

# Cal-ICMA

## California Consortium

### A State Affiliate of ICMA

#### Attention Partners of Retiring Managers!

#### Tips to Navigate the Transition Together

As one partner of a retiring manager reported: “No matter how much people love each other, the change of suddenly having your partner around full-time can create strains.”

How do partners and children deal with the transition when the City/County Manager (“the retiree”) in the family retires from a full-time local government career and moves into his or her next life phase? From the perspectives of the partner and children, what are the positive opportunities and not-so-positive struggles? For those who have experienced this transition, what tips do partners and children have for other families who may now face similar adjustments?

These were some of the questions that the Cal-ICMA Encore Committee tried to address. To gain insights for this article, the Committee requested comments from seven partners and several teenage or young adult children. The key take-away from all the informants was that the transition was a big adjustment, not only for the retiree but also for the partner and any children still in the household.

We are interested in hearing from other partners willing to share their insights and experiences and urge you to write any of the authors at the email addresses listed on the last page. We anticipate revised editions of this paper as we hear more.

## Opportunities—The Perspective of Partners

Partners described a diverse set of new opportunities and benefits as retirees moved into their next life phase.

### **Less stress**

As the manager in the family retired from their full-time jobs, partners perceived that the retiree was less stressed out. They found that the retiree had more time for family, children (often adult children), and friends. They slept more, learned how to take a deep breath, were more relaxed, and consumed less alcohol.

### **Passionate pursuits**

While the retiree had more time to travel with their partner, do home projects, and pursue their hobbies, the big advantage to their encore was that the retiree could engage in a passionate pursuit. This encore opportunity could be art or ceramics or photography or cooking; car restoration; or starting a new business. These creative endeavors were energizing and engaged the retiree.

### **Travel**

Partners appreciated the opportunity to now travel with the retiree. Several partners described planning trips or quick get-aways in anticipation of retirement, so they had something to look forward to once the manager left his or her position.

Because the retiree often had more leisure time than the partner who was still working, the retiree often planned the vacation.

### **Caring for grandkids and elderly parents**

Several partners said that retirees were finding great joy in caring for grand children or grand nieces or nephews or a dear household pet. A key developmental need at mid-life is what the psychologist Erik Erickson calls “generativity” (the opportunity to care for, support, and guide the next generation). The opportunity to occasionally or regularly care for others seems to fill this need and bring joy to many retirees.

While often challenging, some retirees offered care for an elderly parent as part of their new portfolio of experiences and opportunities.

### **Focusing on health**

Many retirees began to focus on healthier lifestyles. They improved their diet, joined a fitness center, exercised more, and took walks. Retirement also allowed the retiree to take care of any ailments or health problems, or to support a partner who was experiencing health issues.

### **One of the Big Opportunities--Reconnecting as a Couple**

If one is in a marriage or other long-term relationship, it is common to get distracted. By mid-life, many of us become "lop-sided." Kids and career distract us, and we may not adequately nurture our love relationships.

Consequently, couples may need to consider how to reconnect. There is now more opportunity to spend time together and share activities which both may enjoy (cooking a meal together, taking a walk, travelling, going to the movies or working out). When taking a walk or sharing a leisurely meal, there is the time (and hopefully less stress) to talk about things that matter to them as well as comfortably share the space together.

### **Opportunities—The Perspective of Adult Children**

Some of the retirees still had teenagers or adult children living at home. The children also experienced a number of positives:

- The children saw that their retiring parent was home more, could set their own hours, and had more time to do things that the parent enjoyed. One teen concluded that her dad now "could get more out of life" than just work, work, work.
- The children also perceived and appreciated that the retiree was less stressed. The retired parent was now more "present," listened more, and was generally more supportive.

- The retiree had more time to help the children at home with homework or any other challenges; or to help the adult children relocate and re-establish themselves in another locale even out of state.
- The retiree also had more time to go to their children's sporting or cheer-leading or music events, or in one case work with his son on restoring a car.
- For those retirees who found new but different work (e.g., consulting, training), the children saw them working harder and more intensely when they focused on work. One said that her father was not as available as she had hoped. In fact, she advised other children of retirees to not think that their retiring parents are done with their profession once they retire. Local government management is part of who they are with lots of attachments ... Some retirees will find that "they cannot just walk away."

