

## **EMERGING SAGE LEADER INTERVIEW PROFILE OF LORI BURKART FRANK**

**March 9, 2010**

**You have been identified by friends and colleagues as one of our community's 50 top emerging 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.**

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

I've lived in Nevada County almost 16 years. I live right outside of Nevada City.

- 2. May I ask how old you are?**

I turned 53 in September, 2012.

- 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 the Bay Area (San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties) and went to Chico State University. I started off and was very focused on business after college. In Silicon Valley, I was involved in selling capital equipment to duplicate floppy diskettes and, as the industry was growing rapidly when I joined it, I was one of the early employees at a company that grew much bigger, and then later contracted. At that time in the mid eighties my father asked me to come work for him in sales at his firm, a manufacturer's representative for janitorial supplies. The industry seemed remarkably "unsexy" to me, but my dad had a continual growth rate of 10%/year and I was interested in getting the company involved in the restaurant supply business (which he was supportive of). So I joined forces with my father in about 1985. Within 3 years we were one of the leading rep. firms for food service disposable supplies in Northern California. This was exciting and fun for me, but I also burned out. I was just into my 30's, single, and couldn't imagine how I would sustain a personal relationship with the travel and all of the hours I worked. Ultimately, I had reached my goals in terms of making money but was miserable so I realized the "money isn't going to be the answer here."

I sold my portion of the business and fell in love with flying. After seeing my first air show in 1992, a hot air balloon pilot friend invited me to be crew for the first air show in Mexico, which was including hot air balloons. I met a renowned hot air balloon pilot and flight instructor at the air show, fell in love, and soon married him.

I wanted to work in training, and in 1994 got a job as a contractor at NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View in education coordinating a volunteer program to teach children about aviation and space science. I was immersed in aviation and really enjoyed working in the government sector and with volunteers.

In contrast to the private sector, my work in the government sector exposed me to a whole different set of values and motives. Until then the motive to work had been money and power – I thought that would make me happy and most of the people I knew were pretty much driven by the same. Profitability was the way businesses evaluated and communicated about success. So I was a bit disoriented when I came to the government sector because not only were they not profit-driven, they weren't even as accountable as they are now. That made me wonder how government agencies knew if they were successful. I met the most passionate, interesting people of my life. This was a very different world than I'd been exposed to before... people going for multiple graduate degrees simply because they were interested in the subject. Working with volunteers, who clearly also don't work for money, also helped me tap into passion and meaning.

This combination of experience led to my interest in coaching. While at NASA I started training to be a coach. Meanwhile, my husband and I moved to Nevada County and were commuting to the Bay Area by private plane. After a couple years of happily commuting this way, it became exhausting. I could see this wonderful community around me, but I wasn't able to be a part of it because I was gone so much of the time. I really wanted a sense of connection and roots here.

To make a change, I wrote a one-page description of what I wanted. My vision included a part-time job in Nevada County working with community leaders on a project I believed had a positive community impact, and that paid a decent wage. Within a week I saw an ad for a United Way community assessment project coordinator, working with various sectors. Getting that job enabled me to transition here and, I was immediately hooked on being involved in this community. This experience always reminds me how we need to get clear about what we want, and that we can make it happen.

While working with United Way I was continuing to work with clients as a coach. The coaching work was a bit isolating because I'd work from home, mostly with folks over the phone at a distance, and it's all confidential. Because I have a deep need for connection, I decided I wanted to keep some part-time work. The next project that came along was contracting with the Department of Social Services to lead the 211 project, which involved a huge community effort – 20 organizations, 26 individuals, over 3 years. Nevada County became the first rural county in California to have 2-1-1 in 2010.

For the last five years, I have also been the facilitator for the Nevada County Community Leadership Program (NCCLI), a leadership course focused on learning about different sectors in our community. Participants spend a day each month for the better part of a year focused on ten different sectors in the community from the Arts to Criminal Justice. I went through the training ten years ago and really loved it, so it felt like a great fit when they invited me to be the new facilitator. My role keeps me connected to what's happening in a lot of different sectors and what's new.

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

No, absolutely not. My family didn't believe in being a "joiner." There wasn't any role-modeling when I was growing up for community service. Now that's changed, and my whole family is involved in different aspects of service.

Community service began to be important to me once I completed the NCCLI program and we were making our follow-up commitments. Many folks were involved in Rotary, which I realized was a service organization (not a networking group). So when I graduated from NCCLI I joined Rotary. I've also been very involved with Toastmasters.

**5. What do you consider to be the greatest 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 don't see myself as a civic community leader. I really like people, I'm interested in a lot of issues, and I like connecting people with one another. One of my personal missions is to connect people to resources –whether through coaching where I connect people to their personal resources, or through the 211 project, which is a way of connecting the public to resources, or just connecting two people that I know are interested in similar things.

6. **There are five key roles that civic leaders often play in their community. (Hand-out list and read):**

- ***Mentor:* teaching and engaging the young**
- ***Mediator:* helping to resolve community conflict**
- ***Monitor:* that is, serving as a public watchdog**
- ***Mobilizer:* that is, working to bring about social change**
- ***Motivator:* urging people toward public good and away from self-interest**

**As you think about your own civic involvement in our community, which of these roles have you played and which do you consider to be your strongest?**

All of these roles speak to me to some degree, but I'm mostly a motivator and a mobilizer. I just can't help myself from motivating and mobilizing.

