

SENIOR SAGE LEADER INTERVIEW PROFILE OF CHUCK COOVERT

February 21, 2010

You have been identified by friends and colleagues as one of our community's 50 top senior sage leaders. A sage leader is a person who brings *unusual experience, sound judgment, and wisdom* in working to advance the civic well-being of our community. We thank you for participating in our interview process.

- 1. To begin, how many years have you lived in Nevada County, and where in the county do you reside?**

My wife and I live in Alta Sierra Ranches. We have lived in Nevada County for about 28 years, and I am retired but devote much of my time to community service.

- 2. Are you working, semi-retired, or retired? May I ask how old you are?**

I am retired and am 74 years old.

- 3. If you would, please share a bit about your personal history: where you grew-up; where you went to school and college; what organizations you have worked for and the positions you have held.**

I grew up in Paducah Kentucky and went all through school there. I traveled a bit when my dad was transferred during WW II, but we settled after the war and I graduated from Paducah high school. On the day after I graduated I headed for California, where I joined my father who was working in San Francisco. I started College and got my AA degree in Electrical Engineering. After that I started with a small electronic manufacturing company. And also got an AA degree in Electronic Engineering. I worked for a period of time with Beckman Instruments. I then went to work for Ampex Corporation in Redwood City CA for about 11 years.

I got fed up with the situation at Ampex, and the day I resigned I got a call from a headhunter wanting me to interview for a job with the Grass Valley Group. It was a company in the same video equipment manufacturing field as Ampex, and I decided to take the job. My wife and I had vacationed in this area so I was familiar with Grass Valley and Nevada County. I worked for the Grass Valley Group for about 11½ years and became Marketing Manager, then headed up Tactical Marketing for the GVG.

After that I went to work for a friend in the Bay Area who headed a company called Pinnacle Systems. He needed a Marketing leader and I had the experience. I commuted between Grass Valley and the Bay area for about 2½ to 3 years, lived in

a condo during the week and spent the weekends at home. After I left Pinnacle Systems-I had enough of working for other people and companies-I did consulting in Marketing and absolutely loved it. After that stint I got involved in nonprofits and have been at it ever since.

4. Is there a history of community service in your family background? Briefly, how would you describe it?

I guess that community service started with me although my mother was very involved with several community service organizations. I saw some children being abused in dysfunctional families and became interested in helping to prevent children from becoming or being abused by addicts. I became a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and am still one after over 10 years. I soon became involved in a number of other groups that were helping families and children from slipping into alcohol and drug abuse. I just wanted to make a difference one person at a time.” I wanted to break the chain of drug abuse that I saw as I saw as a CASA, so I became involved in CoRR. (Community Recovery Resources, a drug and alcohol recovery company.) I am on CoRR’s board, a member of the board of the Child Abuse Council, a member of Multi Disciplinary Interview Team (MDIT), and also the Sacramento Regional Child Abuse Council, which covers 14 Northern California counties.

5. What do you consider to be the principal strengths and capabilities that have made you an effective civic community leader? Are they rooted in action, in your personal style, in your organizational, political, and personal relationships, or in something else?

I am highly organized. Long experience at Ampex and other businesses have equipped me to understand how to organize people to accomplish goals. I am also good at getting people to focus on the goals they are trying to achieve. My managing philosophy is “There is nothing you can’t achieve if you don’t care who gets the credit.” That’s not an original saying.

In which types of civic organizations on the list are you *currently* involved? Overall, how many total hours a month do you give to these organizations?

I would say mainly social services organizations and nonprofits, with a little involvement with media and government— but those are more incidental. I estimate that I spend 80 plus hours per month with all of my organizational involvements.

6. What is the name of the *one* organization on the list in which you are most involved and committed?... Were you invited to become involved or did you

approach the organization and volunteer your services? Are you paid or unpaid? On average, how many hours a month do you give to this organization?

I spend most time with CoRR, Community Recovery Resources—over 40 hours per month. I have five or six meetings per week. I was invited to join the CoRR Board by its executive director and several key board members. I am unpaid and have been board president for 4 years. I have termed out and now on the Executive Committee.

7. I'd like to learn more about your involvement in this organization by asking four questions:

First, describe the leadership role that you play within the organization.

