

FRANCHISEUpdate

ISSUE 1, 2024

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Franchising numbers spike in the US



Annual Women's Issue

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Chelsea Weitzman

EVENT PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Lillian Swenor

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Art Coley John DiJulius

William Edwards Evan Hackel

Matthew Haller Jack Monson

Paul Wilbur

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Colleen McMillar

Article Inquiries

editorial@franchiseupdate.com

Subscriptions

subscriptions@franchising.com
408-402-5681

Why Mentoring Matters

Written by **KERRY PIPES**

In the first-quarter issue of Franchise Update magazine each year, we shine the light on female leaders throughout this industry. It's been fun to discover the "people" behind the leaders over the years. This year, we thought it would be interesting to look at female leaders through the lens of mentoring.

Mentoring has become a hot topic and rightly so. Mentoring regularly increases job satisfaction, increases networking opportunities, leads to better jobs and higher salaries, and builds confidence in those who participate. Whether it's finding a mentor, being mentored, or mentoring others, it's happening all across franchising.

We interviewed more than a dozen female executive suite leaders throughout a variety of franchising sectors. We asked them how mentoring had impacted their careers, how it helped them navigate challenges, what they considered the essential parts of a good mentoring relationship, and much more. They were candid, frank, and articulate. Some of the common themes I picked up on were how mentoring cultivates confidence in leaders, builds stronger organizations, and empowers leaders through the sharing of wisdom and experience. Perhaps most critically, the mentor-mentee relationship is a two-way street where both parties learn and grow.

Elsewhere in this issue, we dig into how brands are using technology to assist their franchisees with local store marketing. Some interesting things are going on, and the results are in-

creased efficiencies and revenue opportunities for franchisees. As Creative Colors International President Mark J. Bollman told us, "If it doesn't really help franchisees make any more money or save them time, quite frankly, they're just not interested, and they don't get engaged."

We interviewed Toppers Pizza's new CEO Adam Oldenburg, who began as a delivery driver and is still involved as a franchisee. He told us how the brand is refranchising a number of its stores to put even more focus on franchisees. We also interviewed Joe Thornton, Scooter's Coffee's new CEO. He has an interesting history working with companies, such as Blockbuster Video, Starbucks, HMSHost, and Jamba. Whether it was in operations, marketing, branding, or something else, Thornton has a history of getting results.

You will also notice in this issue that we have expanded the number of responses we feature in both CMO Roundtable and Challenge the Pros. This was an effort to bring additional insight and perspective to our topical questions that impact franchising leadership.

With that, I'll let you dig into the issue. I hope you enjoy our profiles of female franchise mentors. They are the kinds of leaders who make mentoring matter.



KERRY PIPES
Executive Editor

Class Is in Session

Pretraining provides a jump start on success

Written by **ANDREW SEID**



The ever-increasing capacities of technology make it easier for franchisors to train and support their franchisees and for franchisees to train and support their employees.

Pretraining has become integral to training franchisees and their key staff members. This could be required reading or video content that must be completed before attending training. It can also include exams or other testing that must be completed and passed. Live video or virtual interaction is also possible.

Virtual-reality technology in the market right now allows franchisees and key staff members to learn and practice food preparation techniques, service mock customers, and interact with trainers on the other side of the country (or the world) in ways previously practical only in person. However, this expensive top-line technology is not necessary to provide high-quality, productive pretraining.

As with most major shifts forward in technology, previously impossible things now become possible. In addition, more traditional and common practices become cheaper and easier to use. Smartphones are readily available, and everyone older than 13 is proficient in using them. It's easy and inexpensive for an organization to shoot and edit high-quality training videos. It's also a simple matter for almost any trainee to open up an article or a video in preparation for the course to come.

Regardless of the available technology, the effectiveness of any pretraining program lies with the franchisee and their staff's willingness to engage and complete the material in a timely fashion. Initial training can be costly in travel expenses and time spent away from jobs and normal routines. It's critical to maximize everyone's time when they come together for a classroom program. Pretraining assignments allow franchisors to level-set all participants, and group training programs work best when everyone starts from a shared basis of understanding.

All attendees should arrive with similar understandings of specific tasks and operating

procedures as well as knowledge of common terms and language. Pretraining means in-person training will be as efficient and effective as possible while minimizing the risk of participants falling behind.

As with all forms of training, understanding the audience is key to effectively communicating the material along with your brand knowledge, expectations, and culture. Make sure participants at all levels are fully aware of the various elements and requirements of the training program. In addition, tell them how they will benefit from completing the program to help motivate their efforts.

Traditionally, the two main categories of participants in franchisee training are the franchisees themselves and their key high-level or managerial staff. How can we best communicate our content and our expectations to each of those groups?

PRETRAINING FRANCHISEES

For initial franchise training, new franchisees are motivated to make training time in the classroom as efficient as possible. They generally recognize the value of preparing assignments in advance of class. After all, they are focused on site build-out, inventory ordering, and pre-opening marketing. They appreciate anything that limits their time away from site development.

There should be a prime emphasis at all levels of the franchisee-franchisor relationship on clear communication and mutual understanding of what the expectations are for all parties. Franchisees should not be taken by surprise by pretraining, and they should know what material they need to learn and what efforts they need to undertake. Engage the franchisees with an advance call to explain the training schedule and review pretraining assignments. This will frame any prework in the context of efficiently moving along their training process.

Some franchise agreements include a requirement to submit evidence of successful completion of the training modules. This underscores the importance of completing pretraining

assignments. Most learning management systems (LMS) make this type of verification easy, but for those emerging franchisors who have not yet invested in an LMS, written confirmation of completion is an important element for any potential brand standards enforcement actions.

PRETRAINING FOR MANAGERS

Joint employment and vicarious liability have caused some franchisors to shy away from communicating directly with a franchisee's staff, including their unit managers. However, training a franchisee's management team is generally not a problem. Manager certification programs are common in franchises and often addressed in the franchise agreement.

When training managers, it's important to keep their boss (the franchisee) in the loop about program expectations. Managers are more likely to show up with pretraining assignments done after their well-informed boss has had a conversation with them about what needs to be accomplished. The franchisee might want to reinforce their own training by assisting the manager with assignments.

Provide the manager with an email describing the class and a program outline and then send copies to their direct supervisor, whether that is the franchisee, an operating principal, or a general manager. Supervisors need to understand the scope of what is required of their manager, so they can effectively reinforce program content after the course is completed.

Using the most effective and efficient methods for training is essential to equip franchisees and their managers to fulfill your brand standards. The more prepared your training participants are, the more effective the training will be and the more likely they will be to succeed. ■

Andrew Seid is senior consultant at MSA Worldwide. Contact him at aseid@msaworldwide.com or 860-604-9189.



FEMALE MENTORS

Leading the Next Gen to the C-Suite

Written by M. SCOTT MORRIS

Life is a team sport. From the classroom to the boardroom—and everywhere in between—people need a little help along the way.

“Many times, your lens is cloudy when looking at a situation,” says Catherine Deano, founder of Painting with a Twist. “A mentor has a broader view of the situation and can help clarify and redirect your thinking on a situation.”

In business, mentors share their knowledge and experience with up-and-coming professionals and help guide the next generation of leaders. According to *Forbes*, nearly 85% of Fortune 500 companies have mentoring programs, which goes up to 100% for Fortune 50 companies.

For this edition of Franchise Update, we asked more than a dozen successful women in franchising to share their experiences with mentorship. By necessity, the relationship is a two-way street because there’s no progress without trust and respect. Both parties need to commit to the process for it to be successful. They should be clear about their goals and open about their ups and downs in the business world.

“I make sure that the people I mentor learn from my successes and shortcomings,” says Kim Falk, vice president of franchise development for Beans & Brews Coffee House. “It better prepares them for their next step and propels their career forward.”

If done right, the roles can blur, says Mary Kennedy Thompson, chief operating officer at Neighborly. “I’m amazed at how many times I’m sitting next to somebody who might be new in the business, and they have a great idea or have done something I’ve never done,” she says.

Above all, the relationship should be honest. That might sound like a no-brainer, but mentors need the courage to speak hard truths when necessary, and mentees need the ability to extract the intended lesson.

“Your mentor should be brave enough to challenge you and give you direct feedback when they do not agree with the path you are going down,” says Mallory Maddox, chief strategy officer for Scooter’s Coffee. “I’ve learned the most from those who have been the toughest on me.”

While the interviews on the following pages focus on women and their experiences with mentoring, it’s important to remember that times are changing. As Kris McDonald, vice president of development for Checkers & Rally’s Drive-In Restaurants Inc., says, “I think mentoring is important for all leaders—maybe even more so for the men who are having to adapt to an influx of female leadership.”

APRIL ANSLINGER

Global Chief Marketing Officer



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
3	Self Esteem Brands (Anytime Fitness, Waxing the City, Bar Method, Basecamp Fitness, and Stronger U)	5,200+ club and studio locations in 42 countries and on 7 continents

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

The most profound mentors in my life haven't been those with a formal mentoring title. They cared enough to help me find and learn my way forward and upward even without the mentor title. They were intentional about it, and I'm grateful. Early in my career, I had a strong, female boss who continued to care about me after we parted ways, and she continues to be one of my biggest mentors today. As my career has progressed, mentors have appeared in my life as peers, colleagues, and leaders. I've realized that mentoring happens when both parties are willing to give thoughtful and empathetic insight and willing to be curious and vulnerable. They're ready to put insight into action.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Mentoring women in business is not just important—it's essential. We need to be intentional about building each other up, connecting each other, and celebrating each other. It can make or break business success and, more importantly, our relationships with our careers and mental health. Take stock of the women in your life whom you are building up. If you aren't, find the women you can and want to help!

