

# Reaching the Baby Boomers

(or those whose birth date occurred between 1946 – 1964)

## Max/Maxine and Joe/Josephine

Max/Maxine represent those born before 1946, while Joe/Josephine represent the baby boomers. Both have different value systems and are not motivated in the same way.

The church recipe cookbook fundraiser is a classic example of the difference in these two value systems. Many churches led by Max/Maxine still try to raise money through the sale of cook-books. When Joe/Josephine do not participate by submitting recipes or purchasing cookbooks, Max/Maxine get upset and wonder why they are not committed to the church. The truth is, Joe/Josephine do not have any recipes to submit, since they seldom cook. When they do, it's in the microwave. Max/Maxine make the same mistake when they expect Joe/Josephine to bake cakes or cookies for the bake sale.

Women's groups composed of Maxines still insist on holding their studies in the morning or afternoon. Their subject is still some distant mission study. It never dawns on them that Josephine works outside the home now.

All is not well, however, with Joe/Josephine. In spite of their positives, they have one major flaw that cannot be overlooked. It is impossible to overstate their preoccupation with self. *The secret of a good ministry to Joe/Josephine is not measured by how many join your church, but by how many of them move from this preoccupation with self to a commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ.*

## Max/Maxine

Most churches have a small group of well-entrenched Super Max/Maxines. The good news is that there is usually only a few, while the bad news is that they are usually allowed to dominate and control the decision-making. This happens because church members would rather be nice and avoid controversy than to demonstrate Christian concern and ask Max/Maxine to step aside or share power. Super Max/Maxine thrive on the silence of the majority. They take that silence as support for their views. The more members involved in either converting or holding Max/Maxine accountable, the less likely they are to divide the membership or derail change.

How does a pastor cope with Super Max/Maxine? First, discover a small group of core members that understand the problem and want to do something about it. Second, the sole purpose of this group is to convert or remove Max/Maxine from power. While love is assumed, this group must understand that confrontation is inevitable.

In order to identify who Super Max/Maxine are, let's examine some of Super Max/Maxine's favorite statements:

**“It was good enough for my children.”** Super Max/Maxine never understand the need for a nicer and better nursery. Super Max/Maxine fail to realize that families have fewer children today and value quality child care. Today’s mother with only one child is very particular where she leaves that child.

**“Let’s keep the facilities clean.”** The most often excuse for not opening up the facilities to the public is the fear that people will not take care of them. Super Max/Maxine take more pride in the facilities than in the people who might be ministered to in those facilities.

**“Before we go out after new members, let’s take better care of our own members. We have so many inactives. We ought to see how many of them we can bring back into the church before we try to get more new members.”** Super Max/Maxine have no intention of taking better care of the members. If they did, they would have already done it. Super Max/Maxine know many of the inactives and know that they are not a threat to their power if they return. Their motive is to control who joins the church. They do not want a lot of strangers interfering with their well-organized church.

**“But we’ve always done it this way.”** Super Max/Maxine do not want changes for two reasons: (i) They do not know what the changes will do to their ability to control the church; and (ii) They have a great investment in their own spiritual comfort, which is fed through familiarity.

**“But the rules say . . .”** Super Max/Maxine are more concerned about following the rules than ministry to people.

**“Let’s pay the debt off first.”** Churches can mortgage their future because Super Max/Maxine are more concerned about paying off small debts than starting necessary ministries or making necessary improvements to reach new people.

**“Don’t touch those CDs.”** Most dying churches have money in the bank. Super Max/Maxine go berserk when someone suggests using that money.

**“The pastor has not been to my house in months.”** Super Max/Maxine view the pastor as their own personal chaplain. They get very upset when the pastor does not visit them regularly, even if nothing is wrong. When the pastor fails to visit regularly, Super Max/Maxine make things so uncomfortable for everyone that the pastor either gives in or faces serious consequences. Some pastors spend so much time taking care of a handful of members that there is not time for the silent majority.

