

BOOMERS, BUSTERS, AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE UNREACHED PEOPLES

■ How well will the younger generation be integrated into the older mission agencies wanting to focus on the unreached peoples? The unique characteristics of this huge force of American young people gives one both hope and pause as one considers the outcome.

By Annette Elder

Introduction of Annette Elder

Part of our objective in this year's meeting is to try to make a link between a younger generation and an older generation. I don't know if that's an artificial link or not but there's a lot been written lately about the babyboomers and now the babybusters. Annette Elder, our next keynote address is kind of a babyboomer. I say kind of because I'm not sure if to be a babyboomer you have to be born in the United States, and she wasn't. She was born in India from Australian parents. They were missionaries in India and, then, Ian North, some of you may know that name, brought his family to the United States since they were establishing Ambassadors for Christ International. Annette Elder is Ian North's daughter. We're also glad to have her as part of Caleb project. Annette graduated from Colombia Biblical Seminary. She is currently the interim director of Caleb Project's Follow Through ministry. To me, I would introduce her as a faithful friend who humbly reflects Christ.

— Greg Fritz, emcee

Introduction

We're all here because we're interested in frontier missions—in reaching the unreached peoples. Most of us are spending a lot of our time calling for a whole new wave of workers, manpower and funds to be directed towards the least evangelized—the unreached segments of the world. We've done all the estimations of how many young Christians there are in the world, how many workers would be needed, and what the resources are. We've come up with promising possibilities that we

have everything we need to complete world evangelization. In his book *Baby-Boomers in the future of world missions*, James Engel writes that he believes that in spite of the growing contributions from the two-thirds world, much of the weight of manpower and funding will still fall on the western churches as in this decade we try to accelerate evangelization toward completion. If that's true then it's vital that we consider our younger generations and consider how to maximize that contribution. We need to be asking if they will fulfill the commitments, goals and dreams we have for this decade. Will they become the active contributors needed to accelerate world evangelization to completion?

Engel expresses a realistic concern about this. He fears today's frontier missions challenges will not be realized because the generation which has led the missionary efforts of the last decade will not be able to adjust sufficiently and soon enough to the differences of the younger generation, thus failing to incorporate them in the task. The differences in the generations are so significant, that as I have considered them, I can't see the younger generations being incorporated with just a few minor adjustments. It is my thesis that fundamental changes are required in the missions industry if we are to attract, harness, and release the contribution of today's younger generation to frontier missions.

Why am I dealing with this topic? It's coming on five years that I've been working in mobilization of students. Caleb Project has worked to mobilize this generation to the unreached over the last ten years. Caleb Project was formed in the beginning of the eighties,

and throughout the eighties we've worked to mobilize this younger generation specifically to unreached people. We've seen surges of missions interest. We've seen prayer groups started on campuses. In *World Christian* magazine in 1986, there was an article that told of a swelling movement of students interested in training for missionary work. The article gave statistics and charts of this great increase in missions interest among students. Today those students are in their late twenties and early thirties. Since the average new missionary candidate these days is thirty-two, rather than twenty-three like they were maybe twenty years ago, most of this group should be moving into mission agencies now. But are we seeing that corresponding surge into the mission agencies and to the unreached? We are sensing that we aren't. From all we've seen in relationships with the young people that we help move into frontier missions, there has not been that corresponding surge. Instead, mission agencies are experiencing lower numbers of new candidates. We see a lot of people get interested in frontier missions and start moving along. They build their vision. They consider unreached people. They pray through the *Global prayer digest* and then they struggle to find an agency that they feel comfortable with. They are turning away from traditional mission agencies. Some of them are probably going to find a contemporary mission agency that is just being started. Some of them, a lot of them, are getting lost. They aren't signing up because they can't find something that really is comfortable for them.

Our experience has caused us to

agree with Engel's concern that mission agencies and mobilizers must seek to understand this generation or face serious consequences in our efforts to reach the unreached people. First let us look briefly at the characteristics and potential of this younger generation. Second let us examine the extent of the differences between them and what Engel calls "the maturity generation". (Basically those over fifty). Third, let us ask what change must take place and how it might take place.