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

Intentionality and purpose: As mentors, we have to embrace the mindset of being generous leaders and give that leadership and guidance away to those we know are hungry for it. We're not just mentors because we want to be; we are mentors because we take action to be mentors.

Trust, respect, empathy, vulnerability, and humanness: These things have to happen on both sides of the equation to make it work. Trust that the mentor truly has our success in mind when sharing sometimes hard truths, and trust that mentees are internalizing insight and making it actionable. Have respect for each other's time and know what's going on in each other's lives. Everyone is human with high and low moments. When you show and embrace those moments, it builds trust.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

Mentoring helps everyone become a better leader. When we're sharing knowledge, we're putting leadership development into practice. When we're learning from others, we become better, so we should do it for our entire careers. Mentoring

programs are an important piece of the mix because not everyone knows how or where to be a mentor or how to be mentored. Formalized programs remove the awkwardness and provide platforms for willing and excited participants.

What should the mentoring process include?

Accountability, action, and grace. Accountability is about committing the time, and deliberate action ensures the time spent for both parties is fruitful. Grace is critical because we need to remember that we're all human and continuing to grow and evolve.

How is a mentor different than a coach?

I think mentoring and coaching are more alike than they are different. Both are about sharing experiences, knowledge, and insight to empower others. There's no need for paralysis by analysis here. Be intentional to give and receive to help others (especially women) grow into their careers and strengths.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite?

I wish mentoring had played a bigger part. I had a few incredible leaders and colleagues who chose to mentor me. But truthfully, I had to find my own way a lot. I didn't need to do that, and I just don't want that for anyone else. It's challenging. It's lonely. And it's hard. There is more trial and error than there needs to be. So, I've committed myself to helping pave the way for upcoming leaders to help them learn from my wins and my mistakes. I want to use my platform for good and inspire others to do the same.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges?

One of the most important things you learn in your mentoring relationships is that what you are working through isn't new. You are not alone. Difficult career challenges have been faced by all leaders. There is a lot of solace in this. It reminds you that there are plenty of people to help you through the tougher times.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships?

Mentoring has made me a better listener even for things that go unsaid. It also has taught me grace in understanding that everyone has a backstory, and it shapes their thought processes. True listening and genuine grace earn trust, credibility, and quality in every relationship in life.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making?

Most of us need affirmation. And

that affirmation is what gives us confidence in our answers and our thought processes. In the best mentoring relationships, I've learned how to make decisions—when to trust my knowledge and my gut, how and when to seek insight, and how to communicate. Learning how to make decisions is what matters most.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives?

When you are the mentee, the mentor is usually someone who has more experience than you do. With that experience, they tend to understand the importance of setting goals and achieving results. They help to build the same discipline with the mentee because setting goals and achieving results are critical to job success.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1) Intentionality and willingness—nothing happens if we're not focused on making it happen. There has to be a desire to learn and grow. 2) Vulnerability and curiosity—be curious enough to ask genuine questions and vulnerable enough to realize when we need help or perspective. 3) It never ends—none of us are ever done learning, so find a mentor who can help you continue to grow.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

Mentoring helps us embrace priorities that include yourself and not just that of pleasing other people. It's a constant reminder that you must choose to take care of yourself and your career. It helps us find common ground and points of connection no matter the generation, the culture, or the gender. Our mentoring relationships help us grow and strengthen our networks, which helps us grow businesses and credibility within our businesses.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring?

There isn't a prescription for mentoring. There isn't one way to go about it. Mentoring programs aren't for everyone, but intentionally mentoring others and allowing yourself to be mentored will only help us make a bigger impact in our corners of the world. Be vulnerable, have grace, and help make a difference in the lives of other young women! ■

STEPHANIE COFFEY

Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer



YEARS IN FRANCHISING

17

COMPANY

Frenchies Modern
Nail Care

NUMBER OF UNITS

24

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

Early in my career, I was fortunate to have a strong mentor who saw my potential and realized that I was very eager to learn and develop in my new position and for years to come as I advanced in my career. My mentor believed in me, encouraged me to take risks, and guided me back on track when I wavered. He shared his valuable experience and insights, which allowed me to make informed decisions, avoid pitfalls, and make adjustments when needed. The strategic guidance throughout the years has been invaluable to my advancing my career objectives.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Surprisingly, in the U.S., only 21% of senior leaders are women, which is below the global average of 24%. The need for guidance and community is critical for up-and-coming female leaders. We need the community, support, and guidance from one another to reach our potential and to protect and elevate the franchise industry.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

You treat it like a long-term relationship. You build trust and have a long-term commitment to the relationship. First, the mentor needs to have a desire to develop and help others. Not everyone is up for the task because it takes time and energy to build a mentoring relationship. Good mentors genuinely want to see someone else succeed. Also, the mentor needs to be open about sharing both their successes and their failures for learning purposes. You also must be discerning about the mentee you choose because of the time and energy commitment that you will be making for years. Mentees need to be committed to learning and growing in their professions. They also must be willing to seek and accept feedback from the mentor—both praise and constructive criticism.

What should the mentoring process include?

Ideally, a good mentoring process

should first include an agreement, whether it is informal or more formal. Both parties are committing their time and energy toward a mentoring relationship. Communication, alignment, and trust (C.A.T.) are pillars of a great mentoring process. Communication, as it relates to establishing regular check-ins, ensures that you are supporting the mentee in their desire to learn and grow. You are there to guide them in career advancement discussions and to listen and assist when they encounter workplace obstacles. Understand the mentee's professional goals so that you can appropriately support them, but keep in mind that their goals most likely will change over the years. Open and ongoing communication and revisiting goals are critical to maintaining alignment. Last but not least, trust is a key element as it provides both parties confidence and clarity to make better and more informed decisions.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1) The person you have identified to mentor may not want to grow in the area or to the extent that was initially identified for them, and their path may change over time. That is perfectly fine, and you have to remember that it is their journey you are helping them with and not your journey. 2) You may not be their mentor for their entire career, and they may have other mentors contributing as they grow in their careers. 3) Mentorship is a two-way street. It is rewarding to help navigate someone through the ups and downs of the business. As a mentor, you also continue to develop and sharpen your leadership skills, and you need to be open to gaining new perspectives on issues.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring?

Being a good and effective mentor takes time, but it is extremely rewarding when you see your mentee grow in their career. It is especially rewarding when they appreciate the journey and your commitment to them. ■

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CATHERINE DEANO

Founder



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
15	Painting with a Twist/ Twist Brands	225



Mentoring empowers women to move forward, speak out, be heard.

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career? Mentoring has played a huge part in my journey in franchising and even before. I am a serial entrepreneur and have owned a restaurant, a jewelry company, and a catering company. When I had the jewelry business, I had friends who were artists who guided me in how to design, price, and market my products to customers.

When I got into franchising, my former business partner and I were the first mentees of the International Franchise Association's Franship program. We were paired with Melanie Bergeron from Two Men and a Truck. That was a gift. I learned from Melanie to say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I can get it for you."

Why is mentoring so important for female franchise leaders? Although women have certainly come a long way in franchising as well as business in general, there is still a bit of a glass ceiling. Mentoring makes you look past that and realize it is not about breaking through that glass ceiling but just ignoring it and finding success despite the difficulties. My first mentors were my parents, who taught me to never let the fact that I was a female stop me from working toward my dreams.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship? First and foremost are trust and respect. Also, knowing that your mentor is on the same page philosophically

helps. Mentoring is an intellectual as well as an emotional experience. There needs to be a connection for it to be successful.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers? Mentoring empowers women to move forward, speak out, be heard. It gives us someone to bounce ideas off and learn from. A mentor should be someone who will be impartial and give true feedback that helps you grow.

What should the mentoring process include? One of my mentees heard me speak on a panel, and I have a different approach to imparting information in those settings. It has been described to me as "real," and it is not for everyone. Others have read articles about my road to franchising and connected with my story. Regardless of how they found me, they would connect with me and start a conversation. Sometimes, it is just one long conversation, and that is it. And sometimes, it has been an ongoing conversation.

How is a mentor different than a coach? That is an interesting question, and I think the lines can be blurred. In my experience, mentoring is more about helping and empowering the other person's success. Mentoring is not a career but more of a passion. Coaching is more of a business endeavor. It's not that the motives are not the same; they're just presented in a different form.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite? When we were approached by three of our customers within two weeks about franchising our business, we were literally deer in the headlights. Mandeville, Louisiana, is not exactly a franchise mecca. We did have PJ's Coffee in the area, and we went to them for advice. They mentored us through our first years, and that was an extremely helpful experience. As mentioned before, the IFA's Franship program and many of the people we met through the IFA were instrumental in getting us through those first years.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges? When things are difficult, you need someone to help you think things through—hopefully, someone who is not attached to the challenge in any way. Many times, your lens is cloudy when looking at a situation. A mentor has a broader view of the situation and can help clarify and redirect your thinking on a situation.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships? Advice from my mentors helped me feel more centered and up to the task of being a leader and being able to shepherd my company in the right direction. It made me more aware that my decisions affect not just me, but the lives of my employees as well as my franchisees.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making? Having mentors to rely on for advice as well as a sounding board has helped me see issues from different perspectives and ensured that my decisions have been given a full and comprehensive look. It keeps me from being impulsive. On the other side, watching someone I have mentored make well-informed, intellectual decisions shows me that my mentoring has value.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives? Mentoring has made me more confident in my decision-making. I do not second-guess every decision. It has helped me realize your first gut reaction is the right one most of the time. It has taken fear out of the equation when making decisions.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring? The three things I've learned from mentoring are 1) my decisions have a direct impact on others; 2) a failure is not a failure if you can learn from it; and 3) there is always something to learn from someone else.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite? Mentoring can empower women to move forward with decisions that will propel them to the next level. I do not know one C-level woman who did not have the help of a mentor in their rise to the top. Find a mentor whom you admire, who meshes with your personal and work philosophy, and then listen, ask questions, and absorb information.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring? Do it! It is so gratifying. Mentoring the next generation gives back to the industry and universe. You did not get where you are on your own. Now, it is your turn to put your hand out and help others reach their goals. ■

MARY ANN DONAGHY

Chief Marketing and Customer Experience Officer



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
1.5	Zips Cleaners	70



Women must support other women and help them refine their skills in their professional areas and also as leaders. We don't have to be like men to be successful.

