

## Personal Journeys / Encore Careers

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- **Ed Schilling – July 2010**

### *Find Your Passion, and Pursue It*

After a lifetime of work, I strongly believe that retirement should provide the opportunity for retiring city managers to develop and pursue their passion or passions other than work. And it's important to realize that such pursuit takes preparation and some effort.

I approached my retirement in the same way that I always approached my work; I wanted to have a lot of options. Early in my management career I lost my first city management job after three years. At that time I was fortunate to find another professional opportunity in the same geographic area, but I learned first hand the precarious nature of city manager employment. That experience created within me the imperative of developing the skills, experience and networks to give myself multiple work possibilities, and the importance of remaining open to different work opportunities when they were presented to me. As it turned out, though I was fortunate to remain connected to the California city management community, I never again managed a city as its chief executive. I retired in 2004 from the position of Assistant City Manager for the City of San Leandro, California.

At 58, I was excited to begin my retirement adventure, and while I had developed a number of retirement activity options, I wasn't sure which of those activities would become my true retirement passion. Six years into the process, I can report that the process of finding that passion has been an exciting experience, and one I can recommend enthusiastically to anyone considering that step.

### *Most Managers Are Well-Fixed Financially*

Of course, the first requirement for any retiree is to have a financial plan that works. City managers are fortunate to have a combination of retirement resources, including a defined benefit pension on which to build that plan.

Although my career path was unconventional, including 13 years of mid-career employment with a municipal bond firm, my retirement resources at age 58 were comparable to most city managers who earned pensions based on 25 or more years of government work. In combination with the prospects of Social Security for both my wife and myself, deferred compensation and other savings, we had sufficient financial resources to sustain our standard of living including significant travel. We took one action in my third year of retirement that made both financial management and travel easier--we sold our family home and moved into a comfortable condominium overlooking Oakland's beautiful Rose Garden. Now taking a trip is a matter of closing and locking the door behind us. The Rose Garden is maintained with nothing more than my assistance as an Oakland taxpayer.

### *Make Certain You Have Developed Interests Beyond Work*

The successful pursuit of a retirement passion is unlikely to be successful if the retiree has no history with the activity before retiring. While it is theoretically possible to develop a passionate interest in a completely new activity, the odds against it are long.

Over my working years I developed a number of leisure time interests including golf, tennis, reading, boating, fishing, attending professional and collegiate sporting events, travel and music. As it turned out, my retirement experience helped me realize that among all of those interests I had just one passion, and I now organize my days around making music of various kinds.

I was always interested in music performance, participating in choral music from high school through college, but those opportunities were severely limited once my municipal jobs required attendance at night meetings. During my working years I tried on several occasions to reengage my musical interests taking piano lessons in my late 30's, and joining a church choir and beginning guitar lessons in my late 40's. The guitar lessons led to annual participation in a music camp for adults and introduction to a whole range of instruments including mandolin, banjo, ukulele, harmonica and tin whistle. I found that I couldn't get enough music, or enough different styles of music, to satisfy my renascent interest. The worlds of folk, folk-rock, jazz, old time, bluegrass, choro, tin pan alley and various classical styles all excited me and led me to want more and more. So by the time I was ready for retirement, I knew I would be doing music in some form, but I wasn't sure that would be enough to keep me occupied.

After retirement, I took golf lessons and for three years played once or twice a week reducing both my handicap and my waistline as a result of the regular exercise. However, after a taking a significant break from golf caused by an accident my wife suffered and by my growing interest in several different music-related pursuits, I returned to my pre-retirement pattern of playing golf just two or three times a year. I entered retirement looking forward to more time for boating, but I learned quickly that boating (like most activities) is more fun with a companion. I lacked that companion, and ultimately sold my boat. Similarly, I have enjoyed fishing from time to time, including fly-fishing for trout (some success) and Washington steelhead (nada!). I continue fishing, but it's an activity that works best with a friend or two. Most of my outings now are with my son who lives in Washington state.

I was fortunate to be engaged for two consulting jobs during my first three years of retirement, and was appreciative of the opportunity both times. However, I also came to resent the time that I had to take away from my music, so I have not sought additional work. Similarly, I always imagined that in retirement I would teach graduate courses in public administration at one of the several universities in Northern California. While I was working I taught at two State universities and two private universities, and found that experience to be stimulating. In retirement I relish the freedom to do things on my schedule, and a commitment to teach a class a week, or even to prepare for and teach an intensive semester schedule is more of a commitment than I am willing to take on. It's too much like work, and not something most of us would do for the limited money that it pays!

The one other activity which I started a couple of years before retirement was walking for exercise, generally between three and four miles a day. That activity, greatly facilitated by having a regular walking partner, has continued to be a critical part of my daily schedule. Many managers have the discipline to build regular exercise into their working schedule. While I did that intermittently, I was never as consistent as I needed to be, so the freedom of a retirement schedule has made it easier to take care of myself.

### ***Find and Pursue that Passion***

The real advantage of retirement is the opportunity to reinvent yourself and do the things you have always wanted to do, but couldn't make or find the time for. For me, that passionate pursuit turned out to be making music.

Immediately after retiring I started singing with a community chorale that performed three times a year. I enjoyed the singing, the friends I made, and soon, the opportunity to contribute my financial and administrative skills to the writing and processing of grant applications in support of the chorale's youth education program. This led to a seat on the Board of Directors and overall responsibility for fund raising for a non-profit organization with an annual budget of over \$400,000. Chorale adventures included two European tours (Baltic states and Eastern Europe) and over 40 performances, but differences of approach to financial management priorities and my growing interest in mandolin performance led to a decision to leave the chorale after four years.

### ***Every Night is Friday Night***

Today my musical activities include playing octave mandolin with the San Francisco Mandolin Orchestra, serving as its Treasurer, learning to play the harp, and playing for my own entertainment the other instruments mentioned above. I have also continued to attend annual music camps, have taken lessons and workshops on other instruments, and have even developed my own ukulele class. Along with the frequent travel that my wife and I enjoy (you've really got to see Turkey), bi-monthly dinners with our neighborhood gourmet club, outings of various sorts with friends and my volunteer involvement with the ICMA Range Rider program, my retirement life is full and satisfying.

In describing retirement, a good friend put it this way: "Every night is Friday night, and every day is Saturday." That's the way retirement feels to me. Every day is a new adventure, and a chance to either do something I haven't done before or to spend more time doing the things I love to do.

*Ed Schilling was City Manager of Campbell, California, Finance Director of San Jose, Assistant City Manager in Livermore and San Leandro and Administrative Assistant in Concord. He was a Managing Director for the San Francisco headquartered municipal investment bank Stone and Youngberg. Ed was on the Board of Directors of the California City Management Foundation and is a Range Rider.*

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