First of all, who is this younger generation? This generation is probably the most researched, most analyzed, most known generation that there has been—because of their size. Baby boomers were born, most people say, between the years of 1946 and 1964, making them now twenty-six to forty-four years old. The birth rate during those years was double the birth rate in the thirties, producing the seventy-six or seventy-seven million population, a third of the population of the United States right now.

This generation is divided into two major groups that have enough differences to be considered separate. The elder boomers, born from '46 to '55 are now thirty-six to forty-four and the younger boomers, born from '55 to '64, are now twenty-six to thirty-five. The phrase that's often said about this generation is "where they go, so goes the nation". Because of their enormous size they transform every aspect of society as they move up in society.

The twenty something generation or the baby busters are the babies of the older baby boomers. They were born 1961 to 1972 so they are currently eighteen to twenty-nine. They number about forty-eight million.

Of course, we can't limit everyone to these age breaks and say that all these characteristics will be true of them. For example, some boomers won't reflect all the characteristics we're going to go through but some fifty-eight year olds will.

Some key descriptive words and phrases of these generations are,

- *Fractured families.* About twenty-five percent of them have parents who are divorced. This has resulted in what's also been called the *dysfunctional generation*. Not that everyone's dysfunctional but many in this generation struggle with in-

securities, a tendency to want to be in control of things, and some major emotional problems and wounds that they have to work through. Inter Varsity, earlier this year, did a study on the dysfunctional generation. One staff worker said this may be the most significant problem facing Inter Varsity today. They are re-gearing and re-approaching in order to deal with students that to a large degree are struggling with emotional abuse and fractured family problems

- *Skeptical.* This generation is one who has seen political and social and even religious institutions fail. They've seen a lot of their heroes fail morally, financially, physically, etc. They want to really know you before they can trust you. They want to know the people in your organization before they can trust the organization.

- *Process oriented.*

- *Holistic.*

- *Networking.*

- *Enormous.* The boomers have tremendous potential for manpower, while the busters are going to cause a tremendous labor shortage as they move into their 30's. They are going to have a great impact as companies and people will be vying for their attention. How is the mission cause going to do in the battle for their attention?

- *Flexible* is an important word to describe this group.

- *Experiential.* They like to see truth and claims demonstrated. They don't trust great claims of what you're accomplishing unless they have realistic evidence of it.

- *Single.* By the year 2000 half of the adult population will be single, and most of those will never have been married.

- *Loyal to individuals not institutions.* Their primary loyalty is to individuals and relationships. They see the individual as the primary resource in task accomplishment, and therefore individual care and development.

- *Relational and community oriented.* One of their biggest fears, according to Engel, is fear of isolation in missions; fear of going single or going alone; or of not

being with a team. Caleb project did a survey of Calebites, those who have signed the Caleb Declaration committing to involvement in completing world evangelization. Currently we have about a thousand Calebites that are actively writing to us from these age groups. In that survey, Calebites said relationships were the greatest hindrance keeping them from getting to the mission field. It was that important to them.

- *An inward focus.* World crises, the federal deficit, and social problems nearby have caused them to look inward. They tend to be interested in local and domestic concerns and ministries and not so much in overseas concerns and ministries. Few considered overseas missions as important. Less than ten percent in Engel's survey considered it important, whereas within the maturity generation eighty percent would say that it was important.

- *Wealthy.* The boomers are the wealthiest generation that there has been. The busters will not be quite as wealthy. They have to struggle a little more financially.

- *Innovative.* They value differences. They like both teamwork and flexible structures so that innovation might be released.

- *Indecisive and slow to commit.* They like a lot of options. They like to test out the options before they really commit. They like to know the people in the options before they commit.

- *High tech.*

- *Multiethnic.* By the year 2000, twenty-five percent of the U.S.A will be Asian, black or Hispanic.

Busters are different than the boomers. Among busters there is an increasing scorn for boomer values and habits. There is a decreased interest in materialism, designer labels, and drugs. They do not want to be called yuppies. They don't want to reflect yuppie values. They look for something deeper.

Busters also lack role models. A survey in *Time* magazine showed that few of them had any heroes. The most popular hero was Ronald Reagan, and only eight percent chose him. The busters are working to change the family patterns that they grew up in.