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

First, I would say that I think everyone should have a mentor starting early in their career. I never had one single mentor that I could reach out to. I wish I had. However, I have had some excellent bosses and role models whom I admire who have helped me continue to grow and improve professionally. In addition, I have nurtured relationships with women over the years who have been very successful while also juggling motherhood, and they have been inspirations to me.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Female mentors in particular are important for women to see that other women can rise to the top. Women must support other women and help them refine their skills in their professional areas and also as leaders. Women's work styles are very different from men's work styles. We must embrace and appreciate those differences. We don't have to be like men to be successful. But we need to focus on what's important to make the business successful. That's all that matters. And generally, women have approaches that are different than men, which provides a balance and broader perspective.

Far too often, I've found women not supporting other women, unfortunately. I've witnessed railroading, jealousy, resentment, and, frankly, cattiness that is unprofessional, unhealthy, and damaging to the company and its culture. I could write a book about it! Every female in the business world I know has experienced it, which reinforces that we need to support each other and mentor each other, not

tear each other down. I take that very seriously as I manage younger women.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

Ask thoughtful questions. Listen to the answers. Be honest. Be supportive. Sometimes, a little tough love is necessary. The key is to provide perspective, so the mentee has the bigger-picture view of their role in an organization to put the issues they might have into context. The mentee needs to know they can trust you and that you have their back.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

Perspective, honesty, guidance, and strategy. Without a mentor, I didn't have anyone to provide a long-term view, so I made some decisions and career moves without looking at the larger picture. More seasoned executives have the benefit of experience from their careers and from watching the careers of others. You don't have that perspective when you're younger.

How is a mentor different than a coach?

A coach's job is to push you to win. A mentor's job is to help you be as successful as you want to be and make decisions that will help you achieve your goals. Those goals are different for different people. Some want to rise to the C-suite. Some want to change careers or shift to another function. Others want to figure out how to have more work-life balance.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite?

I had a boss at AOL who later hired me at the University of Maryland Global Campus. He made me appreciate the value

I provided and helped me to see how I was different. He provided me with the support and guidance to know I had earned a C-level position. I had the confidence to know I had earned it.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships?

It helped me to focus on creating a win-win and approach everything from the perspective of what's good for the company.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making?

It helped me to understand my value and that I was especially good at seeing the big picture and making data-driven decisions while tapping into common sense and intuition.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives?

It gave me role models to aspire to emulate.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

Confidence, perspective, and the importance of developing positive relationships.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

Women need to help other women, and young women have every opportunity to achieve their career goals. Things have changed a lot since I started my career. Women have nothing stopping them from their goals except themselves.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring?

Just do it! Women need other women. ■

SHANE EVANS

Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
20	Massage Heights	117



Mentoring has been a cornerstone in my career, providing valuable insights, guidance, and support, especially during the early stages.

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

Mentoring has been a cornerstone in my career, providing so many valuable insights, guidance, and support, especially during the early stages of founding Massage Heights. Mentors have helped me navigate the complex landscape of entrepreneurship, offering both strategic advice and practical tips drawn from their own experiences.

Why is mentoring so important for female franchise leaders?

This industry has its challenges, so mentoring is especially important as it can help bridge the gender gap in leadership roles. It also offers a platform for sharing unique challenges and solutions specific to women in the franchise industry, ultimately fostering an environment for growth, support, and empowerment.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

A strong mentoring relationship that has the grounds to be truly effective is built on trust, mutual respect, and open communication. It should be a two-way street where both the mentor and mentee are committed to learning and growth. Setting clear goals, seeking out regular feedback, and establishing a genuine connection are also essential.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

These types of programs offer a structured way for female leaders to gain insights, develop leadership skills, and build professional networks. They provide a safe space to discuss challenges, explore new opportunities, and receive honest feedback—all of which are vital for career development.

What should the mentoring process include?

Goal setting, holding regular meetings, seeking actionable feedback, and form-

ing a mechanism for tracking progress are all essentials that should be included in the mentoring process. It's also important to include opportunities for real-world application of the advice and strategies discussed during your mentoring sessions.

How is a mentor different than a coach?

Typically, a mentor offers guidance based on personal experience and expertise, often forming a long-term relationship that can evolve. On the other hand, a coach is more focused on achieving specific objectives in a shorter time frame, often using more structure.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite?

Mentorship was truly instrumental to my journey into a C-Suite role. It helped me develop crucial leadership skills and understand the nuances of managing a successful franchise. It provided me with a trusted sounding board for major decisions.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges?

The wisdom and advice I received from mentors were pivotal in helping me overcome obstacles. Their experiences provided me with different perspectives and strategies to approach challenges, which was invaluable in navigating the complexities of business management.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships?

Mentoring has helped me hone my communication and negotiation skills, which are essential in building strong business relationships. It also taught me the importance of empathy and understanding different viewpoints, which has been key in my interactions with partners and team members.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making?

Mentoring has provided me with a sounding board for my ideas and decisions,

helping me to refine them and approach situations with greater confidence. Knowing that I had the support and input of experienced professionals gave me the assurance to trust my instincts and decisions.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives?

The mentors I've had over the years have helped me to clarify my vision, set realistic and achievable goals, and create actionable plans to reach them. Their guidance in prioritizing and focusing efforts has been crucial in achieving both short-term objectives and long-term ambitions.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1) The value of resilience and adaptability in business; 2) the importance of building and nurturing professional relationships; and 3) the need for continuous learning and self-improvement to stay relevant and effective in leadership roles.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

Mentoring can empower the next generation of women with the skills, confidence, and network they need to ascend to C-suite positions. It will provide them with role models, practical advice, and the support system necessary to overcome barriers and succeed in leadership roles.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring?

My advice is to remain open to both being a mentor and finding one. Embrace the opportunity to learn from others and to share your knowledge. Remember that mentoring is a two-way relationship that benefits both parties and contributes to a more inclusive and diverse leadership landscape. Do it sooner rather than later! ■

KIM FALK

Vice President of Franchise Development
and Multi-Unit Franchise Owner



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
18	Beans & Brews Coffee House and Scenthound	74 Beans & Brews Coffee House; as franchisee, 3 Scenthound with 2 in development

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

Mentoring helped me move to the next level in my career. From a young age, my passion for assisting others has been a guiding force in my life. As I embarked on my career journey, initially focusing on educating and mentoring children, my innate leadership qualities naturally emerged. Facilitating the growth of others in their professional pursuits has always been a priority for me. During my career in franchising, I connected with top-notch individuals, cultivating meaningful relationships. Now, whenever I encounter challenges, I am fortunate to have a network of trusted individuals whom I can reach out to for invaluable guidance.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Mentoring is important for anyone, especially the younger generation entering franchising. While the landscape is changing, and more women are in leadership and C-suite roles, there are still times when women are not considered for certain roles or are offered a lower compensation package. The key to winning the highest roles comes down to knowledge. Not only do you need to know and understand content, practices, and processes, you need to know the right people. Developing self-confidence and trust in your creative abilities is pivotal in obtaining your career aspirations. Effective mentors help hone the skills that foster trust and success.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

Trust and openness serve as the backbone of any mentoring relationship. Too many times, people want to withhold information for fear they could become irrelevant or not needed. Unfortunately, I've also observed instances where a leader harbors a hidden agenda, often stemming from insecurity.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

Although mentoring programs can help promote women into leadership roles on a broader scale, individual mentoring relationships offer greater advantages. They have a personal connection and engage in more in-depth discussions. Additionally, one-on-one relationships allow for periodic reassessment of career paths and opportunities along the journey.

What should the mentoring process include?

Mentoring should include regular check-in meetings. Communication is key.

Keep in mind that your mentor will most likely become your colleague over time, and your mentors will change. As you grow in your knowledge and positions, you may need to seek out someone new to help you reach the next level.

How is a mentor different from a coach?

A mentor is more than a coach in so many ways. A mentor will teach, train, and empower like a coach. But they also make introductions and connections to help you achieve success.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite?

Coming from an unrelated industry, I was a bit intimidated during my first year as I attended trade shows and franchise conferences. Once I realized success as a rookie sales manager, I gained the confidence to seek out some of the most accomplished females and learn from their successes and setbacks. I learned best practices and eventually built my "franchise family." My very first brand leader tried to turn me down for a job because I lacked experience. After proving my worth at the brand, he has become a sounding board throughout my career. Years later, he introduced me to Beans & Brews Coffee House, where I currently hold an executive development position.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges?

