

The Encore Executive: A Roadmap for Unretirement

How Former Executives Are Turning "What's Next?" Into Their Most Meaningful Chapter

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The Grocery Store Moment

Opening Scene: You run into an old colleague at the grocery store on a Tuesday morning. They ask, "So, what are you up to these days?"

You pause.

"Oh, you know... enjoying retirement. Playing some golf. Spending time with the grandkids."

They smile politely. You both know what you really mean: **Nothing much.**

As you walk away, something gnaws at you. You spent 30 years mastering financial strategy, steering companies through complexity, making decisions that mattered. And now? Your biggest decision is whether to mulch the garden beds.

The Truth About Retirement Nobody Tells You:

Retirement gets boring. Not immediately—those first few months feel like freedom. But by month six, the restlessness sets in. Your mind, trained for decades to solve problems and see patterns others miss, needs something to work on.

You don't want your old job back. You don't want the 60-hour weeks or the office politics. But you do want to matter again. You want intellectual stimulation. You want to stay relevant. You want a better answer to that grocery store question.

This guide is for executives who are done apologizing for not being done.

The Unretirement Revolution

You're Not Alone—And the Timing Has Never Been Better

Research from Stanford's Center on Longevity (2023) shows that executives who maintain challenging, purpose-aligned work post-career report **40% higher life satisfaction and cognitive engagement scores** than those who fully retire. Your instinct to keep working isn't weakness—it's wisdom.



Meanwhile, the market is hungry for what you have:



Board Demand

NACD's 2024 Governance Outlook Report identifies "CEO/CFO experience" as the #1 most sought-after attribute for new public company board members



Fractional Growth

Gartner's Executive Programs Survey reports that demand for fractional CXOs grew by over 200% from 2021-2024



Profile Success

LinkedIn Economic Graph Data shows executives who successfully pivoted to board and advisory roles saw a 5x increase in profile views after repositioning themselves strategically

The opportunity is real. The demand is there. But here's what most retired executives get wrong...

Why Smart Executives Struggle (And It's Not Your Fault)

The Three Traps That Keep Great Executives On The Sidelines:

1

The Resume Trap

You update your LinkedIn with the same task-based resume that got you your last job: "Managed \$500M P&L. Led team of 45. Implemented new ERP system."

But board and advisory work isn't about what you did—it's about what problems you solve. Boards don't hire task-completers. They hire strategic thinkers who can see around corners.

❏ **PwC's 2024 Corporate Directors Survey** found that 72% of boards seek directors who can reframe operational expertise into governance-level narratives around digital transformation and cyber risk. Your experience has this value—but your LinkedIn doesn't show it.

2

The Networking Trap

You know people. You've built relationships. But those relationships knew you in a role. Now you need them to see you in a new light—as an advisor, a board member, a fractional CXO.

Without a clear, compelling narrative about your transition, your network doesn't know how to help you. Worse, you feel awkward bringing it up. So you wait for opportunities to come to you... and they don't.

❏ **Harvard Business Review's study** of Fortune 500 executives found that those who secured board seats within 12 months had begun specific positioning activities an average of 18 months prior to their exit. If you're starting from scratch post-retirement, you're already behind.

3

The Confidence Trap

You've been out of the game for a while. You wonder if you're still sharp enough. You see younger executives with more "current" experience. You question whether you'd even know what to say in a board interview.

❏ **The Conference Board's CEO Confidence Index (Q1 2025)** notes that boards favor candidates with clear, pre-packaged value propositions over generalized "leadership" backgrounds. You have the expertise—but without practice articulating it, you second-guess yourself into inaction.

Here's what makes this harder: Most executives think they can figure this out alone. After all, you've navigated complex careers without handholding before. But this transition is different. It requires unlearning old patterns and learning a new language.

Four classical columns with Corinthian capitals, rendered in a light, semi-transparent style, serving as a background for the title. They are arranged in a row, slightly receding into the distance.

