

INTERVIEW PROFILE OF EMERGING SAGE LEADER RICHARD BAKER

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 live in Nevada City. I grew-up and went to high school here. So including the 12 years I have lived here since returning, I have been in Nevada County for 30 years.

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

I am 43.

- 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.**

My family's people came to Nevada City both before and after the Gold Rush era. I am 5th generation, and my children are now the 6th generation. I grew up in Nevada City and went to Nevada Union High School. I attended UC Santa Cruz and traveled in Mexico for awhile. I then joined a natural history-based cruise ship as a deck hand and worked my way up to cruise guide alongside the natural history staff for a number of years. Thereafter, I moved to San Francisco and worked as a waiter, then a builder. I was a carpenter for a number of years doing home renovation in San Francisco and Berkeley. This work led to an interest in architecture, coupled with a move to New York. I returned to college at Pratt Institute and got a degree in architecture. My wife and I started a family and returned to Nevada County in 1998. I worked with Gary Tintle as the sole designer in his business for four or five years. I began a business, *Siteline Architecture*, eight years ago and am the primary designer.

- 4. Is there a history of community service in your family background? If so, briefly describe it.**

My ancestors seemed to always be involved in community organizations such as the Elks, Soroptimist, and the Ladies Relief Society. And my parents have been members of the Grass Valley Sportsman's Club and California Fish and Game Commission. My father is Board Chairman of Citizens Bank, and my mother was the first President of The Friendship Club and has recently returned as a board member there. I initiated a club in high school for exchange students. After moving back to Nevada County, I served on the board of the Miners Foundry for awhile. I was also on the board of the Center for the Arts for eight years. I am currently on the facilities committee for the Nevada County School of the Arts. And I was recently elected to the NJUHS school board of trustees and will begin a 4-year term in January, 2011.

5. **What do you consider to be the major 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 not very political. I am focused on creating good relationships and working with people with similar concerns. I am a very good listener and a creative thinker. I am into results and working hard, and I am a pretty good communicator. I am fair, accept other people's ideas, am consistent and trustworthy, and am not ego engaged when making a decision.

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

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

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?

My strongest roles are mobilizer and motivator. I am usually the youngest person in groups that I belong to and do not see myself in the mentor role, except for my family. I can be a mediator but don't seek this role, and I do not see myself as a monitor. I tend to be very positive when working as a mobilizer with a group. Being a motivator while working for the natural history cruise ship meant being a role model as a hard worker.

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. (Hand-out and read):**

- **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?

As to educational organizations, I am presently on the facilities committee for the Nevada County School of the Arts about six-to-eight hours a month. Recently I was elected to the NJUHS school board of trustees and will begin a four-year term in January, 2011. I was asked to run for the seat. I have three children coming up to high school and want to be involved in their education. I will probably put in approximately 10-15 hours a week there. In terms of arts organizations, I was on the board of the Center for the Arts for eight years and was board president. Regarding nonprofit organizations, I have worked a bit with The Friendship Club and am involved with the Sage Leadership Project, an initiative of the Center for Nonprofit Leadership. I have no involvements in media, faith-based, or government/political organizations.

- 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(s) and volunteer your services? Are you paid or unpaid? On average, how many hours a month do you give to this organization or organizations?**

I was on the board for the Center for the Arts for eight years, where I served in leadership roles, 20-25 hours a week, unpaid. I wanted to be involved in the Center because of my arts background, and I thought I could be of help with my business skills. I was invited to be on the board. I started out as a general board member but quickly got involved with many of the committees. I created and ran the Rock and Roll fundraising event, earning \$14,000-\$16,000 annually.

- 9. I'd like to learn more about your involvement in this organization:**

First, describe the leadership role that you play.

I served in many leadership capacities including president. During my time as president I worked 20-25 hours a week literally running the Center. This was a difficult period for the organization. I resigned in 2009 because my wife was hired as the executive director.

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

I mostly helped the Center for the Arts by not seeking any personal gain and keeping the health of the community and the need for a vital art center always at the forefront. This was at a time when some other community arts groups were folding. I'd like to think that I was part of a team that moved the organization through a difficult time and established a foundation for our current success.

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

My main challenges were financial. Getting the community to make a long-term investment in the Center was essential, and educating the community and getting buy-in was definitely a challenge.