Funny you should ask. It wasn't long ago that I approached one of the most successful and respected executives in franchising for a suggestion on leadership. He took the time at a franchise conference to discuss the situation and offer some advice, and he followed up with a phone call afterward to ensure I had talking points. True mentors lean in. I had a boost in confidence to take the leap. To hear the words, "You've already got this," made all the difference.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships?

I've consulted many brands. People see me as a source of knowledge who is willing to help other people and brands prosper.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making?

If other brands and leaders are calling on me for answers, I must be doing something right. There are times in my career when I have been presented with opportunities that involve some level of risk. Having a mentor helped me take on those risks with confidence.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives?

I am competitive by nature. Along with my competitiveness comes a willingness to continue to strive for a new goal or target. Seeing others succeed fuels the fire within me to grow, achieve, and do more. My mentors make me better and help me get there. I certainly don't want to let them down.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1) Mentoring introduced me to best practices; 2) it helped me build my confidence; and 3) it opened doors to some very talented and successful people who are now part of my network.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

It's so important for women who want to move up the ladder to have mentors who've already done it! I make sure that the people I mentor learn from my successes and shortcomings. It better prepares them for their next step and propels their career forward. Finding two to three great mentors can shape a person's success and build the confidence they need to succeed. When looking for mentors, find influential people with different business disciplines. If you want to be a leader in development, you should seek out a few mentors from marketing and operations. A deep understanding of other roles in the franchise model will help you be a better fit for any organization—and grow. Think of it as creating your own board of directors. They can help guide you in important decisions. They hold different viewpoints and experiences. They can provide perspectives that you may not see. Be sure to thank your mentor for their guidance and time. Gratitude goes a long way. And you never know when you might need them again.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring?

Success means more when it's shared. Guiding and teaching others is rewarding. Broaden your scope and open yourself up to mentoring. You won't be sorry! ■

ABBY FOGEL

Vice President, Marketing & Brand Relations



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
9	Unleashed Brands	1,500+ open and in development



Mentoring is often a longer-term relationship focused on overall career and personal development.

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career? Mentoring has played a crucial role in shaping my career as a franchise marketing executive. I've been extremely fortunate to have several mentors who have supported me throughout different stages of my professional journey. They have taught me a lot about being an executive and leading teams, and they pushed me to go for new opportunities.

Why is mentoring so important for female franchise leaders? It offers a unique opportunity to navigate the challenges often faced in male-dominated industries. Mentors can provide guidance on overcoming obstacles, building confidence, and accessing networks that may otherwise be challenging to penetrate. I'm proud to be on the International Franchise Association's Women's Franchise Committee—something my mentor recommended for me—which empowers women in the franchising industry to connect and learn from each other.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship? A good mentoring relationship should include open communi-

cation, trust, and a shared commitment to the mentee's growth. A mentor should be someone with relevant experience, who's willing to share their knowledge and genuinely invested in the success of the mentee. Both parties should communicate what they expect from the relationship and a potential cadence for connecting.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers? Mentoring programs provide a platform for women to learn from those who have successfully navigated similar career paths and can offer tailored advice. Increased confidence and a support system to learn are also valuable benefits.

What should the mentoring process include? The mentoring process should include goal setting for your career, regular feedback sessions, and a focus on both professional and personal development. It is a collaborative process where the mentor acts as a guide, helping the mentee identify and achieve her career objectives. For women, especially, having a mentor who can also relate to her personal situation (mom, wife, etc.) can be extremely helpful.

How is a mentor different than a coach? Mentoring is often a longer-term relationship focused on overall career and personal development. Coaching tends to be more task oriented and specific to skill development. A mentor is typically someone who has had a similar career path or role the mentee aspires to have.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite? I've leaned on mentors to help me grow as a marketing professional and leader. They have offered insights into my area of expertise and also the key components of a great leader. This has helped me hone my skills and leadership style throughout my various roles.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges? At each of the big changes during my career, I've leaned on mentors for their advice. They have helped me think about the big picture and how these changes will help me obtain my long-term career goals. These conversations led me to be more confident in my decision-making and develop a "got get it" attitude.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships? Mentoring extends beyond individual growth and has positively impacted my other business relationships by

fostering a collaborative and supportive professional network. Look for a mentor who will say your name in a room full of opportunities. Mentors of mine have introduced me to valuable connections in the industry that I am thankful to have today.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making? Having a mentor as a sounding board to offer insights and personal experiences has helped me make more confident decisions. Their advice and expertise have also helped me trust my instincts during similar challenges.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives? Mentors have helped me outline specific goals and milestones related to my long-term career goals. I actively reach out to mentors, seeking their advice on areas where I need growth or asking about specific courses or certifications that can pave the way toward achieving these goals.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring? 1) Never stop learning; 2) people are humans first; and 3) you'll never be ready.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite? Mentors can offer valuable insights and guidance based on their own experiences, helping women navigate the complexities of leadership roles as female leaders. They can provide constructive feedback and share lessons learned. Mentors can also serve as advocates, opening doors and creating opportunities for their mentees.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring? My advice is to actively seek mentors who align with your goals, be open to feedback, and embrace the opportunity for continuous learning. I'd also recommend seeking a mentor outside of your current company or boss for a broader/outside perspective on leadership and career development. It's a two-way street, and both mentor and mentee can benefit from the exchange of experiences and insights. ■

AMANDA KAHALEHOE

Chief Operating Officer



Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

In the early stages of my career, I worked in a predominantly male field, so having a female mentor was unfamiliar to me. Instead, I learned from my father, who owned a security franchise. He was named one of the top sellers in the business and then eventually started his own security firm. When I worked at the family business, I was able to hone my skills, take initiative, and learn from business professionals.

When I joined the restaurant franchise industry, I realized I was in another male-dominated field, surrounded by closely knit, seasoned professionals. Lacking a female mentor ultimately inspired me to empower and help mentor women in franchising.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Mentoring can foster a sense of community within the franchise industry. These relationships offer validation from other experienced professionals who have navigated similar challenges.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

The foundation for a mentoring relationship is built on trust, shared visions, and transparency. Trust is extremely important for open communication while a shared vision ensures alignment on goals and expectations. Transparency helps create a safe space for exchanging genuine thoughts, ideas, and constructive feedback.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

Connecting with women in the restaurant space, whether in franchising or not, can help expand your circle of influence. These programs offer support and can open new avenues for collaborative opportunities. In franchising, it is important to share collective knowledge and experiences to help professionals learn the do's and don'ts

YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
2.5	Vicious Biscuit	6 corporate locations with a 7th in development; 7 franchisee deals with an additional 37 locations committed



A mentorship is an organic relationship that focuses on the overall development of a mentee.

of building a stronger business. Being part of a program solely focused on the success of women helps creativity and innovation thrive!

What should the mentoring process include? Mentoring should happen organically and adapt to the unique needs, experiences, and goals of the mentee. While there may be an initial framework, the dynamics must evolve based on the aspirations of the mentee.

How is a mentor different than a coach? A mentorship is an organic relationship that focuses on the overall development of a mentee. Mentors often share lessons they've learned from their careers to help guide their mentees. One valuable lesson I learned from my mentor: "Don't focus on your weaknesses. Identify your strengths and apply them across all aspects of your life."

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite? My journey to the C-suite was shaped by an indirect mentoring process. I was able to expand my skill set by seeking knowledge from experts, tackling challenges, and learning new techniques. As mentioned before, I started in a male-dominated industry and understand the challenges women may face. As

the chief operating officer of Vicious Biscuit, I will prioritize career development for women and offer them support as they work toward their goals.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges? Since joining the C-suite, I've strategically formed partnerships with colleagues who possess expertise in specific areas. In our current phase of expansion, we have six operational locations—four of which were constructed in a single year. We are also in the process of awarding 37 franchise units, so we are extremely busy. During this time, I've been able to consult with a new mentor of mine, Vicious Biscuit Co-Founder George McLaughlin. Since the first day I joined the team, George has given me words of encouragement and autonomy and served as a supportive presence as we began Vicious Biscuit's journey into franchising.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships? My leadership approach has changed immensely. In the beginning, I was moving at an extremely fast pace and was overcommitting to multiple projects. Through mentorship programs with C-level executives, I realized I needed to delegate more. As a result, I've empowered my employees to hone their skills and been able to manage my workload more efficiently. I've also been able to use new strategies from my mentorship program to help drive results for franchisees, vendors, partners, and founders.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making? Receiving support from mentors has helped me build confidence in my abilities. I am relatively new to the restaurant franchise industry and sometimes struggle with imposter syndrome. For example, I'll have thoughts, like "Am I suited for this role?" or "Do I possess the skill set to lead a smart, effective, and organized team?" There are also concerns about executing the visions of our founders and attracting the right talent. For that reason, I am always motivated to enhance and diversify my skill set, contributing value, vision, and strategy while simultaneously empowering our team.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives? Mentoring helps improve results! The advice I received from my mentor is geared toward the strategic aspects of my role. The regular check-ins keep

me focused on organizational objectives and timelines and provide an opportunity to discuss any roadblocks that may arise.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring? To think more strategically and expansively. A mentor once told me I needed to make \$50,000 decisions, not \$50 decisions, and this perspective has become a guiding principle for me.

Clear communication and a deep understanding of the "why" behind it. Offering directional guidance to a team without a clear purpose hinders our ability to achieve results. This principle holds true across all levels of the organization. When communication lacks clarity, the entire system suffers.

