

Second Career Workers -2 Mobilizing the Boomer Generation

In the first part of this article, we addressed issues relating to recruiting cross-cultural workers who have already been settled in a lifestyle and career. Once they decide to get involved with missions, these Baby Boomers and Builders, in their mid-40s or older, also have different issues and needs than those who are sent in their 20s and 30s.

This second and last part of our series addresses how churches can assist second career workers enjoy successful ministry. We conclude with some practical questions for churches and agencies.

Postings: HOW DOES A CHURCH HELP OLDER CANDIDATES EVALUATE WHETHER AN AGENCY IS A GOOD MATCH FOR SECOND CAREER WORKERS?

Don Parrott, Finishers Project: Talk to second-career people already serving in those agencies. Would they recommend others do it with their group? Ask about the agency's flexibility on rules and policies on such things as coming home for aging parents. Do they take into consideration life experience when evaluating readiness or is it one-size-fits-all training requirements? Are their application forms and screening process life-stage appropriate?

Tom Keppeler, Elmbrook Church: Second career people have been around organizations, so they understand that none are perfect, and therefore they tend to be less idealistic. However, you have to help them consider the culture of the organization, and the alignment of geography, calling, and ministry.

Steve Aldrich, Pulpit Rock Church: The issue isn't the agency, but the individual's fit with the agency. I describe choosing an agency like buying a pair of jeans. It's all about the personal fit. Here's where a missions pastor or other mobilizer who knows agencies can help.

Mike Gallagher, Wycliffe: I suggest 10 hints for choosing an agency:

1. Are they true to God's Word in policy and action?
2. Are they directed by an independent board, or by one person or family—a situation that may lead to control issues?
3. Does the vision/passion match your own?
4. Can you join with a given skill set and change to a different area later on?
5. What is their policy on visiting parents or grandchildren?
6. What is their leadership style? Their social and economic "culture"?
7. Can you serve with this agency and be who God intended you to be?
8. Do you agree theologically with them?
9. What is the agency's view on money, support, and strategy?
10. What do their members say about the agency?

Postings: ARE THERE ISSUES THAT SECOND-CAREER WORKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER ON THE FIELD THAN THEIR COLLEAGUES WHO ARRIVE AT A YOUNGER AGE?

BQ, second-career worker: On the field, you discover you aren't as young as you thought you were! As you get older, you tend to have less energy and optimism, and it is harder to adjust to a different culture and learn a new language. For women, there are change-of-life issues that can affect their memory and abilities in different ways.

Older workers are dealing with aging parents, maybe missing the birth of grandchildren back home, etc. Just the fact of having to start over building credibility when you have already been an experienced professional is difficult. You have to learn that God uses the weak and the powerless and the foolish. You know those Scriptures but you have to go through the process of being broken and realize you aren't bringing anything. You are like a baby when you first get there. Slowly you learn to trust God to accomplish His work through you.

Help them consider the culture of the organization, and the alignment of geography, calling, and ministry.

**Tom Keppeler
Elmbrook Church**



For us, leaving our history behind was hard. What I mean is, you get to the field and nobody knows about all of your life experiences. Over time, you share it, but in certain ways, the person you were is left behind. You lose your identity, and that is hard. At the same time, second career people bring so much to the field—maturity and stability that helps them not get shaken as easily as those who are younger.

TJ: Second-career people may not realize how much community they enjoy at home. Younger people generally don't have as deep roots, but older workers may be more dependent on their friends and relatives than they realize. Then they go to a place where they are perfect strangers to everyone. Of course, they develop relationships over time, but leaving a lifetime of relationships can be difficult. It's more than just missing the kids and grandkids. It's the connection to the church, even to a worship service.

Another blindsiding issue: Second-career people can get disillusioned if they discover that missionaries are not as spiritual as they thought. Here they are giving the rest of their lives to this cause, and they have to deal with pettiness, jealousy, personality conflicts, etc. It can be demoralizing.

Especially for people who have been in management-level roles with subordinates, it can be difficult to go overseas and not have a leadership position. Here's where flexibility comes in. You may know a better way to do something, but you aren't the one in charge. You will have to earn the respect of people before you start suggesting changes.

Failure or seeming failure can weigh on people. Sometimes younger workers can feel this pressure more, but older missionaries may see themselves as having less time to make a difference. We may need to help them put a new definition on success and failure.

Mike Gallagher: Second career people may think they are spiritually mature and their church may see them as that, but on the field they may be confronted by unresolved personal conflicts and stress from past spiritual bondages that were never resolved. Churches need to help them get rid of the barriers that keep them from being fully what Christ wants them to be.

Tom Kelly, PIONEERS: I was heavily into time management when I went to the field, and that does not work very well in Asia. The Lord took me through a process of learning to walk by the Spirit rather than being so concerned about the clock. Churches need to be sensitive to these types of les-

They need to be prepared to work in a multi-generational context.... They can't go with a sense of entitlement.

Steve Aldrich
Pulpit Rock Church



sons and pray with the individuals as they wrestle with adjustments. The enemy works in unusual ways and often uses something from our past. Issues are best addressed with the three-strand cord approach—missionary, church, and agency together. Problems arise when someone tries to pit one partner against another.

BJ, second-career worker: There can be team clashes and conflicts, but in general I have seen second career people integrate pretty well. It depends a lot on the team leader and the second career workers' willingness to prayerfully and humbly see how they can switch roles to be learners, even in situations where the team leader may be their children's age. At the same time, they need to realize they have something very valuable to offer.

