

Second Career Workers - 1 Mobilizing the Boomer Generation

The huge American Baby Boom generation now stretches from their mid-40s to mid-60s. These decades are always a time to consider legacy and significance, but this generation, in particular, has reason to reconsider life priorities. First shaped by the idealism of the 1960s and then driven by the you-can-have-it-all promises of the late 20th century, Boomers now have lost their sense of financial security and

are being rocked by job losses and housing foreclosures. In this setting, how do churches and agencies call "second-half" adults to embrace eternal values and go global?

Let's begin by considering the issues these people are facing. What is their perspective on missions service? Here's what one Boomer wrote:



We are prospective second career missionaries. We don't have school loans, but we have mortgages to pay or houses to sell in a bad economy. Some of us have adult children who have moved back home, and senior parents who need help. We may have grandchildren whose lives we want to help shape. We may struggle with emotional baggage; we may be divorced.

For those of us with leadership experience, it is sometimes hard to think about starting over, learning humbly, going back to "knowing nothing" in a new culture. We may seem pickier about the setting because we've learned what hasn't worked for us in the past and we want to avoid problems. Physically and mentally, we know our limits. Some assignments that we might have undertaken at an earlier age are now, sadly, beyond our ability to handle.

Past experiences have made us increasingly individualistic, so we might not fit into a predefined assignment but rather need some flexibility in order to make our maximum contribution. We sense the need for speed because we see our time slipping away, so we get discouraged by lengthy bureaucratic systems of selection and assignment.

Exposure to opportunities is encouraging to us and attending the Journey Deepens weekends or similar missions-introduction programs can help us consider various roles. Short-term trips can show us a place, a team, or an organizational fit. We appreciate agency recruiters who pray with us and seem to genuinely want to see us in God's place, not just in their agency. Follow up and encouragement make us feel wanted and valuable.

We need our churches to provide mentors to be sounding boards and to help us sort through the options. Those of us who are single women, in particular, may need our churches to be advocates because searching for a fit and getting to the field can be lonely.

We know we need to learn dependence on God The Provider, but we need help to walk through the process of defining what that could look like. Can we really raise enough support, and manage to keep a roof over our heads and our health insurance paid up at the same time?

Are we valuable enough for you to take the time to brainstorm creative ways to make missions work for us? Maybe several of us could together fill one role by each rotating in for a few months on an annual basis? Could we creatively work from home? Maybe we could be most effective as recruiters, mobilizers, or perhaps as mentors of Majority World workers?

Please don't assume we aren't interested in missions. Many of us have not rejected the call; we just haven't understood it was for us or figured out how to respond at this stage in life.

Does this letter describe dozens, maybe hundreds, of people in your church? How can church and agency leaders respond? Catalyst interviewed people with varying experience and perspectives, and combined their feedback.

In this first of a two-part series, we look at issues related to getting second-career people engaged in cross-cultural missions. Part 2 looks at on-field aspects and includes discussion questions for churches and agencies.

Postings: HOW DOES A CHURCH GO ABOUT PRO-ACTIVELY RECRUITING SECOND CAREER WORKERS?

Don Parrott, President, Finishers Project: First of all, church leaders need to be encouraged that Baby Boomers are open to considering changing careers. Our research indicates that 61% say they would change careers if they found something more compelling. That is 3 out of 5! That does not mean they are all open to missions, but I believe that they want to make a difference, and it is like picking low-hanging fruit. Yet in my experience, churches don't recognize that undercurrent of desire to make a difference.

Churches that have clear ideas about their priorities need to be careful about trying to fit second career prospects into roles they aren't wired for. When you are younger, you can try different things, but at this stage of life, you know who you are, so if we try to fit them into predetermined roles, they often just walk away. We assume they aren't interested, but in reality it is just that they are wired for something different. We need to discover with them where they could fit.