A culture of accountability. This instills a sense of responsibility, trust, cohesion, improvement, and adaptability in every one of the organizations. When individuals hold themselves accountable, there is a heightened focus on decision-making.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

After finding a mentor with extensive franchise experience, I've witnessed a transformative effect on my confidence and self-assurance. Women face distinct challenges in leadership positions, so these mentoring relationships foster insightful dialogues that contribute to breaking down barriers and empowering women to confidently pursue their goals.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring? I'll be candid about this: I initially resisted the idea of mentoring. The rationale often revolved around efficiency and correctness and the belief that mentoring others would demand the most valuable commodity: time.

However, I quickly realized that investing time in mentoring others and being open to mentorship is valuable and can enhance your development. Witnessing your team thrive under your guidance is rewarding and contributes to a more cohesive work environment.

Building a foundation of trust through mentorship ensures your team views you as approachable, transparent, and willing to guide them toward success. Ultimately, the time invested in mentoring pays off in the growth and development of individuals and the organization alike. ■

MALORIE MADDOX

Chief Strategy Officer



Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career? Mentorship has been prevalent in my life from an early age. I still keep in contact with various teachers from middle school and high school. I also had a piano teacher who was very instrumental in my life growing up. I was always seeking out role models.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders? When you are in a leadership position in the franchise arena, you will face many challenges. We always encourage our franchise owners to seek out relationships with other franchisees, particularly those who are best in class. You can get in front of some of the challenges, avoid making some common mistakes, and propel your success by asking the right questions.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship? Trust. You must be able to speak openly and honestly with your mentor. I always advise anyone seeking out a mentor not to automatically go to a leader you feel resembles you most. As you grow in your career, you will have to work with all different styles of communicators and leaders. Look for a mentor whose style you admire but who brings differing perspectives to the table.

Courage. Your mentor should be brave enough to challenge you and give you direct feedback when they do not agree with the path you are going down. I've learned the most from those who have been the toughest on me. For example, my executive coach once told me, "What has made you successful in your past may not necessarily make you successful in your future." That was an absolute "aha" moment for me and proved to be very true.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers? If it is a truly valuable mentorship, you should learn more about

YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
1	Scooter's Coffee	750+



You get out of every mentorship what you put into it. The relationship works both ways.

yourself than you ever knew walking into it. You should be uncomfortable at times. It should make you truly evaluate what kind of leader you are. I strongly believe in asking my team, “What three things would you like me to keep doing, start doing, and stop doing as your leader?” I have found this very powerful. Once you get the results, it is critical that you execute on the feedback. Your team has to trust that you are valuing their feedback and making changes based on the results.

What should the mentoring process include? Interviews. Goals you hope to reach coming out of it. Honest and deep conversations. Specific examples of your leadership and solutions on what you could have done differently. Team feedback.

How is a mentor different from a coach? I have had both and believe you receive very similar feedback and additional skill sets from both.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite? Mentoring helped me grow exponentially in a few key areas. It taught me how valuable courage is. I try every day to be brave enough to bring up areas of discussion

my peers may shy away from. These conversations are often the breakthrough moments for teams.

Also, it taught me the value of listening. I love when you can listen to your team all share their thoughts and perspectives. It gives you time to absorb it, evaluate what you may have missed walking into the conversation, and weigh in knowing you have truly taken the perspectives of others to heart. We all have blind spots. Listening to others will prevent you from making big mistakes based on what you may have missed.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges? Let the game come to you. The biggest mistakes in my career occurred when I was trying to force something or push too hard.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships? You will always have relationships in business that bring challenges. In news media, we could face very harsh pushback from the public. In insurance, we had challenges with brokers. At Scooter’s Coffee, it is crucial to build strong relationships with franchisees. You are often dealing with a wide range of challenges, ideas, and implementations. What honestly excites me is working one-on-one with a franchisee, addressing specific market challenges, and adjusting our game to drive results. There is no better trust level than when you can win together, and they truly know you have their success at heart!

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making? The regrets I have all have one thing in common: I did not trust my gut. My many mentors have reminded me of that. Also, a hard lesson for me was to stop trying to fix everything. Sometimes as a leader, you have to let your team make mistakes. It is hard to do. However, it teaches them some of the biggest growth lessons they have ever learned.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives? The best advice I have ever been given is, “Be yourself. It is why I hired you.” Once I was able to let that truly sink in and eliminate self-doubt, it made me more confident to lead teams. The feedback I most often receive from those I lead is they truly appreciate my direct feedback. They acknowledge it can be hard to hear, but they trust that I am sharing it with their best interest at heart.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1) There is no better feeling of success than watching someone you have invested in grow and succeed. There is no better conversation than being able to promote an employee you have seen give heart and soul to growth. Those are the best days I have ever had on the job. 2) It’s okay to end a mentorship. I have had one instance where I was mentoring a young leader. They did not listen to any feedback. They came in with new excuses week after week. They would often get emotional and blame others for their failures. They were only focused on a bigger title, not the growth they needed to do to earn it. I had to end the mentorship knowing this person would never be able to move forward until they took true accountability for their actions and results. 3) You get out of every mentorship what you put into it. The relationship works both ways.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

I do not want to spend a day in my career where I do not have a mentor. It takes many opinions and diverse thoughts to be successful. I also strongly feel the larger the position, the more responsibility that comes with it. If you want a seat at the table, you must be prepared, accountable, and willing to invest in your growth to stay relevant and respected. The leaders I have seen fail most often are those who refuse to be lifelong learners. They earn a big position and stop investing in themselves and others.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring? Enter this space if you truly have the success of others at heart. One of the best compliments I have ever received is that I never take credit for the success of others. I always give credit. I learned that from a mentor early on. A leader is the sum total of their team’s score. I always look at my role as how I build everyone to where we have the strongest score in the company. We all truly have two jobs—drive results and build people. I would strongly encourage those leaders out there with big hearts to take others in. My aunt once told me early in my career, “Pick up people along the way and put them in your pocket. Carry them around with you.” We are all stronger with an army of support. ■

KRIS MCDONALD

Vice President of Development



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
7	Checkers & Rally's Drive-In Restaurants Inc.	785



Never too busy to mentor and never too experienced to learn, I adapt and hone my own skill set.

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career? I am pleased to report that mentoring still plays a part in my career. I am both a mentor and a mentee. Never too busy to mentor and never too experienced to learn, I adapt and hone my own skill set. Early on in my career, I did a lot of observing. I watched the leaders who exhibited the qualities that I most admired and wanted to emulate—the ones who had personal integrity, chose the hard right over the easy wrong, invested in both the company and its people, and set and met their goals. I made mental notes, asked a lot of questions, and adapted my personal leadership style along the way. As my career progressed, I established mentor/mentee relationships (where I am the mentee) and also found myself at first coaching and then later on mentoring some up-and-coming leaders both within and outside of my organization. These relationships exist today.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders? I think mentoring is important for all leaders—maybe even more so for the men who are having to adapt to an influx of female leadership (smile). In all seriousness, women are still underrepresented

in the franchising industry and many times may find they are the only woman in the room. Female mentorship is important both to address the distinct challenges that women face in the workplace (sexism, work-life balance, microaggressions) as well as to build the self-confidence and communication skills necessary to be heard in the work environment.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship? Open and honest communication—this goes both ways. The mentor has to be comfortable giving feedback. The mentee has to be honest with the mentor and be open to hearing feedback. The mentor's role is not to give the mentee the answer because many times there is no single answer. The mentor is there to first listen and then to ask probing questions, play devil's advocate, and explore the possible and various outcomes. The mentor needs to challenge the mentee, share their perspective, and help the mentee reach their own decision that is in line with the mentee's overall objectives and career goals.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers? Mentoring is a great way to connect with other female leaders who have shared similar experiences. Not only does it help to bounce ideas off of the person for near-term solutions, it also helps you navigate and guide your career. My mentor often reminds me of the Jim Rohn quote, "If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's plan. And guess what they have planned for you? Not much."

What should the mentoring process include? Open and honest communication as noted above. More importantly, both parties need to commit to meeting and be present during the allocated time.

How is a mentor different than a coach? Typically, a coach will be focused on a specific goal that needs to be accomplished, and they will help you achieve that one goal. Mentoring is a longer-term relationship that covers various aspects of the person's career and overall personal development. While a mentor and mentee can focus on a particular goal, they usually do so in the context of how it relates to the bigger picture.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite? Having a mentor—who is not within the organization and can step back, see the bigger picture, and point out the things that I might be missing—has been invaluable

in creating a path for me to feel accomplished both personally and professionally. When you are immersed in the workplace, you need that outside perspective to help you see "the forest for the trees."

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges? It is out of those difficult moments that we grow the most. Mentoring helped me understand that I had the ability and the knowledge, which gave me the confidence in my decision-making ability to face challenges tactically and strategically when addressing short- and long-term objectives.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships? Once you recognize that you are in the people business, especially in the franchise industry, you understand that you can take what you have learned and apply it to all of your business relationships.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making? The confidence comes from two things: 1) having someone help you vet your decision and challenge you as devil's advocate and 2) understanding the downstream consequences of that decision so that you anticipate possible roadblocks and the next steps.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives? Mentoring helps to define what those goals and objectives are. Because of time constraints, we often don't stop and think about what we want to achieve both personally and professionally. Simply defining those goals and writing them down is incredibly powerful. Once you define them, deciding how to get there can seem daunting. Mentoring helps clear that clutter and focus on the important.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring? 1) The path to success is never linear; 2) there is no "right" answer, just a well thought-out course of action; and 3) course correction is an art, not a science. Learn to be nimble.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite? Mentoring is important for all women regardless of their career path, whether it is C-suite, next-level management, or simply a desire to feel fulfilled and successful in their current position. My advice: observe, ask, listen, try, learn, course correct, and repeat. ■

LISA MERRY

President



YEARS IN FRANCHISING

30

COMPANY

Junk King

NUMBER OF UNITS

192

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

In my career, mentors played a crucial role in teaching me how to navigate through leadership challenges. They emphasized the importance of failing forward and how to overcome obstacles as I rose in leadership. Mentors focused on personal growth and taught me how to use challenges as opportunities for learning and development.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Mentoring is essential for female franchise leaders as it helps address the imbalance in quality leadership. There are more women leaders, but it's important to provide them with the resources and knowledge to grow as leaders. Mentoring provides a platform to navigate the fine line of leadership, balancing emotional intelligence and other skill sets to develop a well-rounded approach.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

Key elements include consistent and scheduled conversations, focusing on both challenges and celebrations. The process aims to provide a safe space for discussing hindrances in work life while maintaining a balance between personal and professional aspects.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

Mentoring programs expand networks, offer support in problem-solving, and provide a celebratory environment for success. They help mentees stay grounded, find solutions to challenges, and navigate career paths.

