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encore! encore!

CREATING A FULFILLING NEXT LIFE PHASE

TAKEAWAYS

› Many senior managers approaching retirement feel uncertain about their next life phase and how to create a fulfilling "encore."

› Many encore managers integrated into their new life of purpose a focus on relationships, creativity, and community in addition to leisure and service.

› Those who have successfully transitioned into their next life phase suggest a number of strategies.

› Cal-ICMA offers support services for managers who are transitioning and who desire to maintain a connection with their profession as part of their encore journey.

A whole generation of baby-boomer managers is retiring from local government management. Consequently, the profession is forced to take concrete steps in confronting the leadership crisis and brain drain resulting from the retirement wave. We, as a profession, have not, however, adequately addressed how we can support senior managers in making the transition into their next life phase and creating a life of purpose.

Recognizing this need, Cal-ICMA, the California affiliate of ICMA, established the senior manager/encore manager initiative and chartered a committee whose purposes are to support senior managers as they transition into their next life phase, to help managers stay connected to the profession as they may desire, and to provide resources so that managers can explore "encore" opportunities.

To collect data and plan a meaningful support program, the committee conducted six focus groups around the state, involving 85 active and encore managers, and then followed up with 10 in-depth interviews of managers who had already crafted a life-after-management experience.

Focus Groups

From the focus groups, there was evidence that by the end of their full-time careers, many managers had entered the doldrums.[1] They had the "been there, done that blues," and some of their passion and energy for the work had diminished.

While most focus group participants felt fairly comfortable about the financial aspects of retiring from full-time local government careers, they were uncertain about their nonfinancial futures. During group discussions, here is what participants said they feared:

1. Uncertainty, the "unknown."
2. Personal isolation.
3. Not being able to maintain connections with colleagues.
4. Losing a sense of contribution.
5. Working too hard in their next life phase and, therefore, not being able to explore other aspects of their personal selves.
6. Loss of organizational support.
7. Boredom.
8. Not having a plan.
9. Lack of competence in other areas they might pursue.
10. Loss of authority and influence.
11. Lack of intellectual stimulation and loss of a sense of personal identity after years of having been on the forefront of community issues.
12. Problems such as marital and family issues, alcoholism, and depression if they retire "badly."
13. Family disruption caused by their retirement.
14. Inability to separate their personal self from their identity as a city or county manager.
15. Problems coping with physical, mental, and emotional stress as they transition.

Participants also discussed their hopes and dreams, voicing these thoughts:

1. I hope to stay engaged and relevant yet have time to pursue other interests.
2. My hope is to craft a vibrant and fulfilling next life phase, including good work, service, love, family, and leisure.
3. I want to explore my "undiscovered self."
4. I desire to work on such new projects as fixing up my house.
5. I want to give back to the profession by coaching other local government managers and assistants.
6. I would like a part-time gig.
7. I think I'd like to teach.
8. I want to find something completely new in my life, which could be a new career, sports, travel, and other leisure activities.
9. I hope for more control over my life.
10. I want to learn new things.
11. I'd like to explore new opportunities, along with new professional and personal contacts.
12. I hope to enjoy my new life as much as I have enjoyed my life as a manager.

Interviews

To arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the encore phenomenon, one of the committee members interviewed eight former city managers and two retired department heads. All the managers needed at least six months to decompress from the intensity of their former positions.

The interviews generated a number of themes, some expected and some not so anticipated. As expected, all the managers desired more leisure time; some wanted to travel or become more physically fit; and most wanted to stay connected to the profession in some fashion, yet with less intensity. The other themes were less anticipated.

Relationships. Universally, all the respondents felt that during their working lives they had neglected some relationships. They wanted to refocus on their connections with partners, parents, children, and friends.

Creativity. The interviewees all wanted to reconnect with their creative selves. At some earlier point in their lives, they had enjoyed playing music, cooking, photography, or gardening, and they all had begun to reengage in these or other creative pursuits.

Community. All those who had made the transition had thought about community. For some, community meant a location. They wanted to move to a community closer to family or to an artist or university community.

For others, community meant a new group of friends. One manager, for example, got heavily involved in cycling and formed significant relationships with those who participated in his cycling club.

