

Personal Journeys / Encore Careers

- **Mike Garvey - May 2010**

*"A great decision: From chief executive to part-timer"
A Second Career / Encore Career Manager's Story*

I think my story is similar to those of many senior managers in local government. For years I worked long hours for reasonable compensation, but really was driven by the desire to improve my community's quality of life. I worked hard and worried about my city, but didn't think much about my personal needs. My family did well, thanks largely to my remarkable spouse, and the pension and deferred comp programs meant money probably would not be a problem after retirement. But I never gave much thought to what I would do when my career was over. Then I got sick.

It was pretty serious--chemotherapy and radiation--but I was blessed with a full recovery. And I was blessed with a Council and department heads who gave me wonderful support. During the months of treatment I began keeping a journal, as people had told me I should during times of great change. For the first time in years I tried to think of myself, and I realized that I no longer wanted to be a city manager. I began to think about what I did want to do, as I was not done working and still had financial commitments.

Again the challenge was to think about myself, something I had not done very often. But, after several mis-starts I developed a list of what I loved about city management and what I could do without. The details differ for each of us, but I found that about 40% of the job no longer appealed to me. I then resolved to make a living working at the 60%. I had no idea how to do that but I took a few steps:

- In my letter to the Council I did not use the word "retirement." I did file for my PERS retirement but figured that was my personal business. I used my letter to announce that I wanted to keep working, and attempted to define the work I was interested in doing.
- I talked with other managers about what I wanted to do. To be honest, I did not have the vocabulary to describe what I wanted. Soon, however, a local manager had a difficult problem and asked if I would be interested in working on it. I was, and my "encore career" was underway.
- After I started the first contract other managers became aware I was interested in special assignments and I began to get a few offers. In the four years I have been doing this I have had only one week where I wondered where the next contract would come from, and I usually have two or three at any one time.

My advice to those who are thinking about leaving city management, whether to retire or to change careers, is to start by studying yourself, your feelings, and your aspirations. Only once you understand yourself will you be able to build a rewarding new life phase.

There are complications: how to market yourself; how to adjust to going from the chief executive to a part-time, special project person; how to adjust to your changed role at home; how to remain a contributing member of society; and, maybe most of all, how you fit into this new life.

So, though each of us has a path that is unique, I offer a few tips:

- 1) Take a little time as the event draws near to decompress. Sometimes we feel a need to jump into the new phase, but we are better served if we take a little time to relax and ease into the changes that are coming.
- 2) Keep a journal. It was invaluable in helping me to understand how I was feeling. One good idea is to write fast, disregarding penmanship and spelling, and capture the stream of your consciousness.
- 3) Develop an inventory as part of your self-evaluation of what energizes you and make those activities and experiences a part of your life. This next life phase should allow us more satisfying activities than the hard work of prior decades.
- 4) Talk to your family, friends and colleagues to look for opportunities for work or volunteer activities, not to mention hobbies and other leisure activities. This is a new experience for all of us and you will have to find your own way. Talk to others; you will need all the insight and connections you can get.
- 5) Experiment before you accept commitments. If you are like me, you haven't said "No" to a request in decades. Don't be afraid to do so now. This will be a great time of our life and we shouldn't compromise it by accepting obligations that do not satisfy us.

The public service has given us some wonderful gifts, and among them are financial freedom and the opportunity to do what we want in our next phase. Our years of putting others first make this transition difficult, but it is well worth the trouble.

Good luck on your journey.