### Challenges and Struggles—The Perspectives of Partners

One of the not-so-positive challenges was that the partner had to adjust to the retiree being home most of the time. Even though he or she may be working on their own projects or passionate pursuits, the retiree often got more involved in the partner's routine and offered unwanted advice in terms of household activities (previously more the domain of the partner). Some of the partners fondly remembered their alone time before the retiree was home all-day.

One partner reported that she and her husband had to learn how to spend more time together, especially on days when nothing was planned.

While the teenage or young adult children were grateful for the new attention and support from the retiree, they too did not want or appreciate the greater involvement in their choices and advice on all matters.

### Ten Tips for Enhancing the Transition for the Retiring Manager

Partners offered these tips for others about to get through this transition with the newly-retired manager:

## 1. Help your partner take a deep breath and reflect

Sometimes it took the retiree a good six months to learn how to take a deep breath. All the partners indicated that the retiree needed time to decompress. It is perfectly reasonable for the retiree and his or her partner to let things unfold and not have everything planned out in advance of the transition.

To help the retiree reflect about encore opportunities, partners might encourage conversations based on questions such as:

- ✓ "What encore activities (paid or unpaid) would engage and energize you?"
- ✓ "How could you experiment with these activities or pursuits? How could you practice a little coaching, teaching, consulting, or sailing?"
- ✓ "How can I be of support to you as you explore or pursue these pursuits?"
- ✓ "If you desire to maintain some connection with the profession, how would you explore these opportunities? Are there colleagues or ICMA Senior Advisors who could help you think about opportunities to stay in touch?"
- ✓ "With whom do you want to reconnect (parents, older adult children, other family, friends)?"

A fulfilling encore journey is created over time with many twists and turns. Partners may wish to have a number of conversations with their retiree before and during the transition about the opportunities, challenges and adjustments posed by the transition.

## 2. Encourage a creative pursuit

Because we get distracted by kids and careers in our adult years, we oftentimes jettison some creative pursuit or activity that we truly enjoy. It could be painting, writing, cooking, gardening, playing the guitar, taking photos, or any number of other interests. Suggest that the retiree experiment with that creative activity, perhaps by taking a class or two, and rekindle that creative spark.

### **3. Don't retire at same time**

If you are still working, maintain your job. Consider having 2-4 years between the two retirements. Once the first of you retires and figures out his or her encore, it will then be time for the other to do the same.

### **4. Identify common activities**

With your retiree, think about some activities which may be mutually enjoyable. One of our contributors to this article suggested, "if only one of you plays tennis or cooks, get lessons for the other (if there is any interest). As one partner stated, "joint routines and activities keep you connected."

While couples want to allow for spontaneity, it is a good idea to plan some joint activities. Let each other know of your schedules so you can plan a meal or coffee or walk together. Also, let your partner know when you are *not* available.

### **5. Respect and honor differences**

The retiree and you will have individual interests. Allow for these different interests and activities. Your retiree may wish to play golf every Sunday morning with friends. You may wish to use this time for your own interests.

One of the partners interviewed provided the following advice: "If one of you adores having the TV on for amusement or education and the other loves quiet time, music or meditation—buy some quality Bluetooth earphones. It could save the marriage!"

### **6. Be vigilant about each other's individual routines and "territories"**

Check-in on a regular basis about respecting the different routines and projects that individually engage you. If you enjoy shopping alone for dinner, or preparing the meal alone, certainly let your partner know.

If one of you is in charge of a home improvement project, the other may share his or her thoughts, preferences or suggestions about the project. However, it was

suggested by one of our informants that the partner taking the lead on the project should stay in charge of the endeavor.

#### **7. Encourage your partner to reach out to colleagues and stay connected**

One's professional identity as a local government manager is typically very strong. A retiree may feel a bit lost in this transition to their next life phase. If he or she feels interested, you might suggest that they reach out to former colleagues for coffee or lunch or golf or other activities. This will help the retiree stay connected. Because the retiree may have more time, lightly suggest that he or she take the initiative in reaching out and scheduling some activities with colleagues.

Since a focus on relationships is one of the potentially positive benefits of a fulfilling encore, you may wish to encourage the retiree to schedule get-togethers with other couples whose company you both enjoy.