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

I have gotten the most meaning and satisfaction this last year seeing how our decisions and vision in the early years have been fruitful. The Center has given a lot back to the community. For instance, the it raised over \$10,000 this past year in support of other local non-profits, including the hospital. I am proud of the Center and continue to have a lot of passion for this place. Other organizations now look at the Center's model for community activism.

10. I want to ask you three additional questions about your various community involvements:

First, what motivates or inspires you to engage in civic activities and causes?

Mainly, I grew-up here and have roots and family history here. I have a lot of passion about the future of the community.

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

No.

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

I have gotten more culture being in this community because I have easy access to great national and local artists who I might not have gone to see in a big city like New York, San Francisco, or Los Angeles. I feel good about being part of creating something that has a lasting effect for me as well as the community.

11. Let's turn to a different topic: 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?

Architecture is a humanist field – community and place. My work feeds my interest in community. When people see how I make an investment in the community, perhaps they think I'm someone they want to do business with. I personally make that decision when I give my business to local companies that I know give back to the community.

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?

I know that I have a commitment to be on the school board for the next four years. Will there be a third phase in my life? Maybe. I love my job and being close to extended family.

This place is home to me. I also like being a little more footloose. When my kids are grown, I can see my wife and I doing something completely different.

- 13. 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? Is so, what are these and how have you changed?**

I tend to be passionate about things I am involved in, and that passion can spill out. When I was younger I was more confrontational, and am now a better listener. The way I express myself publically is less confrontational. I have always been conscientious and empathetic since I was a kid. I think those are good character traits to have in a leadership role.

- 14. 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?**

I really have an enormous appreciation for people who are creative and are willing to express ideas outside the common consciousness of an organization. The status quo is often comforting, but I like organizations that like to grow and grow and grow.

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

None. Empathy and friendship and being available for friends and family are my guides. Shit happens, and I can accept that. With theft and fires that have destroyed my art and work from past periods of my life, I have learned the capacity to let stuff go. Bad experiences have given me insight into how to let go, and having kids has also taught me how to let go of certain things.

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

I put as little ego in as possible. I try to treat my employee the same as I do my business partner. I am not a top down kind of person.

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

Over-commitment and not following through. Putting too much ego into one's leadership, which muffles the capacity to listen. Not being able to be patient with people.

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

I am continuing to invest myself in new things like the school board. It is a new knowledge base for me with a huge learning curve about learning my role and how to fulfill my part. I take this seriously.

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

I have always had pretty good fortune and also generous mentors. I was always able to take on a mentor. Relationships with lots of people can be thin, but my hard work and passion in my life have been seen by mentors. Mentors gave me the confidence to grow as a human. Being back in Nevada County has given me a second relationship with my family and community. Also having kids is transformative.

20. As you look back over your life what would you do differently?

I guess being more conscious about what I was going to be. I was fortunate about what I acted upon, but I never really consciously thought about the goals of my life. I have always had a love for natural history, and maybe I missed the boat a bit by not heading in that direction. I am a little cautious, but it's hard when you have a family dependent on an income. I don't feel stuck, but if I did it again, I would have made significant decisions differently—or at least more conscientiously—rather than allowing life to happen on its own.

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

Wisdom is based on life experience and not accepting information without vetting it against a good rich life, value to others, and humility.

22. You probably know other individuals who have emerging sage leadership talents and skills but are not currently involved in the public life of our community. Why do you believe they choose to be uninvolved? What might be done to encourage their involvement?

I know a lot of people with financial means who are not involved. That is frustrating, but I try not to place judgment. What I know is that people need to come to it on their own. People like us put a good face on it and act as an example. I interviewed a colleague, and what he said stuck with me: *So many people have earned so much from this community but do not give back equally*. Why not say “thank you” by being more philanthropic?

23. 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?

It's incredible. I appreciate the breath of the arts that are here, the natural beauty, and the variety of people. My wife says, *“The people in Nevada County are the most diverse group of white people you can ever know.”* It's true. We are 40 minutes away from the best the Sierra has to offer, skiing in the mountains, rivers to fish in. But, you have to be pretty entrepreneurial to exist here. Financial survival has always been the history of this place, which means you can't come here and expect it to be given to you. The history of the hard rock miners is infused in our persona.

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

No – I'm good.