Who is this “Joseph Kern” guy?

Until about a month ago, I was teaching high school Chemistry, Physics, and Engineering in Hiawatha, KS (way up in the squiggly corner of the state). My wife (an Agriculture teacher) and I were there for seven years. In that time we gained two boys. Russell is three and Jonas is four and a half.

We both graduated in 2005 from Kansas State University. My major was in Secondary Education, with a minor in Biology. After I began teaching, I started work on a Master’s degree in Instructional Design and Technology from ESU. I wrapped that up in 2009, and I’m really pleased that I’ll be able to work with the IDT staff on campus (if nothing else, for support and ideas).

One major reason for what is turning out to be really big move (as measured by differences in job responsibilities and the number of boxes still piled up throughout our house) is that in Hiawatha we were about four hours away from our families, which made trips home for holidays difficult and quick weekend visits almost impossible. Especially when two little boys can stay quiet in a car for only three of those hours.

I am originally from Chase, KS (which I always have to follow up with, “No, not Chase County. It’s in Rice County... Halfway between Great Bend and McPherson.”) Mandy, my wife, is from McPherson.

We have a great new house in the country south of Olpe, and Mandy is working on her new career as a Chicken, Bee, Tomato, and Child Farmer. We’re both very happy to be here on this leg of our adventure, and I am very exited about my new job here at ESU.

What is his job?

Don’t feel bad if you have no idea. Or maybe about a dozen ideas. I’ve had a couple of weeks of meetings and discussions that have been slightly akin to nailing a chunk of Jell-O to the wall.

The simple answer is that I will be helping faculty develop teaching strategies that use online technology to improve student experiences and performance. My main focus will be helping individual instructors who are less familiar with the technology and would like a lot of guidance, but I will also be helping more techno-savvy instructors who just want to experiment with something new.

And using online technology isn’t limited to the distance courses. I will be helping traditional, on-campus instructors who want to develop more of a blended class that increases student engagement in new and richer ways.

I’m also interested in researching the effects of the strategies and tools that instructors implement. I love numbers and spreadsheets and fancy graphs and knowing whether making a change in a course is actually worth the effort, so that we can make sure the best strategies are being used.
Maybe this is just a problem in K-12 education, but I doubt it… You work exceptionally hard on a spectacular piece of educational resource material that is available for your students. If they use it, they can’t help but be successful. But many don’t, so they perform worse than they should. And your effort goes down the tubes.

“Nudge” isn’t a book written specifically for educators, but it could be billed that way. If you understand the picture at the left, you know what a nudge is. It’s all about setting up procedures in a way that makes it very hard to not do the right thing.

The book explains how to incorporate strategies like Default Settings, Bundling Decisions, Losing Privileges vs. Gaining Rewards, and taking advantage of Social Influence, so that you can get students to make the right decisions without the feeling of a mandate from a mean instructor. It’s how to give them an offer they can’t refuse, and make them thank you for it.

This book will really help guide you as you prepare your course procedures and syllabus for the coming semester.

(If you would prefer the abridged version, there is a spectacular overview of the main points and how you can use them on my shiny new Instructional Design Website @

http://www.emporia.edu/distance/id/