**“Why must we pay someone?”** Super Max/Maxine still think that all programs can and should be run by volunteers. Super Max/Maxine have not considered that in most households both spouses work outside the home.

**The primary tool for reaching Max/Maxine is to appeal to their sense of duty and obligation.** Max/Maxine have a strong work ethic and usually very loyal.

**Max/Maxine must understand that they carry the primary responsibility for bridge building.** *Bridge builders* must be in love with Christ and his mission more than they love themselves or their church. Bridge builders try to discover what the two generations have in common.

**The primary tool for reaching Joe/Josephine is an appeal to their compassion and their need for meaning in life.** Joe/Josephine need to discover that: (a) joy comes from living on behalf of others; (b) self-denial does not mean denial of life; and (c) compassion for others rather than commitment to the church is the goal of discipleship. In order to meet these objectives, the church needs to provide a variety of short-term ministry opportunities.

### *Operative Words for Reaching Baby Boomers*

BASICS — Churches need to return to the basics of faith and teach more Bible.

BUSY — Time is now as important as money. Joe/Josephine live fast paced lives.

CHILD CARE — Quality child care is expected.

CHOICES — Joe/Josephine have diverse lifestyles that require a wide range of options.

CONNECTEDNESS — Joe/Josephine have a deep desire to belong.

CONSULTATIVE — Planning needs to be done with Joe/Josephine, not for them.

EXPERIMENTAL — Churches need to risk trial and error.

FLEXIBLE — Joe/Josephine must see life as a process or pilgrimage rather than static and concrete.

HEROS — They have none since the death of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.

HOMEBOUND — Joe/Josephine enjoy staying at home.

INFORMAL — Formality is out in everything.

INFORMATION — Joe/Josephine expect a full disclosure in everything.

LEADERSHIP — Strong leaders attract Joe/Josephine. *Future-active leaders* are open, fast, flexible, decisive, and innovative. This leadership initiates rather than manages. It takes risks rather than maintains the status quo. It encourages people to attempt things they might not do on their own.

MAINSTREET U.S.A. — Joe/Josephine long for the warm feelings that come from small town atmosphere.

MISSIONS — More hands-on opportunities for missions means that Joe/Josephine will be involved.

NETWORKS – Joe/Josephine like to feel part of a larger community; like to work in teams.

OPPRESSION – Joe/Josephine appreciate a pastor that speaks out against oppression.

PRACTICAL – “How to” is more important than theory.

RECREATIONAL – Athletics are an everyday part of Joe/Josephine’s world.

RELATIONSHIPS – Establishing lasting relationships is a major drive.

SELF-FULFILLMENT – Search for significance is important.

SERVICE – Opportunities needed for personal involvement in service to others.

SHORT-TERM – Joe/Josephine avoid long-term commitments.

SINGLE – Many spend a large part of their lives single.

STABILITY – Pastors need to stay at one church longer.

SUNSET – Many of the traditional structures of the church need to be discontinued.

TRAVEL – Joe/Josephine travel more than any other generation.

## **Taking Aim at the Baby Boomer**

**Mainstream churches attract Joe/Josephine in two ways: Advertising and Personal invitation.**

- 1) *Two factors make advertising a necessity today: (i) People no longer attend church because of guilt or peer pressure. They attend because they want to. And (ii) Joe/Josephine’s only ideas about church are from their youth.*

Advertising needs to be informative and directed at one of their specific needs.

- 2) *The vast majority of adults attend worship the first time because they were invited by a friend, relative, or neighbor.* Some churches provide members with business cards that can be given out. They are brightly colored and easy to read. They contain the times of the services and a map showing the location of the church.

People are more responsive to attend church during ‘periods of transition’ in their life cycle (e.g., child birth, marriage, divorce, spouse’s death, children leave home).

## Feeding the Baby Boomer

The children of Max/Maxine are not found in mainstream churches for two reasons: (i) they were never personally discipled in the faith; and (ii) they were confirmed into the church rather than led to a personal relationship with Jesus.