Jim Baumgardner, second-career missionary and field leader, Team Expansion/PIONEERS: Most older adults haven't been challenged to think about how much life experience they have to offer. Reinforce the message that they need to seriously consider the call to go—it isn't just for the young. Attending a Finishers Project conference helped challenge us, but local churches need to find multiple ways to deliver this message to their members in their 40s, 50s, 60s, and beyond.

Churches can be proactive about looking around their congregation and asking God to identify prospects. Natural places to look are where people are already active in ministry, either as staff or volunteers. It does not have to be missions. If they have a commitment to advancing the Kingdom, simply ask, "Have you ever thought about serving cross culturally?" Those currently serving as second career workers can be invited to share their story.

Jacque Baumgardner, second career missionary, Team Expansion & PIONEERS: A personal invitation to attend the Perspectives course opened our eyes to global needs and opportunities. It was life changing. A number of people from that class are now field workers. I would encourage churches to sponsor the Perspectives course and emphasize that it isn't just for college students and young adults.

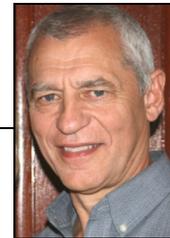
Tom Kelly, second-career missionary and now a PIONEERS mobilizer: As middle-aged adults, my wife and I heard a guest speaker who used Psalm 90:12 to challenge us to consider the number of days we had left until we would reach the age of 70. That started me on a process of serious thinking. Our friends were talking about early retirement, but I didn't see retirement in Scripture.

We started contacting mission agencies. Several said, "We appreciate your interest but don't know how to use you."

Then PIONEERS asked us to consider Mongolia and told us they needed someone there with our strengths. Our years there provided amazing opportunities. Some agreements we negotiated with the Mongolian government were possible only

61 % [of Boomers] say they would change careers if they found something more compelling.

**Don Parrott
Finisher's Project**



because I was older. Age is so respected there.

I also would recommend that missions pastors take along a potential second-career worker when they visit the field. These people usually have more vacation and discretionary time to make short-term trips. Their life experiences can provide objective insights that can benefit both those who have been sent and those sending. It can be life changing.

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**Tom Walsh
Church of the Saviour**



Tom Walsh, missions pastor, Church of the Saviour, Wayne, PA: We are working on setting up a database that tracks our members' skill sets, professions, the languages they speak, etc. Then when a particular need comes to our attention, we can make the match.

Our approach to recruiting second career people is that we make a lot of noise about the options and try to put down rails for them to run on. We look for actionable things for them to do—whether that means staying here and getting involved long distance, or going for a week or a couple months, or moving overseas for extended time. At one point, we put up a display presenting a host of different professions being used in missions.

The head of a new business-as-missions effort is part of our church, and we have invited him to engage our people in any way he can. One venue where he is effectively connecting with our businessmen is at our Saturday breakfasts.

Sometimes the most difficult aspect is getting people on the field to think creatively about how they can use the incredibly talented and skilled people sitting in our church. We welcome opportunities and requests.

Phylliss Hammerstrom, missions team member, Hudson

(OH) Chapel: Our church has an “Executive Transition” program helping unemployed or underemployed people find jobs. We can use this venue to talk about what these experienced, mature people could do in missions. Listing priority missions needs on a jobs board might help put missions on the radar screen of those currently seeking employment.

A quarterly tea during our third worship service is a place where people can meet the Global Outreach team and indicate interest in missions. We also have launched a once-a-month dinner club where people interested in global engagement can hear from agencies, meet guest missionaries, and pray and encourage each other. This year we hope to sponsor a Finishers Forum to educate Boomers in our region about missions. All three of these are great avenues for grabbing the attention of second career prospects.

Postings: ARE THE CRITERIA DIFFERENT FOR IDENTIFYING OLDER POTENTIAL CANDIDATES AS COMPARED TO THOSE IN THEIR 20S AND 30S? WHAT INDICATES THEY WILL DO WELL OR NOT WELL IN A CROSS-CULTURAL SETTING?