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They do not want to follow the patterns of their parents. They're geared less towards starting new things and more towards fixing things. They feel like they've inherited so many social problems, they don't know where to start and rather than start new things, they just want to fix and improve. Although overwhelmed with social problems, they are showing increasing interest in social services and efforts—especially where their efforts make a demonstrable difference.

The buster generation is not so large and not so wealthy. They carry significant financial debts. About five years ago, as we sent out our monthly forms to Calebites we asked them about their debt. We asked if their debt was less than or more than \$5,000. Now, that is an inappropriate question to ask. We're finding we have to ask if their debt is less than or more than \$15,000. Now it's not uncommon for us to have students writing in and telling us they have \$20,000 and \$30,000 debts. In our survey, young adults that we assist said debt was their second greatest felt-hindrane to going to the mission field. Students are asking us if any mission agencies take students with debt. It is a hard issue but something we must face and deal with.

The third greatest hindrance felt by Calebites was family and parents. Either they are attached to their families and parents or their parents disagree with their missionary ambitions.

We've looked at basic characteristics of these younger generations. Let's turn now to look at the major differences between these generations and the maturity generation.

I've enclosed the chart above for quick reference. I took the basic idea for this comparison out of a book titled *Help I'm a Baby Boomer* by Hans Finzel. I've adapted it, including characteristics of the busters and clarifying some points.

Let me stress just a few key points of difference. In terms of individual power, the maturity generation functions mostly on positional power while the contemporary respects personal power. The maturity generation uses hierarchical structures versus the networks of teams or working groups found in contemporary structures. In Naisbitt's new book he talks about the chief executive officers of the

<u>Contrasting views of leadership and management</u>		
	<u>Maturity Generation*</u>	<u>Contemporary</u>
Individual Power	Positional	Personal
Structure	Hierarchical	Network of teams
Focus of loyalty	Institution	People
Style	Structured	Flexible, ambiguous
Source of energy	Stability	Change and innovation
Leadership	Dogmatic/authoritative	Inspirational/facilitative
Leader	Order giver	Coach, teacher, facilitator
Quality	Affordable best	Excellence
Expectations	Security?	Personal growth
Status	Title and rank	Making a difference
Resources	Cash	Information
	Time	People/networks
Motivation	Complete a task	Build people

*Those who today are over 50 or so are referred to as the maturity generation.

future being a team rather than one person. The focus of loyalty for the maturity generation is on institutions, while boomers and busters focus their loyalty on people. The contemporary groups value ambiguity and flexibility because they can release innovation.

Dave Daugherty, of OMF, believes these differences are reflected in mission agencies. According to him there are basically two kinds of mission agencies today—traditional and contemporary.

Most of today's agencies would fit in the traditional category. They are usually strong in experience and resources. The contemporary agencies are young, inexperienced, innovative and few. Church Resource Ministries is a typical example of a contemporary agency. It's list of corporate values might be uncomfortable to those of the maturity generation, while being very attractive to younger boomers and busters (see box to the right).

Traditional agencies have both good and bad news when it comes to today's younger generations. The good news is that the boomers are large, wealthy and educated. They are a large potential resource. And both boomers and busters are willing to volunteer and contribute when given a cause. They are innovative or at least improvers. According to Engel, younger boomers who are spiritually alive demonstrate more awareness and more willingness to volunteer self than older boomers.

The bad news for traditional agencies, according to Dave Daugherty, is three fold. First, the institutional loyalty they have relied on for retaining

workers and supporters won't work with the younger generations. Instead teams, relationships with people they respect, vision and clear strategy are what draws and retains this generation.

