

The Why

What does a beyond traditional retirement age former public official do to fill the gap of no longer being in a position of authority. I've given that lots of thought. That truth lies in the fact that I no longer have lots of people working for me who require real attention. I don't have to spend countless hours dealing with one crisis after another or working on all the basics of hiring the right talent. I no longer have to do what one might call ceremonial responsibilities. I have time to think. I am inspired by my students. Now before I go further, I need to go back a few years and share how all this really got started.

My son, some time ago shared a book on exercise and health. The bottom line message was there is a real value in pushing your exercise routines much harder to get something special in return. Don't remember any real details but one thing it led to was taking my morning walks much more seriously. I pushed myself, walking in Manhattan, Kansas, where we live and enjoy the surrounding Flint Hills. It is a rolling up and down workout and given I did my best to do it every morning, it quickly led to some really quality time to just generally think. Whether it was the frequent beautiful sun rises, the fresh air, or just having time alone, I've not had any trouble keeping up the routine.

Eventually while walking I developed a habit of exploring thoughts about relatively serious topics. To be honest much of that was driven by my thinking about the future and what my three grandchildren, their children and grand children's lives might be like. What about the serious challenges we face like the for real impacts of climate change and how a growing population is going to be fed over time? As I gave this more thought, combined with opportunities to serve on a few national advisory boards, I began thinking about doing something more than just think. I remember one evening at the National Archives when my wife, Lynn, and I returned to D.C. to participate in an Archives Foundation event. I had a chance to visit with Michael Beschloss, author and historian who served on the Archives Foundation Board. I can't remember specifically what led to his comment but at some point he said I should write a book, that I had lots of experiences that needed to be shared. I gave that some thought to the point of actually deciding to do just that. That is I did until Lynn and my friend, mentor, and current boss Dr. Mary Tolar told me that despite some good material, selling it to any volume of readers would lead to little more than a book that maybe a few copies would be passed down through future generations of Carlins.

But the story didn't end there. Mary had other ideas and with Lynn's support I'm ready to try another approach that just might work. Given my age, I must admit I had to be led to the potential of modern communication and shorter bites. I'm now ready to connect my experiences with the real challenges we face today, and as I proceed, it won't be only my grandchildren I'm thinking about but the future for all who call our planet home.