

INTERVIEW PROFILE OF NORMAN WESTMORE

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? Where in the county do you reside?**

My wife and I moved to Nevada City in August of 1997 and have resided here for the past thirteen years.

- 2. Are you working, semi-retired, or retired...And how old you will be on your next birthday?**

I am retired, although I devote much time to nonprofit work in the community. I will be 73 on my next birthday.

- 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 was born in Oakland, California, in December 1937. But within months, my mother moved us to Yuba City to live with my uncle and grandmother. I never knew my father—and my grandmother, mother, and all of my uncles and aunts would not give me any information about him. Throughout my childhood the subject of my father felt like a forbidden subject—the family shame closet.

I grew up on the family farm and learned to do all kinds of farm work from a very young age. My uncles had no children, so they wanted me to learn the rice farming business and take over the farm when they retired. I went to a local elementary school and then to Yuba City High School. I was not motivated to get good grades or to excel in class work, and I was not encouraged to go to college. By the time my dean of men took me on as a project and tried to get me serious about academics, I had blown through almost three years of high school without doing serious study. I was able to graduate from high school but did not have the grades to get into college. Nor did I have any money to go—again, no help from my family.

I was able to get into the local community college, Yuba College, and began pursuing a degree in engineering. I had to make-up all of the math classes I hadn't taken in high school, plus take all engineering classes during my first two years of college. I brought-up my grades at Yuba College and then took an engineering entrance test. I was accepted into the School of Engineering, University of California, Berkeley, and received my Bachelors in Mechanical Engineering from Cal in 1959.

Right after college I joined Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica, California, where I worked as an aeronautical flight test engineer. I was there for about eight months and

was laid off when the project I was on was completed. I had aspirations of being an aeronautical engineer, but at that point after eight months I decided that going into the defense business was not a very stable career. I interviewed with companies in southern California and in the San Francisco Bay Area, including Ampex, Fiberboard, and several others. I took a job with Pacific Bell, in Los Angeles, in 1960 and worked for them for 31 ½ years. I experienced all aspects of the industry except accounting.

My career in the Bell system included an assignment at AT&T in New York and with Bell Labs in New Jersey. My education continued after I was selected for a “fast track” management development program at Pacific Bell. While I was at AT&T I participated in several different executive programs, including post-graduate executive programs at the University of Southern California and PACE University in New York. I feel my career in the Bell System was very fulfilling and successful.

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

My farm family was relatively poor, so there was little history of helping our community that I recall. I personally started giving back to my community when I joined a church in New Jersey in 1974.

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

Those attributes have changed. The strengths and capabilities that worked well for me in business were different than those in my community service and nonprofit work now. Different in this sense: In the business world I was very action oriented. I drove people and held them accountable for getting results. If managers didn't perform I moved them out, one way or another. That was the culture I learned in the Bell System, and it was very internally competitive. Those who excelled rose to the top and were rewarded. Those who didn't succeed and go up the ladder were destined to a flat career. I became pretty competitive; that was my style in the business world, and it worked well for me.

The principal attribute that has worked well for me in the nonprofit world is learning to be a good listener. I try to find out people's strengths and then tap into them. And I'm probably much more diplomatic than I was in my corporate days. Another skill I have acquired is communicating well with groups of people and being succinct in dealing with problems without necessarily promoting my part of the agenda. The most important thing I have learned is patience, although I am still rooted in action. I tend to focus on the reason for pursuing a particular course and the outcome that is expected. I also focus on who will be responsible for taking action that is needed to complete a task. This style in my nonprofit work is rooted in my engineering background and my Bell System experience.

6. There are five key roles that civic leaders often play in their community:

- ***Mentor:* teaching and engaging others**
- ***Mediator:* helping to resolve conflict**
- ***Monitor:* serving as a community watchdog**
- ***Mobilizer:* working to bring about change**
- ***Motivator:* urging people to pursue worthy goals**

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

I am more of a mobilizer, and to a little lesser degree a motivator and a mentor. I do some mentoring in Kiwanis with youth and children, and I have taught Sunday school with young children. I probably learn more than the kids do. This has taught me patience as a grandparent with my own grandchildren. I get my greatest sense of fulfillment from enabling an organization or group to bring about positive change.

6. 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?

Number one is non-profit organizations, then social services organizations, then fraternal service clubs, and then my church. Over the last two years my civic involvements have taken about 70 hours a month. Going back before that, my hours were about 30 hours a month.

