherness that we as a society experienced after 911. There is a lot of work to be done around understanding that every person you cross paths with will be different in one way or another, and when we learn to come from a place of love and acceptance, we all grow richer in our knowledge about people, about the world, and about ourselves.

What are your 5 strategies you use to promote your own well-being and mental wellness? Can you please give a story or example for each?

The five strategies I personally use to promote my own well-being and mental wellness include the following:

1. Self-care. Making time for self-care is so important, and I know this is a common thing that is encouraged today, but really people may not know HOW to do this. Self-care for me is picking 15 minutes during most weekdays to meditate after work, before my children come home. I love to do this on what I call a "poky mat." This is an acupuncture mat that you lay on, uncomfortable at first, but really enjoyable once you get used to the practice. I also make time with my friends as important as time with my family.
2. The second strategy I use is to make sure my body is well taken care of. For me, this includes trying to get an adequate amount of sleep every night, eating healthy (for the most part), and moving my body. When my body feels taken care of, I overall feel stronger.
3. Thirdly, I am always learning. Just like I want to take care of my body, I want to keep taking care of and expanding my brain. I will never be satisfied with the amount of knowledge I know. Knowledge can come in the form of reading a book, watching a documentary, or even through an experience. I recently got back from Mexico and there I took a day to tour Chichen Itza. The experience of walking amongst the Mayan ruins and learning about some of their routines in their daily life opens my eyes. Experience can be the greatest teacher. Learning about other cultures deepens my knowledge and acceptance for others and I really feel recharged after taking time to consider other peoples lives.
4. Taking care of my own mental health, for me, also involves making responsible decisions. What I mean by this is making sure I feel stable in life and I do this not just playing hard, but working hard as well. Whatever I choose to have in my life, I want to make sure I am doing a good job maintaining that thing as well. For example, when I became a mother. I thought to myself, I am going to fully invest in these children and make my best effort to be the best mom I can be. I take this same approach to being an employer, a homeowner, and even a car owner. If I choose to have something in my life, I want to support that thing to the best of my

ability. This creates a strong foundation and helps me be confident in the choices I make for myself and those around me.

5. Lastly, I would not be where I am today if it was not the friends I have that walk beside me. I have very close friends that know everything about me including my deepest darkest secrets. At this age, I would consider all of my friends quality friends and I am choosy about who I bring into my life. I invest in my friendships and feel they invest in me. Having genuine, quality people walking the path with me has provided more strength than I could have ever found on my own.

What are your favorite books, podcasts, or resources that inspire you to be a mental health champion?

The top two people that inspire me to be a mental health champion is Brene Brown and Mel Robbins. My favorite books would include *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch. *The Gifts of Imperfection*, by Brene Brown. *The 5 second Rule*, by Mel Robbins. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho.

If you could tell other people one thing about why they should consider making a positive impact on our environment or society, like you, what would you tell them?

The best piece of advice I would give to others would be to seek education. Seek education and open doors will start coming your way. If that does not appeal to you, then seek opportunity. Also, get involved in your community because it is there that you will make connections. Whatever you do, keep moving forward and don't give up. Failure is not a sign that you should stop, it is just a detour to your destination.

How can our readers follow you online?

Readers can find more information about the projects I am working on by going to the following links:

Insta: @LightBulbEffect

Insta: @Jennifer_Michelle_Coaching

Website: www.fcsMeridian.com

Website coming soon: www.LightBulbEffect.com

Website coming soon: www.jennifermichellecoaching.com

This was very meaningful, thank you so much. We wish you only continued success on your great work!

About the Interviewer: Inspired by the father of PR, Edward Bernays (who was also Sigmund Freud's nephew), Michelle Tennant Nicholson researches marketing, mental injury, and what it takes for optimal human development. An award-winning writer and publicist, she's seen PR transition from typewriters to Twitter. Michelle co-founded WasabiPublicity.com