What should the mentoring process include?

The mentoring process should involve consistency, scheduled meetings, and a focused agenda. While addressing job-related topics, it should also create an open space for discussing personal challenges, fostering a safe environment.

How is a mentor different than a coach?

A mentor guides individuals in the bigger picture

of problem-solving and utilizing skill sets with long-term development in mind. Coaching focuses more on skill improvement and goal achievement for individual areas or tasks.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite?

Lessons from mentors involved delegation, trust, and effective leadership. Delegating and managing a team led to more productive leadership. I also learned how to listen more than talk, so I could help mentees work through problems while feeling supported.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges?

Mentors helped me with problem-solving and keeping the fail-forward mindset when growing in my career. Beyond career challenges, mentoring has been beneficial in building business relationships by aiding in recruiting leaders and building cohesive teams, providing insights into hiring and team-building strategies.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives?

Mentoring encourages a grounded and specific approach to setting realistic goals and achieving objectives. It taught me to be project oriented and focused on starting and finishing tasks.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

The three most important things I learned include 1) the importance of consistency, 2) being vulnerable and transparent, and 3) achieving a balance in my personal and professional life.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

Mentoring provides online tools and communities for faster growth. For female executives considering mentoring, my advice is to start as soon as possible. The benefits, including empowerment and representation, make it a valuable investment in personal and professional growth. ■



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April 12-13 | London, England

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April 12-13 | Los Angeles, CA

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May 5-7 | Washington, DC

IBA/IFA JOINT CONFERENCE

May 7-8 | Washington, DC

INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISE EXPO

May 30 – June 1 | New York, NY

Partnership event with MFV Expositions/Comexposium

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June 18-20 | Atlanta, GA

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September 9-11 | Washington, DC

FRANCHISE LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

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FRANCHISE EXPO AUSTIN

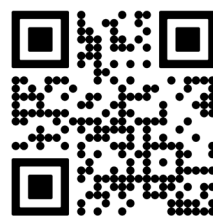
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HEATHER NYKOLAYCHUK

President



YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
4	Budget Blinds	1,500



As I searched for a supportive and stable culture in a workplace, my mentors helped me dig deep to identify my real needs. By meeting with mentors regularly, I was able to find a place where I'm thriving.

Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career?

I have used mentors at every step of my career as well as in my personal life. I have built a pool of mentors—or what I call a board of directors—that I can call on individually depending on what it is that I am working through. I am grateful to have a diverse group of mentors who have a wide range of skill sets and advice to provide around the difficult aspects of leadership. For example, if there is a business problem where I'm trying to align two parties who are finding tension with each other, or I am having trouble finding a good work-life balance, I can call on certain peers of mine to get advice from different perspectives.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders?

Mentoring is important for any sort of leader but for females especially. In the franchising world, there are still a lot of franchises that are led by men, and it is important to be able to have someone who understands you and can counsel you.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship?

You have a mentee who is willing to do the work and a mentor who is equipped to put in the time to make it work. Those two things are super important.

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers?

Sometimes, you don't

necessarily know whom to go to. By having programs in place, it gives you lists of people who are willing to mentor and what their specialties are. It takes away the fear of approaching someone about becoming a mentor. As you move up in title and level, sometimes people forget you are human, and they have this fear of approaching you, so these programs can help connect mentees with leaders who have similar interests and skill sets.

What should the mentoring process include?

Key components of the mentoring process include clear goal setting, scheduling regular meetings, providing feedback and evaluation, and developing a trusting relationship. Most importantly, to build a strong relationship, the mentee and mentor need to be compatible and like-minded.

How is a mentor different than a coach?

To me, mentoring is a long-term relationship where you have a mentor guiding a mentee through various aspects of their professional and personal life. Alternatively, a coach is a short-term engagement that is more task or skill focused.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite?

Mentors throughout my life have helped me in building confidence and finding a voice. They've helped me find my superpowers and be proud of them. Mentors

have also worked with me on developing a strategic mindset and have prepared me to be a thoughtful leader.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges?

After 17 years of working at Mattel, I decided it was time to leave because I wanted to work somewhere closer to where I live and be a bigger part of my family's life. As I searched for a supportive and stable culture in a workplace, my mentors helped me dig deep to identify my real needs. By meeting with mentors regularly, I was able to find a place where I'm thriving.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships?

Mentoring opens up avenues to network and meet different types of leaders throughout my industry as well as in my community.

In what ways has mentoring helped you build confidence in your decision-making?

Mentoring has provided a safe space to learn from my mistakes with constructive feedback in a supportive environment. It has helped me to become more confident and understand the long-term effects of my decisions.

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives?

It's helped me achieve goals by providing guidance, accountability, feedback, and ongoing support.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1) Finding my superpowers and being proud of them; 2) becoming a thoughtful leader; and 3) having confidence in decision-making.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

Mentoring helps to address specific challenges, provides guidance, and creates a supportive network for professional growth. It empowers women to gain the confidence to break through barriers and succeed as leaders.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring?

Embrace the role of being a mentor and recognize the value that you're bringing to someone, set clear expectations on the relationship and how it will work, and create a safe and trusting environment for that to take place. Just do it. Nothing shapes the future of our C-suite more than mentoring. ■

MARY KENNEDY THOMPSON

Chief Operating Officer



Can you describe the role mentoring has played in your career? I have been very blessed to be mentored and sponsored by a number of people. Probably my top mentor was Mike Bidwell, former CEO of Neighborly. He showed me when I was going in the right direction and walked me through when I was heading in the wrong direction. Mike gave me clear, unemotional, factually based feedback on how I could be a better executive, leader, and human being.

Why is mentoring important for female franchise leaders? It's important for both men and women. It's important that men and women be mentored by both men and women. I often have women ask me to mentor them, and I will. When I'm done, I usually recommend a male mentor because both sides are important, and we work in an environment with both men and women.

What are the key elements of a good mentoring relationship? Trust is first and foremost. Honesty and willingness are second. Mike was willing and brave enough to have conversations that mattered. He told me things I needed to hear that weren't always comfortable.

Finally, you need to be clear on what you want to accomplish. If I'm being mentored or somebody's asked me to spend time with them, I want goals. What do you want to accomplish? What do you want to learn? What do I want to learn? How can we get there?

What are the benefits of mentoring programs for female leaders looking to advance their careers? Anybody looking to advance their career should find people to learn from and ask for help. I'm not a big believer in official mentoring programs because mentoring is very organic. You find somebody who connects with you, or you connect with them, and you want to learn from them. When we make mentoring too formal, or we get in the middle of the relationship, it stifles the mentoring that needs to happen.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't encourage mentoring and set up environments where people are willing to actively mentor. But if you're a leader—man or woman—you need to have somebody you're learning from. It's not learning so you can advance your career; it's learning so you can be better and stronger and help grow your company. That, in turn, will help you advance your career.

YEARS IN FRANCHISING	COMPANY	NUMBER OF UNITS
30	Neighborly	More than 5,000 franchises (U.S. and International)

What should the mentoring process include? Set up an environment that encourages people to share and help one another. When one grows, they all grow. Establish clear goals and be consistent. When someone asks me to mentor them, I ask, “Why? What do you want to learn?”

Then, I ask them to do something. I have books that I’ll have them read because they need to have skin in the game and do some work ahead of time. If I ask somebody to mentor me, I’ll say, “What’s the book you’re reading now?” or “What’s a book you think I need to read?” That’s a big part of the process. It’s not a one-way relationship; it’s a two-way relationship. Part of that should be the homework and the hard work you’re willing to put in.

How is a mentor different than a coach? A coach is a person whose team you join. Often-times, you don’t necessarily join the team for the coach. You join because you want to be part of the team. You join a company because you want to be part of the company, and there’s a CEO or your boss who’s the coach.

A mentor is somebody you look for who might be outside of your normal circle. They see things differently or have a different set of experiences than yours. A mentor cares about where you’re going, has experience, maybe, from a different place than where you’ve been, and can help you understand how to get there.

What role did mentoring play in your path to the C-suite? Everything. I heard someone say once, “You know, I want to be a diamond.” A diamond is brilliant, strong, and sparkly. It’s the strongest thing out there. What does it take to be a diamond? You have to be cut by another diamond. I look for diamonds everywhere, and diamonds aren’t all in the C-suite. In fact, many are well outside of the C-suite. Some people are two years into franchising and have something significant to teach.

Mentoring has meant everything in my path to the C-suite, but I didn’t seek mentoring to take me along my path. I sought the mentoring to learn and grow.

