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Interview

Amber Crowell Kelleher
Executive Director, TESOL
International Association

What do you like to do in your free time?

Most Saturday and Sunday mornings I “run gently” with a small cohort of friends. We don’t care about our time or distance. Our runs are an excuse to socialize and unpack our weeks. I also love traveling and meeting people around the world. I have been content to hunker down with my family during the pandemic, but my wanderlust is reemerging.

How did you meet your spouse/significant other?

I met my husband on a study abroad program in Sheffield, England. We were both business majors at RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology), but we didn’t meet until we were “across the pond.” Like many people, our study abroad experience was transformative. It was the spark that ignited a lifelong interest in international education.

If you could go back and give your 18-year-old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Take Spanish in college. I took two years of Spanish in high school and switched to German during college and grad school. I enjoyed learning German, but in hindsight, I wish I had continued learning Spanish. Instead of being strong in one additional language, I am mediocre in two!

What did you want to be when you were a child?

An author or a doctor. I don’t think there are “many (any?) people who start out thinking, “I want to pursue a career in association management,” but I’m grateful that I discovered this path. It has been a terrific way for me to put my Thunderbird MBA skills to work.

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

I have known about TESOL (and known members of TESOL) since early in my career. My first couple of jobs were in international education (American Institute for Foreign Study and Linden Tours). Other career opportunities took me down a different path for a while, but I am thrilled to be back serving professionals whom I truly admire and respect.

What’s one thing working with TESOL that you didn’t expect?

I have been so impressed with the collaboration and partnerships that happen in this profession. I am a collaborator to the core, and it is invigorating to see the mutual support and true willingness to work together to the benefit of our students and teachers.

What’s one lesson that you have learned in your career that you think everyone should know?

People support what they help to create. It’s a simple concept, but it’s a game-changer. It is a lesson I use every day.

What was your COVID hobby that you still do now?

Walking. I walked a couple of miles nearly every morning during the pandemic, and I still do. There is a lot of noise and energy in my house (!!), and the introvert in me thrives on that alone time to recharge and start my day.