Second, short term thinking conflicts with the structure and mode of most traditional agencies; yet Engel and Jones say it is now one of the most effective ways to raise potential for volunteering

<u>Corporate Values of Church Resource Ministries</u>
<i>Ambiguity</i> – We shy from structure, limits and inhibitions
<i>Tolerance of Diversity</i> (theologically, in methods to accomplish calling)
<i>Decentralization</i> – to facilitate entrepreneurial freedom
<i>Risk</i> – willing to experiment in order to be effective; failure is allowed.
<i>An Independent and Entrepreneurial spirit</i> – valuing the differences between us as sources for innovation.
<i>Teachable, Ever Learning Attitude</i>
<i>Holistic Understanding and Appreciation of Spiritual Power</i>
<i>Incarnational Ministry</i> – Hands on
<i>Priority of Persons</i> – as organization's most precious commodity.
<i>Reproduction</i>
<i>Spontaneity in decision-making</i> – Flexibility

and giving. Those agencies that fail to make it a priority investment will suffer, they say. Short terms are usually felt to be an interruption to the missionaries, something that is squeezed into the program. It will take a retraining of the grass-roots missionary's mind to value it.

A third point of bad news for traditional agencies is that boomer and buster characteristics collide head on with the agencies. This lowers the labor pool of those who they can successfully recruit from.

A letter to OMF from a candidate illustrates the clash of cultures. The letter explains reasons for withdrawing his membership application: "First, the structure of the mission would be very uncomfortable for both (wife's name) and me. The 'top-down' leadership style would be particularly difficult to deal with since we both like to be intimately involved in decisions which affect our lives. We do not feel we would be able to make the adjustments necessary for that type of leadership."

I experience the same kind of clash in many interactions with younger people interested in missionary service. A few weeks ago, eight alumni from a short term to Asia sat in our living room talking about their desires to work among the least evangelized. Discussing their steps and obstacles, one asked, "What do you all do about mission agencies? I mean we feel like we just don't fit into any of them!" All nodded in agreement as she continued to express her struggle, ". . . Why is it important to go with an agency anyway?" We discussed the importance of agencies, but most shared in the discouragement about finding those they felt they would be released in.

Another younger boomer went on a two-year term with a respected traditional agency. He worked under a field leadership that strongly characterized the maturity generation's model. Back at home he shared with a few friends his perspective of the time. He had felt a lack of being developed as a worker. It distressed him that the work at hand seemed of higher value to the leaders than developing the individuals. He felt crushed in their order-giving style of leadership. Whereas he had hoped to find his fit, he did not fit.

I give these examples only to illustrate the differing values and perspectives. Much of the dissonance between

the generations is due to a cultural difference in which biblical aims and principles are carried out differently. The point is not to show which culture is better, but to show that it is different. And since the younger generation is the one to which we are looking for frontier missions manpower and support in the coming years, the mission industry faces a problem unless we contextualize our structures and leadership to them.

I summarize younger Christians' views of mission agencies as follows. They shrink from the more centralized and bureaucratic; they are afraid they will be directed rather than listened to. They want to be included in decisions about their lives. They are afraid of being expected to fit into a mold rather than being treated as individuals with something unique to contribute. They prefer agencies that demonstrate a value in field team relationships, needing to know they will be part of a team.

Their value for relationships will lead them to more readily join an or-

ganization with which they have personal contact rather than impersonal. It will also make it hard for them to venture into new territories where no team is part of the package. Although there is interest in the unreached, this generation finds few agencies that will help them get to the unreached with a team. This is a generation that will more readily join a cause if they understand the rationale and strategy, vision, significance and their contribution to it.

This generation won't be won by the old methods. They aren't going to be attracted to the existing structures; few will sign up unless things change; the majority of those who do will not be comfortable in existing structures and won't remain. If traditional agencies don't adjust, the boomers and busters will either find a contemporary agency (of which there are still relatively few), start another one, or forget the whole thing.

The mission industry must adjust, as difficult as it may be, to this generation. The question remains, "Can we adjust

One traditional agency that is attempting to make the fundamental changes necessary if OMF. This is what they are doing.

1. Teach OMF personnel to look at the differing generational perspectives as cultural differences, not necessarily right or wrong. For example, boomers are loyal to people and personal relationships hold them together. The maturity generation is loyal to institutions. Boomers may judge the maturity generation as sacrificing people for the organization, while the maturity generation condemns the younger for not being loyal to anything but themselves.
2. Welcome change—Welcoming boomers into organization to help it keep pace with the times.
3. Welcome boomers and teaching them how to fit into existing agencies and contribute. Help them to see the un-named teams that do exist. Train and release them in *intrapreneuring*.
4. Release people to try new things and fail
5. Change their communication image. This lets boomers know we're interested in them, their innovation, and their value of excellence.
6. Recognize dysfunctional realities. Recruit out of churches. They tend to deal more holistically with individuals than schools do. In churches individuals have a chance to be in relationships and mature.
7. Develop relationships with the younger generation, both personally and corporately. Establish corporate strategic alliances (formal and informal) with contemporary organizations.