How has what you learned from a mentor helped you navigate difficult career challenges? When I got recruited by Mike to join Neighborly, it was a hard decision. I had been with Cookies by Design for more than 12 years. It was a brand I had grown up in. I loved the people and still love them. I’ve always been very close to the founder, so I went to her

and shared that I had this opportunity. It was a hard decision to make. She said, “You know, you have to make the decisions. Nobody else is going to make those for you.”

A peer at Cookies by Design said, “Mary spends so much time discussing the past that she doesn’t think enough about the future.” I didn’t know who this person was, but it was a mentoring moment for me. It really helped me. I don’t think that person will ever know how much they helped me move into my new role.

How did mentoring help you in other business relationships? I started running with somebody who’s the CEO of a large platform company. We started mentoring in those moments. If you asked her, she would say we mentored each other. There were things I had done that she hadn’t, and there were many things she had done. This helped me connect with people.

One of the most brilliant networkers I ever watched was Dina Dwyer-Owens. She was a brilliant networker. When I got to watch, see, and understand, I found that networking is the beginning of mentoring. Networking has helped in my business relationships—going to somebody and saying, “Have you ever done this? What do you think about this? What do you know about this issue?”

In what ways has mentoring helped you set goals and achieve objectives? I had a mentor who was the CEO of Money Mailers. He grew up in a fishing village in Africa. He was the youngest of four boys, and when he was 12, his parents and his brothers pulled him aside and told him they’d been saving their money for all these years for him to go to school. He earned two degrees, one from Harvard and one from Yale. He was probably the smartest, most brilliant mentor I ever had.

When I first took over as the leader for Cookies by Design, I didn’t know what I was doing. I told him that I’ve set goals for myself that I have to achieve. He asked, “Why were you hired for this role?” I responded with the specific goals I intended to accomplish. After a 10-minute discussion, he said, “Mary, they want you to think. You need to make time to think because if you don’t, you can’t set the goals, and you can’t achieve those objectives.” To this day, I schedule blocks of time in my calendar labeled as “prime think time.” Despite my inclination to constantly take action, I recognize the importance of pausing to think. He emphasized that thinking is the starting point for goal setting and objective achievement.

What were the three most important things you learned from mentoring?

1. As leaders, our job is to change people. I’m an extreme optimist, so I thought I could change everybody. I learned that sometimes you can’t change them fast enough. You have to change them because that’s what the organization needs, or maybe, that’s what the person needs.
2. The most effective leaders aren’t the loudest or the ones standing in front beating their chest. They’re the ones standing quietly in the corner, getting everybody else out there and directing them in subtle ways.
3. Do not take yourself so seriously, and have fun in the process. I’ve had multiple mentors tell me to relax and have fun because it goes really fast.

How can mentoring help the next generation of women on their path to the C-suite?

I spoke to a group of about 500 women. Their biggest question was, “How do we get a seat at the table?” You have to create results and hit your numbers. Mentoring can help this next generation find responsibilities that feed their soul. Mentoring can help you get to the right place, understand where that is, what the best path is, and what the pitfalls are.

What advice do you have for female executives considering mentoring? For any one time I’m mentoring somebody, I want to learn from somebody else as well. If you’re doing all the mentoring, you might want to think, “Maybe I have something to learn from somebody else.” I’m amazed at how many times I’m sitting next to somebody who might be new in the business, and they have a great idea or have done something I’ve never done. If you’re somebody who’s always being mentored, maybe there’s some giving back you need to do. ■

DISTINCTIVE FLAVORS

Chick N Max carves out a tasty niche

Written by **MAX SHEETS**

I've spent more than three decades in the restaurant industry. I got my start as a teenager scraping cheese off pans in a Pizza Hut kitchen. I later spent more than 20 years in real estate and development for such brands as Lone Star Steakhouse and Saloon, Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburgers, Smashburger, and Ted's Montana Grill. In fact, I was with Smashburger when the footprint transformed from a handful to hundreds, and I was at the floor of Ted's Montana Grill when Ted Turner and George McKerrow pioneered the better-burger segment. My responsibilities took me across the country. And in those travels, I saw things done well, and I saw the opposite.

But soon it came time to channel that knowledge and start my own concept that would accommodate the ever-growing movement towards red meat alternatives.

I knew the concept had to feature a real point of differentiation that would carve out a niche in an increasingly saturated segment. After experimenting with different smoke flavors, such as hickory and mesquite, I realized that a franchise serving Almond Smoked Chicken as a healthy alternative would be a big part of the concept. With that knowledge, I conceptualized Chick N Max in 2017 and assembled a team of culinary professionals to perfect the menu. Our first restaurant opened in January 2018.

A new approach

Chick N Max isn't just serving up ordinary "original" or "spicy" chicken sandwiches. Our menu features the latest food trends in America, and we're taking it to new heights with our unique flavor combinations and sauces. We're proud to say we're creating the "better chicken sandwich" segment and offering a global flavor profile. Our menu impresses and delights even the most discerning diners.

Our chef-crafted sandwiches, made with almond-wood smoked pulled chicken or golden fried tenders, are where we stretch our culinary muscles. Examples of proprietary sand-

wiches include the Maple Bacon Sandwich, featuring pulled smoked chicken, chopped bacon, a drizzle of maple syrup, cheddar cheese, and mayonnaise on a potato bun, and the Sweet & Spicy Sandwich, which includes lightly breaded, crisp chicken tenders, fried jalapeño pepper strips, cucumber, tomato, and sweet and spicy sauce on a brioche bun.

Our almond-wood smoked chicken, however, can also meet the needs of a more health-conscious diner when served as smoked leg quarters, breast quarters, half-birds, or smoked wings.



This is unique to the entire industry. No one uses almond wood, which we view as an ingredient adding a unique flavor profile. It produces a softer, sweeter flavor than other, harsher woods historically used in restaurants, such as hickory, mesquite, and white oak. The gentleness of the almond-wood smoke allows the chicken's authentic and rich flavors to come through.

Our guests can complete their meal with a range of 10 homestyle sides, including fries, onion rings, mac and cheese, mashed potatoes, smoked white beans, and 11 sauces that are made daily to ensure the highest quality and taste.

Finally, our menu also includes wonderfully chef-crafted salads that can be customized with our smoked or fried chicken.

Easy-to-execute menu

As a fast-casual brand, we've designed our menu to be extremely balanced. We've managed to match an easy-to-execute menu with guest-delighting food. Our fried tenders please guests of all ages, and our almond-wood smoked chicken is healthy and flavorful. Our menu performs better than the industry average in the fast-casual segment because of our strong dinner and catering offerings.

Spreading our wings

Our growth has accelerated since we launched our franchise opportunity in 2021. We're incredibly proud of how far we've come and excited about where we're going. With six restaurants currently open and operating across Kansas, Texas, and South Dakota, Chick N Max promises to continue to inspire additional locations across the country.

This year, we're gearing up to further expand with existing and new franchisees. Thanks to an active franchise pipeline that stands at more than 50 restaurants, we expect to open as many as three to five new restaurants this year and at least that many each year thereafter.

In terms of size, Chick N Max restaurants range from 1,950 to about 2,250 square feet, with 40 to 60 seats and a drive-thru. Each restaurant has between 25 and 35 employees.

The numbers

Though we are an emerging brand, our leadership team comprises established restaurateurs who've crafted our franchise concept with growth in mind. Our build-out process is designed to be accessible for entrepreneurs to join the Chick N Max family. Our menu is delicious and easy to execute, allowing our franchisees to focus on providing great customer service and growing their business.

Coming out of Covid-19 in 2021, our sales grew 30% over 2020, generating two-year sales comps of more than 40%. Since then, we've consistently experienced double-digit sales and customer growth.

Including a franchise fee of \$35,000, the total investment to open a Chick N Max restaurant ranges from \$410,500 to \$997,500. ■

Max Sheets is the founder and CEO of Chick N Max.

“I like to involve the teams as much as reasonably possible not only for ideas, but to create a better and fluid working unit.”

The Top Man

Adam Oldenburg takes charge at Toppers Pizza

Written by **KERRY PIPES**



ADAM OLDENBURG CEO

Company: **Toppers Pizza LLC**

Units: **71**

Age: **39**

Years in franchising: **18**

Years in current position: **1**

Last May, Toppers Pizza Founder & CEO Scott Gittrich announced he was stepping down after more than three decades leading the Wisconsin-based brand. But waiting in the wings, groomed to take over, was Adam Oldenburg.

Oldenburg has been a part of the Toppers Pizza brand for more than 18 years, rising from delivery driver up through the ranks to his most recent position as vice president of operations. “I told people when I was a delivery driver that I was going to run the company someday,” recalls the 39-year-old. They might not have believed him then, but he’s on top now.

Outside the corporate office, he’s also part of an ownership group that operates five Toppers

locations, and he has even been recognized as Franchisee of the Year. All of this experience on both sides of the franchise operation have given Oldenburg a deep understanding of Toppers and the pizza industry.

Still new to the job, he says he’s focused on continuing to expand the franchisee network, delivering menu innovation, and leveraging cutting-edge technology and marketing. That’s why the brand is refranchising a number of company stores, he says, “to have the bulk of our efforts focused on our franchisees.”

As Toppers grows, Oldenburg says he recognizes that maintaining quality control will be an important but necessary challenge. He believes he and his team can handle the challenge.

Oldenburg says Toppers has long-term goals of reaching 100 stores by 2026 and 500 stores in the next 10 years while building and maintaining a brand that customers and team members are proud of.