TJ, missions pastor in California: As we get older, we have certain ideas of how things should be done. People who do best in missions are flexible. They have an open mind, even if they have been on their career path for 20 or 30 years. They are open as to how they will use their skills or education wherever they go.

We had one second-career couple who did poorly because they were too rigid in the way they lived their lives and in their profession. And they wanted too many answers about how everything was going to happen. Missionaries have to be people who can let go and believe that God is going to take care of things. In this case, our church failed to define this tendency in the interview process. We probably were not as critical in our evaluation because we wanted them to go so badly. In hindsight, we realized that there were warning signs we should have noted.

Another second career couple is doing really well because they went into it with the attitude, “Whatever it is, it is, and we will adapt.” We also were more careful in our preparation with them, and they joined an agency that screened them more thoroughly.

Teenage children must be in agreement with their parents’ decision to go.

**Stephanie Korb
Church of the Saviour**



Don Parrott: As far as selection goes, one of the advantages of sending second-career workers is that the church has had a chance to watch them and observe their track record. Do they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit? What is their attitude in working with others? What are their values?

Put missions on the radar screen of those currently seeking employment.

**Phylliss Hammerstrom
Hudson Community Chapel**



Mike Gallagher, second career worker and director of Wycliffe Bible Translator’s National Finishers Office: I believe the bottom line is: Are the prospective workers living a spiritually mature Christian life?

What do their relationships reveal about their character? Is there pride and rebellion or servants’ hearts? What is their real passion and vision? What is their prayer life and Bible study like? How are they reacting to and ministering to the people God puts in their path?

Jim Baumgardner: Another clue—do they gravitate to those of other cultures or do they seem to have an us/them mentality? Be wary if they have all of the answers or are characterized by conflicts in their relationships.

Stephanie Korb, missions staff, Church of the Saviour, Wayne, PA: Another important factor for some mid-life candidates is teenage children. They must be in agreement with their parents’ decision to go. We are in the process of sending out one second career couple with a 13-year-old daughter, and in order to go, it was essential that the entire family was united about moving overseas. Another family had several teenagers who were on board with going, but they needed to come up with the right educational alternative for each of them. A third couple decided to wait until their youngest child left for college.

Postings: WHAT ARE THE HURDLES THAT DISCOURAGE POTENTIAL SECOND-CAREER CANDIDATES FROM CONSIDERING OR APPLYING FOR MISSIONS? CAN CHURCHES HELP OVERCOME THEM?

Don Parrott: I talk about the five “f’s.” Far and away the biggest issue is **faith**. They wonder, “Can I really trust God in this unknown world called missions?” Churches can help by asking penetrating questions that bring people face to face with what they really are trusting. If a person’s heart is right, he/she can wrestle through it. The bottom line is—it’s all about faith, faith, faith. Once they have cleared that hurdle, almost all of the others are diminished. In fact most of them are variations on the faith question.

Fear is the second factor, and it is growing because of world situations. Terrorists. Money. Health. We need to challenge them to trust God, not the infrastructure.

Finances is the third factor. It's easy to trust God when there is a paycheck coming in, but when you have to trust God to provide through His people, it's a step of faith. There are various resources that are helpful. Randy Alcorn's, *The Treasure Principle*, is a good starting place.

The fourth area we see is **family** concerns. We'll talk more about that later.

And last is the area of **fit**. "What will I do?" Many still have the mentality that they need theological training and a church-planting platform, but one of the joys we have is helping them see that they have valuable skill sets God wants to use around the world. They already have the right training. Here is where agencies can help. There are a thousand possibilities.

Tom Keppeler, missions pastor, Elmbrook (WI) Church: Practicalities are what hold people back. Some begin exploring missions with the assumption they will get a salary. When you unpack the faith-based paradigm of support raising, it is a shock. Some still have kids in college or just going into college, and that complicates decisions.