There have been three periods over the last eight years where I have been heavily involved in nonprofit organizations. One was with Habitat for Humanity, where I was Vice President of Operations. Essentially, this was like a working executive director position. Two of us literally ran the organization, and we did most of the operational duties. I spent about 80-100 hours a month there, and that role lasted for about a year. In addition I was Board Chair of Miners Foundry, which involved about 20 hours a month. Recently, over the past two years, I have been Board Chair of the Center for Nonprofit Leadership (CNL).

7. **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?**

It is the Center for Nonprofit Leadership. I was invited to join the board of CNL about four years ago. I spend on average 40 hours a month involved in its activities.

8. **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.

I have played four principal roles within CNL: leading the creation of a strategic plan, serving as Board Chair for two years, securing 501 c 3 nonprofit status for the organization, and helping to build what is perhaps the strongest nonprofit board in our community.

Initially, when I was invited to join the CNL leadership team, my role was to lead the development of a strategic plan. I designed the process, brought a team together, and in one year we created a far-reaching strategic plan—which included a recommendation to pursue 501 c 3 status for CNL. I led the entire process, wrote the bylaws and the incorporation documents, and filed the required IRS papers. This resulted in CNL securing 501 c 3 nonprofit status.

I have also helped the organization by developing a process to identify, cultivate, and recruit members to the CNL founding board and beyond. The process has resulted in CNL adding the 14th and 15th board member, and we are now at full capacity. Personally, I believe this has been my most significant contribution to the organization. Part of the process has also involved my developing a succession plan, and this has resulted in an outstanding individual succeeding me as Board Chair.

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

I would say attracting a highly diverse and talented group of leaders onto the CNL Board. A number of them really stand out, and they are emerging as future CNL Board leaders. This has been very fulfilling to me because it has involved coaching and some mentoring.

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

A major roadblock came up as we were forming the CNL Founding Board. Some individuals on the earlier Leadership Team (before there was a CNL Board) were not right for the founding board and needed to exit. So we had to work through each of these delicate decisions. The challenge was to be careful in encouraging a person to leave, while preserving their good feelings about CNL. I was able to accomplish this,

and those who left formal leadership within the organization found they could better serve CNL in a capacity other than being on the board.

I want to discuss another roadblock I have experienced, and it is with an organization other than CNL. I am on the board of one of our community's major performing arts organizations, and its board of directors is huge (27 members). I have found that getting many board members to work together is difficult, if not impossible. They are good-hearted people, but the board is too big and unwieldy. This has been complicated by the fact that difficult economic times have made it necessary to cut-back on staff, which has resulted in important things not getting done. In addition, the organization has needed a strategic marketing plan, but the board saw little value in having one. With some urging, the decision was finally made to find an external person who had the right marketing skills. I found that person, we hired her, and she is doing an outstanding job. Unfortunately, with the staff cutbacks the executive director was left to do the heavy lifting that has been needed to implement the new marketing plan. Now, with the resignation of the executive director, the entire burden for operating the organization has fallen onto the board. Many of the roadblocks encountered in this arts organization have been long-standing. The organization is now poised to undertake significant change, including the search for a new executive director.

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

All of the various leadership roles I have been able to play within the Center for Nonprofit Leadership have given me enormous meaning and satisfaction.

10. I want to ask you three additional questions about your civic life: *First*, what motivates or inspires you to engage in community activities and causes?

I became involved in giving back to a community most actively after I retired from my telephone company career. I was moved to help families in need of decent housing, so the very first organization I worked with and helped was Habitat for Humanity in the San Francisco Bay Area. Working side-by-side helping people to improve their lives, give them hope, provide them a home, and watch them being industrious was very motivating and fulfilling for me. Teaching these families how to be responsible made it clear that I could make a difference when my wife and I moved here to Nevada City, so that is what I have done.

Part of my motivation to give back to my community is that I have been very, very blessed in my life. As a youngster I didn't have a lot of money but wasn't poor either. I was loved and learned about the value of hard work on our farm, and that created the basis for my values. I was also very blessed to have worked all of those years with Pac-Bell and to have risen fairly high in that business. I learned a lot there and became financially sound, so I was able to retire early. I quickly discovered that I didn't just want to just sit around and do nothing. This led me to look at ways I could give back to the community, and I have found great meaning in having done that.

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

The short answer is no. If I were sacrificing anything that was really important to me, I wouldn't do it. I keep a pretty careful boundary about what I will and will not do. I'm clear about that.