Spiritual connections. Some but not all respondents wanted to reconnect with their spiritual selves. For some, spirituality meant more involvement in a religion. In fact, one of the managers became an active deacon in his church. Other managers pursued a greater spirituality, but it was less connected with an established religion.

In other words, most managers who had transitioned into their encores felt they had become "lopsided" during their careers and now were seeking wholeness and a fuller life.

The Encore Challenge

Most managers who are approaching midlife have spent their careers and family lives weaving meaningful lives. To make the transition into their next life phase,

they need to unravel some of that life and reweave a purposeful next life phase.[2]

Given so many choices, the encore challenge is: How do I confidently reweave a life of purpose with the right balance of activities and experiences so that I can become the best version of me?

Five Strategies

To identify effective strategies addressing the encore challenge, the committee commissioned a number of "My Journey" vignettes. Six managers described their encore journeys and provided lessons and tips. The vignettes and other research suggested these five strategies:

To craft a purposeful next life phase, we must view it as a journey.

Have the courage to reflect. As Leider and Shapiro state, "the inward look transforms the outward journey."[2] To promote self-reflection, some managers talk to their partners, closest friends, counselors, or spiritual advisers; write a journal; or even go on a soul-searching retreat. Some of the courageous questions include:

- What is the core of my identity?
- What are my dreams and fears about the next phase?
- In evaluating my whole life at this point, what is my inner voice telling me?
- What is the balance of working, learning, and playing in my life?
- Who will be part of my "community"?
- Is there enough intimacy in my life as I enter my encore?

Pursue one's calling or vocation. A life of purpose revolves around giving away one's "gifts." To identify a calling, you must ask yourself: "What renews me and sustains me and makes me feel the most alive?"

After much introspection, one manager wrote a personal "purpose statement" that allowed her to evaluate opportunities and make choices about her encore. The purpose statement centered on teaching and coaching local government professionals, helping them become better leaders.

Explore other aspects of self. Although one may wish to develop an encore career involving consulting or other paid work or pro bono service, it is important to integrate some nonwork or nonservice elements into the encore journey. Play, adventure, creative pursuits, and intimacy deserve as much attention as work or service. Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung stated that, at midlife, "the undiscovered life yearns to get born."

Create a transition plan and test it out. After some significant self-reflection, it is important to draft a transition plan that incorporates a variety of experiences. Based on the plan, one needs to rehearse some of the desired activities to determine whether they are truly engaging.

If one desires to teach at the university, for example, it is a good idea to do some guest lecturing before leaving the manager job. If one wishes to sail as part of one's next life phase, it is a good idea to take some lessons before buying a boat.

Take some risks. To become one's "best version," you need to take some risks. Local government managers are generally comfortable commanding their local government worlds. Relearning how to play the piano or creating more intimacy with a partner or a grown child may be uncomfortable, and it requires some risk taking.

New Support Services

To support managers who are thinking of their next life phase and those who have already begun their encore journeys, the committee has developed a number of services. The committee also is committed to helping other state and international associations that would like to experiment with similar forms of assistance.

The programs include:

- **A web page on the Cal-ICMA website**[3] provides information and access to services and resources.
- **One-to-one peer coaching matchups** are available on the web page. Those wishing peer coaching can review profiles of encore managers who can provide advice for those wanting to explore consulting, teaching, interim management, nonprofit service, volunteering, and other opportunities and contact them to establish communication.
- **"My Journey" vignettes,** including tips and lessons learned, also are posted on the web page.
- **A resource list** includes books, articles, and other websites.
- **Support network meetings** are offered two or three times a year for senior and encore managers to share experiences and learn from each other.[3]

The Encore Journey

Crafting a purposeful next life phase should be viewed as a journey. We may know the general direction but not the exact destination. Enjoy the adventure! PM

ENDNOTES

1 Frederic M. Hudson, *The Adult Years: Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

2 Richard U. Leider and David A. Shapiro, *Claiming Your Place at the Fire: Living the Second Half of Your Life on Purpose* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004).

3 Access the resources and services of the Cal-ICMA program at www.cal-icma.org and click on Senior Manager/Encore Manager Program.

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