The 211 and Community Assessment projects required bringing people together who are incredibly busy. I think my sales experience early in my career really helped me motivate key people to participate because I was able to show them what the benefit would be. This enriched and broadened my perspective on the projects because I needed to look at them from a lot of different perspectives (ex: business, County Mental Health, etc.) and speak to them all. I really enjoy connecting people across sectors.

7. **This project has to do with the involvement of sage leaders like yourself in civic organizations that seek to improve the quality of life and well-being of Grass Valley and Nevada City. This includes nine types of civic organizations.**

- **Fraternal and service clubs**
- **Social services organizations**
- **Educational organizations**
- **Governmental and political organizations**
- **Arts organizations**
- **Media organizations**
- **Faith-based organizations**
- **Environmental organizations**
- **Other nonprofit organizations**

**In which of the nine 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'm most involved in social services at this time because of the work projects I'm involved in. I spend about 100-150 hours a month in these types of civic organizations. Rotary, about 4 hours/month plus events and Toastmasters, about 8 hours/month.

The line between paid work and being there simply because I'm interested is blurred. In my paid work, I'm very involved in social services and also with educational organizations. I'm somewhat involved in all of these different types of organizations, except environmental.

8. **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'm most involved in social services in the county. I was originally hired for a short-term project about four years ago and have continued to work on social service-related projects for the County. I was invited to work with the County after my work with United Way. On average, between 100-150 hours/month. Just about everything I do is somehow connected to this work.

9. **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.**

The leadership role that I play is as project coordinator and facilitator of the Nevada County Community Leadership Institute (NCCLI).

**Second, in what ways do you believe you have *most* helped the organization?**

I think one of the valuable things I bring to this and other organizations is my variety of experience, especially coaching, to know our values and hold a vision of what we want to create. I empower groups & teams by helping them to focus on a vision and hold it. When we do this we're capable of anything.

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

Sometimes people in social services get so focused on their work, the burdens, and on scarcity, that they forget how to communicate about the benefits and joys of helping people and our community to folks outside their field. It's sometimes challenging when organizations or individuals are holding onto

their own agenda. The Truckee-Tahoe Collaborative is a great example of a group that has a very collaborative and positive style rather than a scarcity attitude.

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

Getting things done and witnessing the limitless possibilities when people pull together. I'm also really excited and proud that Nevada County is so often the first to implement or pilot a program – it is really gratifying to work with such passionate and visionary people.

**10. I want to ask you four additional questions about your civic life: What motivates or inspires you to engage in civic activities and causes?**

It's not "civic life" that motivates me. Rather, it's when people come together to do something positive that I'm inspired to participate. I want a seat at the table because I like to see something positive resulting from people coming together.

**Do you feel that you are sacrificing anything in your life by being deeply involved in our community's civic organizations?**

Not at all. I feel enriched and connected which makes my life better.

**What personal benefits do you get from your civic involvements?**

Realizing that I have a part to play in contributing to a healthy community, which is a place that I can be safe and happy.

**11. Is there a relationship between your role as a working professional and your personal involvement in our community's civic organizations? If so, how would you describe it?**

The line between my professional roles and my volunteer jobs is blurry, and I like that.

**12. Do you see yourself continuing along the same career path with increasing responsibilities and leadership roles? Or at some point do you see a different path for yourself?**

My life is constantly evolving, but there are no dramatic changes I want to make at this time. I'm confident that by staying conscious and alert I'll be drawn into new ways of engaging.

**13. 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?**

Some of the qualities that I really appreciate are good communicators, people who have a vision and can articulate it, people who are compassionate and inclusive.

When I get involved in something it's very important for me to get a clear vision. I do this purposefully and bring that strength to my projects. I also increasingly bring compassion to my projects and facilitation. And I'm committed to constantly working on my communication skills through Toastmasters.

**14. Four more quick questions about leadership: What, if any, spiritual traditions or practices do you most draw upon in exercising leadership?**

I wouldn't cite any particular religious tradition, but every faith that I've been exposed to has offered something that I can learn from and draw from in my work – like compassion and honoring all that's around us.

**How has your leadership style changed as you have progressed in your career?**

I'm more compassionate and I'm a better listener.

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

Not having buy-in and moving forward too quickly.

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

I love taking all sorts of courses. I'm drawn to opportunities to learn.

**15. What are the one or two peak experiences that set you on the path you're on today?**

Having the life I have today is a peak experience. It is a life I visualized and a life that seemed impossible when I first thought of it. I met with a "success team" once a week for many years and each of us worked on our goals. At the time I felt stuck in my work, I was single and I lived in a condo in Silicon Valley. Living in the country, falling in love and getting married, flying,

having horses, and doing work I was passionate about seemed a million miles away. But each week we'd bring our goals to the table and take some small step forward. And, it all happened. And it continues to happen.

- 16. You probably know other individuals who have emerging 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?**

I interact with a lot of involved people and I haven't met many folks recently who aren't involved in our community in some way. Of course, some have small children or family obligations, but they still get involved in their kids' school and activities. I feel very fortunate to know so many people who are involved and engaged.

- 17. 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?**

Absolutely. I feel safe and valued here. People smile and talk to you rather than averting their gaze. Because we're a small community, you know you're going to run into people so we're more civil and we cut each other more slack than when there's more anonymity. I also really like being in a place where everyone lives by choice, not simply because of their job. People are consciously making the choice to live here, and that's one of the most amazing things about this place.

- 18. Is there anything else you'd like to say or ask as we close?**

No, we've covered so much I don't think there's anything else that needs to be said.