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methods sufficiently and soon enough to capture the potential of this generation?" Minor adjustment won't work, major changes are required. Changing language, terms, and the look isn't going to be enough. The Chinese people living in Thailand learn to speak Thai but are still Chinese in culture. A change as deep as culture would have to occur for Thai people to be comfortable with them. In the same way, fundamental changes on a cultural level are needed within the missions industry. Such changes deal with structure, leadership styles and management.

That is a difficult endeavor! I'm no expert in changing corporate cultures; but from a recent study on corporate cultures I know it isn't easy to change them. Many experts on this subject write that it is impossible. Traditional mission structures have a lot of inertia due to their size and age. It is hard for them to change directions, not to mention corporate culture and leadership models.

Can the majority of agencies today make sufficient adjustments soon enough to capture the potential of the boomers and busters. We asked this question to Dave Daugherty, of OMF. His response was hopeful, and went on to tell us ways that OMF is actively working to do just that (See figure for steps OMF is taking).

If indeed it is possible for traditional agencies to become relevant to the younger generations, what adjustments might it mean?

1. Decentralize to involve them and include them in decisions. Hierarchical structures need to be replaced with work groups. Instead of decisions being made behind closed doors by the few at the top, include the people at the grass roots doing the job. The more grass roots the processes, decisions and work, the more comfortable boomers are.
2. Provide a flexible structure rather than bureaucratic one where everyone is expected to fit into the policies, procedures, hierarchy, or positional slots.
3. Balance personal development with task accomplishment. Help people to feel they are reaching their potential and learning new skills. The individual of the upcoming generation changes him or herself first before attempt-

ing to change society.

4. Demonstrate value of process in and of itself, apart from the ends. Boomers value the integrity of the process just as much, if not more than, the integrity of the ends. The ends do not justify the means. The agency will have to slow down in some ways to do this
5. Foster a friendly and family atmosphere. This would mean a casual and less formal environment. Develop friendly leadership who use personal power more than positional power. Replace formal titles. Naisbitt gives an example of a company that changed it's titles: manager became coach, director became team leader, employees became team members. (p. 228)
6. Work in terms of committed teams. Recruit for teams to unreached. We have looked for rugged individuals to pioneer the unreached; this generation is not likely to do it as rugged individuals, but rather as rugged committed teams.
7. Lead by example, inspiring and equipping. It is WHO you are that wins and influences this generation, not your titles, achievements, or position. (Naisbitt, p. 227) Develop leaders who can work as facilitators and coaches, rather than as order givers. Motivate by keeping a sense of involvement and sense of partnership high.
8. Welcome the boomers and busters, prepared to deal with debt, dysfunctionality, and singleness
9. Mobilize and recruit minorities. For example, there are approximately 1 million Koreans in the US. The Korean Center For World Mission reports that, by conservative estimates, 30-40% of Koreans in America are Christians, attending church regularly. Mission agencies dealing with Korean American candidates are finding they raise support remarkably fast. One Wycliffe office commented that while the typical American candidate may take two years to raise support, the typical Korean American takes as little as three weeks.

Conclusion:

My main concern here is the unreached and least evangelized. Ultimately they will be the ones to remain neglected. In Engel and Jones' concluding statements, they write, "I wouldn't be surprised if the boomers in the 90s end up being one of the last major missionary thrusts out of the western world" if they are approached in relevant ways. (p.59)

If we would mobilize a whole new generation of pioneers, we would spend our time and energies wisely in understanding today's generation, communicating to them in ways they understand, and involving them in ways that will release them.

Dave Daugherty leaves us with the wise words of St. Francis of Assisi as we consider what all this means for us and our organizations, "May God grant us the courage to change what must be changed, the patience to endure what may not be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference." ■

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