My leadership role is serving as Past Board President, and my principal task is on organization. I help the board to stay on track and keep focused on unresolved questions or issues. I also keep up-to-date on what is happening within the organization, and I am a resource because I know many people in our community from my business background.

Second, as you think back over your involvement in the organization, what roadblocks have been most challenging?

My most difficult challenge is getting CoRR Board members to be active in reaching out to the community, especially in the area of fund raising. The most fulfilling things I do are working in partnership with the ED and keeping him supported.

Third, what experiences within the organization have given you the *most* meaning and satisfaction?

It is very satisfying to know we probably saved children's lives by some of the touch decisions we have made in certain CASA cases. I personally take on the difficult CASA cases, and in the last four situations we have helped parents to turn around and become responsible for their children. This is very satisfying.

I want to ask you a question about what personal benefits do you get from your civic involvements?

I remember when I retired I got bored after two weeks and needed to be doing something that would help people. I find that the more I get involved in

organizations, the more I learn how to help people. These experiences keep me learning and fulfilled.

- 11. One of the benefits of growing older is that we are increasingly able to reflect on our experiences and learn from them. Have you found any patterns of personal behavior no longer useful in your leadership role? If so, what are these and how have you changed?**

The biggest thing I have learned is not to look over my shoulder and worry about the past mistakes I have made over my lifetime. Learn from them Yes. Second, I have learned patience. At one time in my career I recognize I was not a patient man, but as I have grown older I have gained a lot of patience. I have also learned not be as pushy as I once was. A friend of mine at Grass Valley Group once said to me "Make sure you have plenty of velvet on the wheels of your steam roller." I have been trying to add a little more "velvet" to my steamroller wheels all the time.

- 12. What leadership qualities do you most admire in effective leaders that you have known? Which of these qualities do you believe best describe your leadership?**

My boss at Ampex was a great model. He always encouraged and trusted me and gave me responsibility. The quality I admired most in him and other good bosses is that he did not micro-manage me. I did not like to be micro-managed, therefore I don't micromanage down.

- 13. What, if any, spiritual traditions or practices do you most draw upon in exercising leadership?**

I am not a heavy churchgoer, but I have a strong belief. Organized religions are not very important to me, but believing in people is important. I talk to my maker.

- 15. What is the one mistake you see leaders making more frequently than others?**

Some leaders think their title means they need not be open to others or to listen to them. And they believe their post gives them the right to have the only right answers. Some leaders are not comfortable having smart people reporting to them- they just want people that agree with their opinions.

- 16. What are you doing to continue growing and developing as a leader?**

I am taking courses in calligraphy, CASA classes on child abuse and psychology, and computer classes. I have a passion to want to keep learning. My father

encouraged me to keep learning, and I have followed that advice. I enjoy trying new things, and I have met great people in my learning experiences.

- 17. The three characteristics most often associated with sage leadership are *unusual experience, sound judgment, and wisdom*. What does having wisdom mean to you?**

Wisdom has to do with making mistakes and learning from them. And to understand what you are doing and why. An example is Einstein's notion of bonding agents-what he thought bonding means. I have often thought about that—trying to understand how things fit together. Wisdom is how I transfer what I have learned to existing problems or issues.

- 18. You probably know other individuals who have sage leadership talents and skills but are not currently involved in the civic life of our community. Why do you believe they choose to be uninvolved? What, if anything, might be done to get them engaged?**

Many people I know are already engaged. Some of the retirees that have moved up here from the Bay Area or LA are tired; they just want to relax and play. Others are simply not engaged, and I don't know what will get them involved. Some are work-alcoholics, but they might not be the people we want to have involved because they would drive people nuts. It is important to get the "right" people involved in our civic activities.

- 19. One final question: It is often said that the quality of life in our community is highly attractive and unusual. Do you believe this to be true? (If yes): What are the three or four things about our community that you most value and make you want to continue living here?**

Yes, it's true. We like the mountains, the trees, and the moderate climate-it's a great place to live. The people are nice, friendly-it's a combination of the beautiful hills and the closeness of the community. I know starting over and building all the connections with people I have established would be a lot of work, and I'm not sure I would want to do that. I feel good about all the friends and colleagues we have established in this community.

- 20. Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

No