But if God gets a hold of them, they will respond and commit. We recently had one man in his early 50s who was a successful HR manager. He is cross-culturally gifted, and as energetic and flexible as any 20-year-old. He was involved in outreach here and has held leadership roles. If every case were like that, it would be easy.

Some adults have attitudes to overcome like, "I'm not good at learning languages." They may have self perceptions that they need to "unlearn"; this can be challenging.

Mike Gallagher: Second-career people want to be valued for their first-half contributions and not micro-managed by the church or agency. They want to be free to be creative in their role. Church leaders can turn them off by not respecting them, not celebrating them, and not giving them value. The Boomer does not want to be put in a box.

TJ: Elderly parents are frequently an issue, and you have to have an open, frank discussion. How will the workers respond if there is a major health issue? Come back at the first sign of illness? Get on a plane if there is a major crisis? Say goodbye before they go? Plan ahead of time to make frequent trips home? The missionary, the church, and the agency need to face all that up front and not assume "we'll cross that bridge when we get to it" because it affects not just the missionary's work but his/her team, field, national coworkers, etc.

Health concerns can affect anyone, but second-career workers are more likely to have issues. For example, can they

easily get their medications in the country where they will serve? Again, the issues need to be addressed in advance.

Second career people want to be valued for their first-half contributions and not micro-managed.

Mike Gallagher
Wycliffe Bible Translators



Steve Aldrich, missions pastor, Pulpit Rock Church and missionary, OC International: This is the sandwich generation—concerned about aging parents and children having babies. I sit down with prospective workers and talk about the fact that there may be other family members who can step up to the plate and assist with aging parents. They may be the oldest child or named as the executor of their parents' estate, but often there are others who can step in if God is calling them to go.

Postings: MOST SECOND-CAREER CANDIDATES HAVE MATURITY AND LIFE SKILLS. BUT HOW DO YOU EVALUATE WHETHER THEY ARE READY TO GO CROSS CULTURALLY?

TJ: You need to make sure that they are spiritually prepared without assuming that just because they have been in the church all of their lives they are ready. Even if they are going in a support role, they are witnesses, not just people who hibernate in an office. Say you are an accountant in a missions office, as soon as you leave the building, you are a missionary interacting with nationals and you need to be able to evangelize your neighbors, just as you should be doing at home.

Jacque Baumgardner: Before we became missionaries, we were involved with international student ministry and taught English at a local refugee center. We spearheaded the

adoption of a people group through our Sunday school class. These were great preparation. We also did both cross-cultural training and language acquisition training at Missions Training Institute in Colorado, and we recommend that sort of preparation to everyone, regardless of their age and experience.

Watch them interact, especially with internationals. Do they really listen and dialog?

Tom Kelly
PIONEERS



Tom Keppeler: Cross-cultural trips can help, although it is one thing to go for 10 days but very different to live there. Agencies have various assessment instruments, and these tests can prove helpful, but much of it comes down to knowing your people and seeing them operate.

Tom Kelly: I would add, watch them interact, especially with internationals. Are they open to people of any color and culture? Do they really listen to them and dialog with them? Condescension is a danger sign.



Steve Aldrich: They need to be prepared to work in a multi-generational context, and this involves understanding themselves first. A Finisher will want a job description, weekly meetings, tracking, and monitoring. A Millennial doesn't want any of that. Second career people will love what they do, but their greatest frustration will come from working with others. They can't go with a sense of entitlement or arrogance. Are they teachable? I want to have seen that lived out in ministry in the local church first.

Don Parrott: One danger I warn about is short-circuiting cross-cultural training and adaptation time. Often second career workers have desperately needed skills, and they get put right into ministry. Then they burn out on the cross-cultural issues. For instance, rather than giving them time to learn language, they are encouraged to work in English, but this increases stress. I am a big proponent of paying the price to learn language. Older people will probably struggle, but even if they learn just a minimal amount, the cultural understanding that comes with it will be huge.

Interchange Postings

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