I got involved with the Center for Nonprofit leadership because I felt I had something to offer. At first I didn't want to get involved in the administrative stuff and in board governance, but I was invited repeatedly to be a board leader and that is what I felt the organization needed. I saw some other boards that were completely dysfunctional and I felt I could make a difference with them as well, so that's what motivated me to join them.

Third, what personal benefits do you get from your civic involvements?

Take Habit for Humanity as an example. I work with a group of friends I have made within a Habitat construction crew. We go out and hammer nails and get a lot done while also having a good time. Best of all, we are helping families to have a nice home. What can beat that?

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

One pattern always comes to the forefront, and that has had to do with the way I deal with anger. I had a short fuse in business. Interesting enough, a short fuse and intimidation worked when you were in negotiations, whether it was with union leaders or when you were in confrontation with colleagues. I learned in that world that being tough led to success. Well it doesn't work well in most other relationships, so the biggest thing I have learned over time is the need for patience. I have learned a lot about being patient with youth and younger people, and coaching them rather than beating on them all the time. I find I still have to work at having patience and restraining expressions of anger.

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?

The qualities I most admire in some of the mentors and coaches I saw in the business world were men and women of high integrity and moral standards who could make courageous decisions, even when they may be costly. They saw and believed in what needed to be done, and they took the high road to accomplish it. Observing those people and their courage in the face of risk to their own careers, but nevertheless doing the right thing, were the qualities that I most admired.

Another quality is active and open listening. I developed tremendous admiration for bosses who didn't need "yes" men around them. They wanted diverse opinions and

looked for different solutions and new ways of doing things. I found those people inspiring because they fostered people who were open and would disagree with them.

At one point in my career I worked for the president of the company and felt I needed to report back to him on how the company was operating. This involved looking out for early warning of problems, of unethical conduct, of people cooking the books, and other emerging problems in the business. For me that was a great learning experience of dealing with high pressure. I needed courage and strength to give the president the correct information so he could make the right decisions. This was very valuable to me and I continue to admire those qualities. That's why I put courage way up there.

The last leadership quality I most admire is compassion, mixed with not putting-up with any bull. I call it the hard love model, where I don't enable anyone if they are misrepresenting the facts. I simply won't stand for that behavior. One of the last jobs I had at Pac Bell was heading-up the Office of Business Ethics, and I reported to the president. This was the first ethics position ever established in the company and one of the few in the United States. That job was an incredible pressure cooker. I headed the office of whistle blower and had a few people who investigated cases of misconduct to determine if there was wrongdoing in the corporation. I called that my last best job and feel the same today as I reflect back on it.

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

I am involved in my church and draw strength from my faith beliefs. Linking back to my comments on courage, I try to model the behavior I want my children to emulate. I call it "Walking the talk." So spiritually speaking I only have to look in the mirror, look to my god and ask, "Man, are you doing the right thing?" And then reflect on it. This enables me to help people make tough decisions and be a relatively good model most of the time. And when I'm not a good model, to acknowledge it. For me the qualities are honesty with self, honesty with others, and not wearing a false front or covering up when I have blown it. I don't know if those values are spiritual, but they provide me a sound foundation.

14. How has your leadership style changed as you have progressed in life?

I have developed a much more collaborative style of leadership and I am able to tolerate diverse opinions. I can be completely comfortable allowing different points of view to be expressed and debated. In my corporate leadership role I would push for rapid decisions and was much more impatient.

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

Many leaders feel they must micro-manage their organizations. They do not let the creative abilities of their people to develop and be utilized. These micro-management attributes stifle the growth, creativity, and development of organizations.

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

Most important for me is to keep learning from other people. I attend workshops, I observe other leaders, and I look for the keys to successful people. I frequently am very curious about how others work to achieve their goals, and I try and learn from these observations.

17. The two characteristics most often associated with sage leader wisdom are *unusual experience* and *the exercise of sound judgment*. What does having wisdom mean to you?

Wisdom to me is life's personal experiences *and* being open to new ones. I get upset with dogma and intransigence in people. And I really get upset with the political arena today, where people shout, don't listen, and are derogatory to others. So having wisdom involves being open and listening to the points-of-view of others, and giving others the benefit of my own opinions without feeling I have to convince them. That's part of wisdom, not having to convince people that my way is the right way or the only way.

