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Interview

Cheryl Delk-Le Good
Executive Director, EnglishUSA

Where are you from?

I'm originally from the Chicago metro area—a suburb on the southwest side. I went to Illinois Wesleyan University for undergrad and earned M.A. in French Language & Teaching and then TESOL at Michigan State University. My school mascot journey includes being a Viking, an Argonaut, a Titan, and a Spartan! I love Michigan and lived there after grad school for my first full-time ESL position at Western Michigan University before moving to Atlanta in 2000.

What do you like to do in your free time? Anything new during COVID?

I work hard and play hard! My husband and I golf, and we take advantage of the weather in Atlanta to play throughout the year. We've been married for 10 years, and when we first met, I was so relieved that he was willing to give it a try because it's such a great way to spend time together. We play with my dad (and mom, until she passed away in 2017) and a big group of friends here and in Alabama. And October 25th this year goes down in my personal golf history—my first hole-in-one! I also took up kayaking a year ago—like golf, it helps expand the peripheral perspective away from a screen into meditative nature.

How would your family describe what you do?

I can do a really good impression of my Chicago-born mother, and I can imagine her saying (and what I'd give to hear her again):

"Cheri [yes, my family calls me Cheri] talks to a lot of people, in person at conferences and on 'the Zoom.' She works closely with a Board that work in programs like she used to; she says they're so dedicated to working hard to help international students learn English in the U.S. She told me that on most days, she doesn't even feel like she's at work because she loves the people and the mission."

What's on your bedside table/Kindle?

I just finished *Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett. And I had the fortune of meeting Rajika Bhandari in person at the AIRC Conference in Miami a few weeks ago and have her *America Calling: A Foreign Student in a Country of Possibility* on my table to finish for the holidays and suggest for the next EnglishUSA Book Club choice!

When did you first hear about EnglishUSA? What attracted you?

I first heard about EnglishUSA (formerly AAIEP) back in the late 1990s when I was working at Western Michigan University. When I relocated to Georgia State University and became director of the intensive English program in 2003, I worked quickly to apply for membership. A few years later, I served on the Board for the first time and in 2012 as President. During those years as director and ESL lecturer, having a peer group to turn to—one that included people from all over the country—was something I never took for granted. I relished every professional moment I had with the Board and other directors. Being hired in 2015 as Executive Director was a dream career that I hadn't imagined possible.

How has serving as Executive Director of EnglishUSA changed you?

What has been most fulfilling both personally and professionally, in addition to non-profit association management best practices, is

getting out of my comfort zone and asking for help when needed and showing by example for others to do the same. The term “vulnerable” has been a bit overused by pop psychologists but it’s the right word and concept, but I believe that the vulnerability that I have embraced in this position to give me the confidence to learn what I need to learn to help EnglishUSA members and the industry.

Where will our profession be in 5 years from now?

The crystal ball question! When I’m asked this question, it’s usually within the context of student enrollments and whether programs will bounce back to previous levels. On a panel I served on with Languages Canada and EnglishUK in November, we all agreed that the word ‘renovation’ is a more accurate vision to describe what we’re all going through right now and likely through the next 5 years for our industry. If we maintain our strong structures and improve the many “upgrades” that we’ve made during the pandemic, continue to commit to high quality standards, prioritize students and their success, and share best practices within our community and beyond, we can enhance the English language study experience in the U.S. We’re not rebuilding from the ground up. Our foundations, established for decades by those who created, formed and fostered this industry, are strong.

Who has been your most important professional mentor?

At both Western Michigan University and Georgia State University, we sought out CEA accreditation for the English language programs. During this time, I met Mary Reeves, who then moved into the Executive Director role at CEA. She has served multiple associations during her career (and continues to do so in retirement). I had the privilege of serving on the CEA Commission prior to starting my staff role with EnglishUSA. Mary is



a role model for fairness, diplomacy, and “continuous improvement.” I learned so many aspects of association management by watching a true leader in action. She continues to inspire me with her gratitude to those who commit to the mission of English language programs and her gratitude for her family and health.

What do you think other people should know about EnglishUSA?

People should know that EnglishUSA is 100% dedicated to serving its members, and even though on paper, the program/institution name is what's listed, the Board is always seeking out ways to better serve the individuals who work so hard every day to teach, create and coordinate programs, plan activities, assist students in being compliant, help them cope with being so far away from home, etc. We do this best when our "members serve members" and share their best practices. We all help each other help students succeed on their professional/personal/academic paths.

What podcasts you'd recommend and why?

·*Make Me Smart* with Kai Ryssdal and Molly Wood because I like to learn how issues with the economy and technology have such an impact on our culture. And they use my favorite quote a couple of times a week: "None of us is as smart as all of us." (I always think of our members and their contributions over the years!)

·*SmartLess* with trio Sean Hayes, Jason Bateman and Will Arnett, who each week surprise the other two with a mystery guest. Just in the past month, they've interviewed Jerry Seinfeld and Jeff Daniels. And a few months ago, Kamala Harris. I love the banter among the three of them and how the guests join in as well.

