

## Personal Journeys / Encore Careers

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- Arne Croce - September 2010

### *My Encore Journey*

#### **From City Manager to Management Consultant Via Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania**

I remember meeting a school superintendent who had been in the position so long he hated kids. Although I did not have similar feelings about citizens, after 30+ years in city government, including 24 as a City Manager, I knew I wanted to leave before I got close to that point. I wanted to leave with enough productive years remaining to have a second career. It had always been my desire to define myself as something other than a former city manager.

I announced I was leaving my position as City Manager in San Mateo California in April of 2008 and was gone by the end of June. Having watched organizations struggle through the long lame-duck periods of managers who gave six-months to a year's notice, I concluded brevity is best. Besides, I wasn't retiring; I was leaving a job and career to begin another, as yet unstated, second career. Forget about it! There was no escaping the R word. In and out of the organization people congratulated me on my "retirement", asked me what I was going to do in my "retirement" and telling me how they were looking forward to my "retirement" event. Give in to the fact that if you are over 50 and have been in your position for a long time, in the eyes of others, you are retiring!

Prior to leaving I had, unsuccessfully, put a great deal of energy into a career transition. It was humbling and frustrating. My interest had been in doing international development work. My wife and I applied to the Peace Corps as volunteers. Near the end of a long process we were informed that because of a medical condition (mine, not my wife's) our opportunities were restricted. This, along with the difficulty of finding compatible positions for two people in a remote locale, meant we would probably be waiting quite awhile for a posting. I shifted my focus to employed work for international organizations. These positions are usually in larger towns and cities and the medical condition was not a problem. Many applications later, it became apparent this would be a difficult transition. Without the magic reference to USAID experience in my resume, I was summarily screened out for most positions. Although I had good interviews for some positions, appointment was hampered by the need for USAID to approve all hires; again the lack of relevant experience.

In retrospect, the rejection turned out to be a good thing. My wife and I decided to feed our wanderlust by leasing our house out for a year, buying one-way tickets to some place and hitting the road! It was a wonderful year. By the time we returned to our home we had been in 22 countries, taken 40 flights, slept in 125 beds and consumed uncountable bottles of beer and wine. One of our more memorable experiences was living with a family in Moshe, Tanzania and volunteering in a non-profit indigenous tree nursery. We were fascinated by Petra, Jordan and delighted with our time in Turkey. If we were thirty years younger, we thought we would surely immigrate to New Zealand. If someone had told me forty years ago I would visit

Vietnam as a tourist I would have thought they were smoking some strange stuff (which was quite possible forty years ago!).

Although the places we went, things we did and people we met were wonderful and memorable, perhaps the most incredible part of our journey was having no responsibilities or expectations of us for a year. Think about that as you go through your highly structured, stress-filled days!

Part of our trip was to figure out what we wanted to do when we grew up. I was surprised to realize I still had a passion for local government. While I had hoped to put my expertise to use in the service of developing countries, as the months passed from 2008 to 2009, it became apparent that I could make a contribution to local government in the US. I contacted Jerry Newfarmer at Management Partners, and over lunch accepted a position with the firm. No background checks, no questioning of credentials or doubt about qualifications.

For the past year I have worked on a variety of consulting assignments. Not surprisingly, budget reductions strategies are in high demand as are reorganization studies and integrating services between multiple jurisdictions. It is fascinating to get exposed to so many government organizations. There is a broad range of practice among city managers! I have not let go of the international interest. This past July, through ICMA, I worked in Iraq on a local government capacity building program. Hopefully there will be other opportunities for similar assignments. The flexibility of consulting allows me to work these in.

I am not big on giving advice, but am more than happy to talk with you about my transition and experiences. There is life after city management, and it is good!

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