I find it interesting in dealing with many younger people today that they have no room to listen to another person's point-of-view in an open way. They have already formed their opinion; it can be political, it can be in any organization, and it can be in a non-profit as well. To me that's what wisdom is all about. I will tell you very frankly that I didn't come to this conclusion early in my life. I have learned what did and didn't work well in parenting, so I am a better grandparent than I was a parent. My goal is to not make the same mistakes again.

18. What are the one or two peak experiences in your life that set you on the path you're on today?

One stands out, and that was when I met the woman who was to become my future wife. I had just come off a failed marriage, but from the standpoint of self-esteem I was doing well in the business world and climbing the corporate ladder. I was very ambitious on the outside, but on the inside I was having grave doubts about my relationships with my family, especially my children, and what they were going through as a result of the divorce.

Before I met my wife-to-be, I vowed I wasn't going to marry again any time soon. That vow didn't last very long because I met a woman who was to become my wife. So my peak experience was finding the woman who I loved and who loved and trusted me. She had two very young children, and I took on the responsibility of being their father. Her husband had drowned in an accident. I didn't necessarily want to replace him but, rather, be a father in-kind. For me, that was also part of my first peak experience.

A second peak experience was again family-related. For a period of time, my relationship with my own two daughters was more distant than close and loving. This was because there was stuff we hadn't dealt with. I came to the conclusion that I could

not force my daughters to love me or see the good things that I did. I just had to be who I was, and I had faith that as they and I opened-up with one another we were going to keep working on our relationship and see where it went. The improved relationship occurred at a relatively early age in my daughters' lives (mid twenties). They are now in their mid-forties and our relationship is very, very close. This was a peak experience because it changed the course of our lives. In looking back, my life and theirs would have been a sad and lonely journey had we concluded we weren't going to invest any more in our relationships with one another.

19. 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?

I have several friends who are very capable leaders but have chosen not to get involved civically with our community. There appear to be a number of probable reasons for this. One is that they were very successful in the corporate world, but they have reservations about their own capability of being able to handle the frustration of working with or leading volunteers. Another reason is that some people don't want to go through the trouble of becoming involved. They are tired and say they don't want to put up with having to deal with conflict. Still others don't want to branch-out in establishing new relationships. To some degree, they withdraw and hunker down.

Another characteristic of the talented but uninvolved is that they tend to have a very narrow field of interest. They are just interested in their boat or in playing golf, and that's it. They were very successful in business. That was their sole focus in life, and they got fulfillment from it. As these kinds of people get older, they tend to become very entrenched with their computer or playing golf with their buddies on Friday.

What to do about talented individuals who haven't gotten engaged in the civic side of our community? I think those of us who are deeply involved in, say, nonprofit work need to talk with them about our experiences and the passion we have for the missions of these organizations. And to emphasize the personal fulfillment that we get from being deeply involved. This may awaken the interest and passion in others, and it has happened to me several times. For example, there is a person who had retired from the ministry and was looking for a way to get involved in the community. I was working for Habitat. And when I gave him my 30-second elevator speech, his eyes lit up. Suddenly, something clicked. I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you are available, my wife and I will swing by on Sunday to pick-up you and your wife and take you to a home dedication for Habitat. Would you like to go?" Well, you can guess the rest of the story. There wasn't a dry eye during the dedication, and he became so hooked on the organization that he continues on the Habitat Board to this day. I could probably have talked to him for hours, but I decided to take the extra step and personally involve him in something that would move him. Most individuals have something in them like this. If we can help to awaken it, we can unlock something that will enrich their lives.

20. 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?

There are a whole host of things that make this place special. To begin we have a beautiful out-door environment: the mountains, trees, lakes, rivers, and streams. We also have an interesting culture, made so by the great variety and backgrounds of people who decide to live here. I have lived in a lot of places—New York, LA, San Francisco, small cities and suburbs—and conclude that one of the unique things about being here is the feeling that we are all in it together. You easily get to know a lot of people in our community, so you really feel connected. Somehow the closeness of our community fosters an attitude of wanting to give back to it.

In a smaller community you can also see how you make a difference. If you do something in a larger community and never see the results, it's kind of like shoveling sand at the beach and watching it wash away. In a smaller community you see the impact and get feedback on the positive difference you can make. My wife and I also enjoy the countless cultural and arts opportunities that are here, and the fact that we are close enough to two airports that we can get to them in an hour or hour and a-half. So part of the reason for being here is that there is no sense of being isolated from the larger world when we want to get to it.

21. Is there anything else you'd like to ask or add before we close?

No. Thanks for the opportunity of being interviewed.