The Four Pillars of Successful Unretirement

The executives who successfully transition into board, fractional, and advisory roles do four things differently. They don't just "network more" or "update their resume." They fundamentally reposition themselves.

The Four Pillars of Successful Unretirement

01

Know Your Unfair Advantage

Not all C-suite experience is created equal. What made you exceptional in your operational role? Where did you consistently create breakthrough results? What do people remember you for?

Gallup's CliftonStrengths research on over 10,000 executives shows that leaders who lead with their "Strategic" and "Relationship Building" strengths secure roles 50% faster than those leading with "Executing" themes. The key is identifying what makes you different—and building your entire positioning around it.

03

Network With Intent

Your existing network is valuable, but you can't rely on people guessing how to help you. You need a systematic approach to reactivating relationships, positioning yourself clearly, and creating "collisions" with the right opportunities.

This isn't about mass LinkedIn outreach or paying companies like Boardsi.com to connect you. It's about strategic, high-value conversations with people who can say, "You know who you should talk to..."

02

Master Your Story

You need one thing before anything else works: a confident, purposeful answer to "What have you been up to since retirement?"

Not: "Oh, not much. Enjoying some downtime."

This: "I'm doing selective advisory work with growth-stage SaaS companies who need CFO expertise to scale without blowing up their cash burn."

When you can say this with clarity and conviction—at the grocery store, at a dinner party, in a networking conversation—everything changes. Opportunities start finding you.

04

Perform When It Counts

Heidrick & Struggles' Board Monitor (2024) reports the average time from initial board search to seating is 4.9 months. You'll likely have one shot to make your case. Can you articulate your value in board-relevant language? Can you handle the "Why now?" question without sounding desperate? Can you negotiate terms from a position of confidence?

Most executives underestimate how rusty their interview skills have become. The executives who win these roles practice. They prepare. They don't wing it.

Your Next Step – The Grocery Store Moment, Reimagined

Imagine running into that colleague again. This time, when they ask what you're up to, you don't hesitate:

"I'm doing fractional CFO work with two PE-backed portfolio companies—helping them scale their finance operations without the cost of a full-time hire. I'm also in conversations about a board seat with a SaaS company in the healthtech space. It's the perfect blend of staying intellectually engaged without the burnout of my old role."

They lean in. "Really? That sounds amazing. How did you get into that?"

You smile. Because you have a story. You have clarity. You have purpose.

This is what unretirement looks like.

Before you take the next step, consider:

1 The Grocery Store Test

If you ran into a former colleague today, what would you say you're doing? Would you feel proud of that answer?

2 The Monday Morning Test

If you woke up Monday with a fractional CXO engagement or board meeting on your calendar, would you feel energized or anxious?

3 The Opportunity Test

If the perfect board or advisory role appeared tomorrow, would you be ready to interview for it? Do you know how you'd position yourself?

4 The Narrative Test

Can you explain in two sentences why you're the perfect advisor/board member for a specific type of company?

5 The Confidence Test

On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that you could land a meaningful board or advisory role in the next 6 months?

If you're feeling uncertain about any of these questions, you're in the right place.

What Happens Next

You've spent decades building expertise that matters. The question isn't whether you have value to offer—it's whether you know how to position it, tell your story, and open the right doors.

Some executives figure this out through trial and error.

They spend 18-24 months spinning their wheels, sending LinkedIn messages into the void, wondering why nothing's working.

Others get intentional.

They invest in the transition. They work with someone who's guided dozens of executives through this exact process—from restless retirement to purposeful encore careers.

Want to know where you really stand?

Take the Unretirement Readiness Quiz—a quick 5-minute assessment that shows you exactly what's working in your transition (and what's holding you back).

[TAKE THE READINESS QUIZ →]

About Kendra



Kendra Weinisch is the Unretirement Expert, specializing in helping former executives transition from retirement into high-impact board, fractional, and advisory roles. Through strategic positioning, narrative development, and targeted networking, Kendra has helped dozens of executives rediscover purpose and relevance in their encore careers.