Don Parrott: Another frustration is seeing how inefficiently things are done sometimes. That throws a lot of people, especially if they have been in management roles. Cultural training is important because older workers intuitively get a lot of things but they may not know how or when to bring up issues. They may keep quiet and it gnaws at them, or they may say something too soon or incorrectly. Cross-cultural training can help them process issues appropriately for the context.

Postings: ARE THERE CERTAIN TYPES OF MISSIONARY CARE NEEDS UNIQUE TO OLDER WORKERS?

TJ: Staying connected is important for everyone at every age. Especially during the first six months or year they are on the field, keep in almost weekly contact so that you are really feeling the pulse of what is going on in their lives. Don't assume that since they are mature people if you have not heard from them in two weeks that everything is going okay. It probably isn't, but they don't want to tell you!

Mike Gallagher: A church could recruit a mentor or coach to be a loving bridge between the missionary and the church. Depending on needs, this person could look after their house, property, or investments, or they could monitor family needs and perhaps even liaison with doctors.



Don Parrott: Seemingly small things can make a huge difference. For example, a church could consider helping grandkids to buy a ticket to visit their grandparents on the field. It's a valuable investment in both workers and their grandchildren.

Phyllis Hammerstrom, Hudson Community Chapel: Churches can help workers think through retirement plans, health care issues (including medical evacuation), and end-

Integration...depends a lot on...the second career workers' willingness to prayerfully and humbly see how they can switch roles to be learners.

BJ
Second-career worker

of-life issues (such as where they want to be buried should they die on the field). They may appreciate your willingness to help them discuss these sensitive issues with family members, as well as process with them important information like their agency's hostage policy. Agencies may do this, but churches should not assume they have covered it all sufficiently.

BQ, second-career worker: The emotional and spiritual

support of our sending team [some-times called a Barnabas or advocate team] has been huge for us. This team can be

The emotional and spiritual support of our sending team has been huge for us.... They are filling in "in our place" there at home.

BQ
Second-career worker

made of friends you have had through the years who know you, your children, probably your parents. They are committed to you and to filling in "in your place" there at home.

They are beside your children when they face difficulties or holidays alone. They give you security because they are going to be your hands and your feet back home. For me, there was a sense of relief that I didn't have to wonder, "What are my loved ones not telling me? What is really the state of things back there?" The church can help set up such teams and encourage them.



Discussion Starters

For Churches

1. How could you better assess the second-career missions potential in your congregation? Should you utilize a survey to collect data on skills, experience, languages, etc.? How could you identify those willing to consider a short- or longer-term assignment?
2. Do you send your members overseas only as teams, or do (could) you send individuals or couples to complete a specific task? Is your congregation aware of this option?
3. Do you have unemployed but highly qualified people in your church who could fulfill a much needed short-term role in a global setting? How could you make it financially possible for them to go?
4. What are one or two ways you could communicate to "second-half" adults the exciting possibilities of using their gifts in some type of missions service?
5. Have you asked your current missionaries to identify ways they could use older adults to assist in their ministry—for one week, two weeks, a month, six months, two years, or more?
6. Do you currently have a list of priority second-career personnel needs from a trusted agency, and are you and your missions team praying about which needs could be filled by a person from your congregation?
7. How could you expose your congregation to multiple personal stories of people who went to the field as second career workers? Sometimes the "how we got there" story may be just as important for your congregation to hear than the "what we are doing there" sto-

ry.

8. Have you assumed that second career workers are mature and need less missionary care? How could you be more proactive in discovering their current struggles and ministering to them? For instance, do you have missionaries with aging parents? In what practical ways could you be of help?

For Agencies

1. How could you help each field, team, and individual worker to creatively envision ways to use second-career personnel in roles that would require a few days, a few weeks, or several years?
2. What multiple means could you use to communicate second-career opportunities to churches?
3. Are there ways you could be more flexible in shaping roles to fit second career applicants? Are you aware of the areas in which potential candidates are discouraged by what they interpret as inflexibility?
4. Some second career candidates apply to several organizations and are frustrated by the need to complete multiple, laborious applications. Would you be willing to accept the forms of other agencies?
5. How can you assist local churches to proactively recruit second-career workers? Should you distribute copies of this issue of *Postings*?



6. How can your agency and sending churches collaborate to make it possible for second career appointees to raise support while meeting their family and financial obligations?
7. Could you give more visibility on your website and in your in-house publications to the role of second career workers? Should you give space to highlight the story of how God moved them from a settled lifestyle at home to a global ministry and how they overcame the obstacles to make that shift?
8. Are your younger team leaders sensitive to the challenges faced by older members of their team who come with an extensive background of experience? How can you better prepare them to deal with inter-generational issues on their team? How can you encourage them to fully utilize the skills and perspective of second career volunteers?

Interchange Postings

Catalyst's **Postings** e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

Don't miss future issues!

To subscribe to future issues of this FREE e-newsletter, go to www.catalystservices.org/postings.

Want to read more?

Find all the past *Postings* at www.catalystservices.org/postings-gallery-of-archives/

Contact us

To ask questions, suggest future topics, change your email address, or unsubscribe to this monthly publication, email info@catalystservices.org.

© 2009 Catalyst Services, Inc.