**The secret to long-term success with Joe/Josephine is adult education that moves them from a “program-centered” faith to a “Christ-centered” faith.** They want to know what the Bible says rather than what the church says about the Bible, and they want to know how the Bible has been helpful in the lives of people they respect.

**Ministries to families with children.** One church has a camp on site all summer. A director is hired and volunteers are recruited. The first year the church held the camp for one week. Each year another week was added. Parents’ Night Out is another popular ministry. Single-parent families need special attention.

**Quality child care.** Joe/Josephine need free quality child care for every event in the church. Keep the nursery clean and uncluttered. Provide a brochure for parents, telling them how you clean the toys. Change the carpet as often as necessary to keep it clean. Infant yard signs are a winner that read: “It’s a girl. Welcome to the newest member of our church.”

**Relational youth ministries.** Youth ministries are of two types – program and relational. A youth program ministry is focused on one or two charismatic individuals. When they leave, so does the strength of the program.

Relational youth ministries are accomplished through small groupings of youth based on age. Three words describe it: (i) Youth need a place where everyone is accepted no matter how different they are. (ii) High-quality growth experiences are essential, using art, music, dance, or role play. (iii) Teens need opportunities to put their faith into practice. Work camps provide opportunities for youth to learn about themselves.

**Weekday ministries.** Many growing churches have a major week-night event preceded by a quality meal. The meal is from 5:30 to 7:00 P.M. followed by several options: (i) communion at 6:30 and home by 7:15; (ii) staying for a Bible study and being home by 8:00; (iii) or participating in choir and being home by 8:15. Parents can pick up their children and go straight to church. The meal costs between \$3.00 and \$5.00. Because many two-wage-earner families eat meals out, quality, catered meals improve attendance at most church functions.

Early morning Bible studies fill a need for many in the workplace. Men and women meet at a restaurant for food, fellowship, and a Bible study led by the pastor and are gone by 7:30 A.M.

**Hands-on, locally controlled missions.** Joe/Josephine like to choose where their money goes and to participate personally in some form of hands-on missions in the short-term. Habitat for Humanity is one example.

**Women's ministry.** Today's woman needs three things: *(i)* practical "how to" seminars in balancing career and home, parenting, health, etc.; *(ii)* powerful leadership roles that are challenging and give direction to the life of a church; and *(iii)* schedules that take into account their very busy lives.

**Quarterly Sunday school teachers.** Members sign up to teach for three or four months instead of twelve. Quarterly teachers create two problems: continuity and training. Children prefer a familiar face.

**Relationship building opportunities with God and others.** When asked why they returned to church, nearly 70 percent say it was either because of an inner need to go back to church or to rediscover their faith. Boomers are looking for churches that provide avenues for exploring the meaning of these experiences (e.g., retreats, reverse mission trips, book studies on spirituality).

## The Sunday Morning Experience

**Methods of congregational participation are changing.** Joe/Josephine participate differently than Max/Maxine. Responsive readings or long recitations of printed material do not speak to their needs. Joe/Josephine desire more spontaneous and emotional participation. They want to interact with the lives of others by clapping, singing, listening to personal testimonies.

A relevant music ministry includes five important characteristics: *(i)* variety is essential; *(ii)* quality is expected; *(iii)* pace is better than slow and quiet; *(iv)* familiarity or ease of singing is of supreme importance; and *(v)* praise choruses are acceptable.

**Membership in the church.** Because Joe/Josephine are not traditional "joiners," it can be helpful to talk about "belonging" to the church family instead of joining.

**Stress global concerns.** Joe/Josephine travel more than any other generation. They look at the total picture. Sermons, therefore, need to have a global orientation.

**Storytelling is more important today than ever before.** First-person monologues by biblical characters can be used to share the gospel story in contemporary form.

**Informality is stressed.** More and more churches are allowing the choir to sit in the congregation as a group without robes.