Because of one's strong identity with the profession, the retiree may desire to continue some kind of work which is related to local government management—as an interim manager, consultant or university professor. As one partner reported to us:

*"A saving grace of his early retirement—from my perspective—was the occasional interim City Manager or General Manager position that came up. The interim jobs kept him busy, utilized his skills in helping out an agency or city in trouble, and brought in extra money for vacations and home improvements. A side benefit was that we had more experiences to share to enliven our conversations."*

#### **8. Help the retiring manager consider opportunities to serve**

Service is typically part of the retiree's DNA. Integrating some service into one's portfolio of encore activities helps any retiree stay engaged. The service could take many forms: coaching emerging leaders (through the ICMA Coaching Program or the ICMA Emerging Leaders Development Program), volunteering at your child's or grandchild's school or at your church, or serving on a non-profit board.

## 9. Suggest that your partner get a peer coach

Encourage your retiree to get an informal peer coach or advisor for his or her encore journey. Cal-ICMA has a listing of peer coaches who have already experienced the twists and turns, and the joys and challenges, of the transition and are willing to offer feedback in respect to the encore plans of your partner. ICMA Senior Advisors or State Liaisons are also great advisors.

## 10. Get healthy

Support your retiree in any efforts to get healthier, mentally and physically. Going on walks or jogs together, preparing healthier meals, and gifting a gym membership are all ways to encourage a healthier lifestyle.

As one of the contributors to this article suggested, “Walks alone or together not only contribute to physical health, but also clear the mind and allow for new ideas to bubble up.”

As insufficient sleep is a hallmark of a career in local government management, you can also encourage your partner to sleep more and to nap. Help your partner notice how good it feels to get adequate sleep at night or take an afternoon siesta.

### **Bonus Tip—Get a buddy**

Through the ICMA Partners Program or through any connections with other partners over the years, reach out and reconnect with someone in your similar position. Another partner who is going through the transition (or has recently gone through this phase with a retiree) can serve as a wonderful sounding board.

### **Last Thoughts**

It may be difficult for the retiring manager (and thus for you) when your partner must retreat from his or her “I’m in charge” role. Managers need help in making the transition. They may be emotionally spent and ready to retire, but still have lots of energy that needs to be directed into positive outlets. Any such pursuits can be paid or unpaid, professional or personal. The key is for the activity to be engaging for the retiree and therefore energizing.



This transition into one's next life phase is an opportunity to reinvent one's relationship with each other, adult children, grandchildren, parents, and/or dear friends. If one takes the relationships for granted, and don't reinvest in them, one may lose the opportunity to create a fulfilling encore.

One's transition into a next chapter in life is a journey. We may know the general direction but not the precise destination. As one contributor to this article suggested:

*"Encourage your partner to be OK with **discovering** and **exploring** (not knowing!). City and County Managers are required to KNOW—the goal, the analysis, the options, the plan. Encourage them to enjoy the opposite—not knowing exactly what they may want to do. . . and the spaciousness that comes with it."*

Finally, as one partner advised, "breathe in, breathe out, and move on together." Share in your partner's encore and enjoy the adventure.

**For more information about encore resources:**

To support Managers who are thinking of their next life phase and those who have already begun their encore journey, the Cal-ICMA Encore Manager Committee has developed a number of support programs. These efforts include:

- A webpage on the Cal-ICMA website (<https://icma.org/encore-manager-senior-managers-initiative>) provides information and access to all our services and resources. The webpage has links to all of the following:
  - One-to-one peer coaching match-ups. Those wishing peer coaching can review the profiles of encore managers who can provide advice for those wanting to explore consulting, teaching, interim management, non-profit service or other opportunities.
  - "My Journey" vignettes including tips and lessons learned are also posted on the webpage.
  - A resource list includes books, articles, and other websites.

In addition, the Encore Committee has produced five "how-to" papers to assist managers wishing to pursue different paths:

- "So, You Want to Be an Interim Manager?"
- "So, You Want to Be a Consultant?"
- "So, You Want to Be a University Professor?"
- "So, You Want to Be a Non-Profit Executive?"
- "When Do I Know It's Time To Leave?"

If you have suggestions or other comments to add to his paper, or for more information, please contact any of these three coordinators:

- Kevin O'Rourke at [Kevin@kolgs.com](mailto:Kevin@kolgs.com)
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