LEADERSHIP

What is your role as CEO? Leading a high-powered team that delivers on a thoughtful and executable strategic vision. I play a huge role in financial oversight, franchisee support and relations, maintaining and building on the culture we have established, and creating value for our franchise partners and shareholders.

How has Covid-19 affected the way you have led your brand? In many respects, Covid-19 has amplified the number of deliveries that are made in the environment today. I’m not just talking about pizza but groceries, food, and retail as well. We are now making strategic decisions based around how we show up in the delivery segment. It’s different and changing daily.

Describe your leadership style: “Care with candor” is my mantra. I truly believe that you can’t care about someone if you aren’t able to have the tough conversations with them that need to happen. If you see someone failing, you have to be able to tell them so and work with them to deliver on what is expected. If you don’t tell them, are you just going to let them fail? How is that great leadership? On the other side, if someone is successful, I will hold

them up for the world to see. I tend to listen extensively and use the information that I have gathered to make a sound decision. I like to involve the teams as much as reasonably possible not only for ideas, but to create a better and fluid working unit.

What has inspired your leadership style? First and foremost, my parents. Their open communication was a guiding light for me through my career. They also were hard-working and served friends and family without question. After that, there has been no bigger influence on my leadership journey than our founder, Scott Gittrich. Working in restaurants is fun and tough work. He showed me how to have fun, lean in, be disciplined, and think differently.

What is your biggest leadership challenge? I'm anticipating that the balance of growth with quality control is going to play out to be a big challenge. It usually is when it comes to franchise growth. We plan to have great franchisees that execute the Toppers system and to have extremely high standards when it comes to delivering on QSC (quality, service, cleanliness).

How do you transmit your culture from your office to frontline employees? We are out in stores and listening. It's a requirement that executive team members, including me, are out in stores and working for a minimum of five hours each month. Whether that's making pizzas (for those of us who can) or handing out food to customers, we get the chance to engage with team members on what is going right and where we are screwing up.

How can a CEO help their CMO develop and grow? The easy answer is that the CMO develops the strategy and targets, and the CEO holds the person accountable for delivering on that strategy and the results. The environment is consistently changing, and one of the main areas that I focus on with my head of marketing is getting him involved with other experts in the industry. That could be creative, loyalty, search, mailings, out of home, etc.

Where is the best place to prepare for leadership: an MBA school or OTJ? I'll start out by saying, I don't have an MBA. For some people, that's an immediate turnoff, and they see an MBA as a prerequisite for any job. I'd tell you that you're missing out on some opportunities with people if that's what you believe. You can educate yourself on leadership, and there is a lot out there to learn about the subject. Learning is one thing. Applying that

learning is another, and you can't get that type of experience unless you are on the job. Leadership is a journey, and I'm happy to say that I'm still on the never-ending path to better myself in this area daily.

Are tough decisions best taken by one person? How do you make tough decisions? That's a tough question in itself because it varies. There are certain burdens that a CEO must carry. There are decisions I must make myself and others that are team decisions. If there is a tough decision that someone on my team needs to make, I always offer support. Whether that's personnel issues or something else, I will offer advice, role-play the situation, and even be side by side with them when the tough decision needs to happen. Tough decisions are made because you are thinking about the company as a whole. I've had to lay people off, close locations, switch vendors, etc., and you have to continually tell yourself that it's better for everyone, not just a finite group of people.

Do you want to be liked or respected? Both, but I also don't think that those are my driving motivators. I want others to be successful and to build something special in their lives. If I become liked or respected through acting in that way, that's great.

Advice to CEO wannabes: Leading a company is not a job, it's a lifestyle. There are not many moments in the day when I'm not thinking about work. Of course, I have a balance with family and friends, but when you are in this role, it's important to stay in touch even through weekends, etc. Get ready to give all the credit to your team and own all the failures because everyone works for you.

MANAGEMENT

Describe your management style: I would say that I have a pretty balanced management style but would lean toward people oriented and delegative. I want people to succeed, and to do that, you need to give them the freedom to shoot for the moon or even fail miserably.

What does your management team look like? I have an executive team that has a mix of people who have come from outside of Toppers and those who have grown up in Toppers. They are all unique, valuable, and driven individuals. They complement and support each other, knowing that each department is equally important to the success of Toppers as a whole.

How does your management team help you lead? First and foremost, I couldn't do what I do without them. Each of them helps mold me in a different way and, frankly, will

call me out when I don't rise to the occasion or they feel something is off. They are all life-long learners, so it's not surprising to get a book or an article from them on a certain area of the business where we might be challenged. I expect them to manage up—period. I'm not perfect. With their help, I will fail less.

Favorite management gurus: Do you read management books? John Maxwell's *The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential*—I give this book out regularly. Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and David Novak's *Taking People with You: The Only Way to Make Big Things Happen*. I'm a fan of all things Brené Brown, and I listen to Lewis Howes's daily motivation podcasts every morning.

What makes you say, "Yes, now that's why I do what I do!"? Watching people succeed and hit their goals. There is nothing more rewarding than that. Of course, I love seeing people eat great pizza too.

OPERATIONS

What trends are you seeing with consumer spending habits in your stores? People are looking for value, whether that be in price or convenience. If you can't deliver them the product that they paid a premium for, you are going to lose that customer.

How is the economy driving consumer behavior in your system? Covid is definitely over and so is the abundance of stimulus checks and other programs that were happening during that time. As inflation has had its toll on people, we are seeing our customers' wallets tighten, whether that be with their willingness to try a new pizza or order as often.

What are you expecting from your market in the next 12 months? Expecting or hoping? Lol. I expect the pizza segment to be competitive mostly on price. We and other smaller chains have to fight with the big guys, and some of them have established themselves as aggressive low-cost providers. Usually, when wallets tighten, you need to offer a value around price to retain and/or attract new customers.

Are your franchisees bullish or bearish about growth and adding additional units? Overall, bullish. Most of our franchisees understand that the more stores we have, the stronger the brand and, frankly, the more we can achieve from economies of scale.

Are commodity/supply costs any cause for concern in your system? Always, but

“Results over efforts. Now, don’t get me wrong: I love hard workers, but if they can get it done by working less, I’m going to ask how, so we can replicate it.”

I’d have to say that it’s far easier today than it was during Covid. We have a great team in purchasing that is consistently looking for ways to renegotiate contracts and provide world-class service on behalf of our franchisees. We know that every dollar that we can save on a commodity is a dollar more that our franchisees can take to the bottom line.

In what ways are political/global issues impacting the market and your brand?

As far as I’m concerned, government regulation will always be something that we have to look out for. But frankly, we will always figure out how to work with what we are required to adhere to, and we will change our business model accordingly.

PERSONAL

What time do you like to be at your desk? I like to be at my desk by 9 a.m. on a daily basis.

Exercise in the morning? Wine with lunch? I’m an avid weight lifter. I’ve been doing it regularly since high school. I tend to lift at 6 a.m. on most mornings unless there is a conflict. Then it’s earlier. Wine with lunch? Heck, no. A beer, maybe, if I’m vacationing.

Do you socialize with your team after work/outside the office? Oh, yeah.

Specifically, the team that I work with daily, the executive team. We’ve been to sporting events and restaurants and have even done happy hours together. I don’t have a second me. I am what you see, so there is little risk in socializing with my team outside of work.

Last two books read: *Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect* by Will Guidara and *10x Is Easier Than 2x: How World-Class Entrepreneurs Achieve More by Doing Less* by Dan Sullivan and Dr. Benjamin Hardy.

What technology do you take on the road? My phone is my go-to, but I also use my laptop. I use Evernote on my laptop, home computer, and phone to stay organized.

How do you relax/balance life and work? Spending time with family and friends has to be at the front of why life is great in the first place, so I make time for that. I love all things sports, from playing to watching. I coach my oldest son’s basketball team. I also grew up in the ’80s and ’90s, so video games are a staple of entertainment for me.

Favorite vacation destination(s): I grew up going to Gulf Shores, Alabama. In my eyes, it’s home away from home. The kids have now been there three times and consider it their favorite destination. I know that this is going to sound cliché, but it’s hard to argue with Disney and Universal. I’ve been spoiled by attending some Disney Institute courses through Toppers, and it’s just a different and one-of-a-kind experience.

Favorite occasions to send employees notes: I love seeing people do great acts of service, especially in the restaurant. I’ve sent hundreds of notes prior to becoming CEO when I’ve seen servant leadership. I still do that, but I also repost anniversaries on LinkedIn for all team members who are employed at the corporate office and add a little something.

Favorite company product/service: I’m an avid Jordan shoe wearer. I wear them during speaking events, to the office, and during my personal time. They’ve got me hooked. Dollar Shave Club—genius. Taco Bell—sorry, you can’t beat a chalupa. How do I not say Amazon? It’s disrupted the industry but is so dang convenient ... and dangerous.

BOTTOM LINE

What are your long-term goals for the company? 100 stores by 2026 and 500 stores in the next 10 years. Build a brand that customers and team members are proud of.

How has the economy changed your goals for your company? Our brand will hit its goals if we do the right things regardless of the economy. Goals will stay the same, but the decisions will change daily.

Where can capital be found these days?

Of course, there are traditional lenders, like SBA loans, and those are the easiest to get, specifically, if you have the down payment. We are actively creating relationships with nontraditional lenders to drive down our franchisees’ interest rates by leveraging the equity in the business. Money is easy to find. It’s what you pay for it that might make you unhappy.

How do you measure success? Results over efforts. Now, don’t get me wrong: I love hard workers, but if they can get it done by working less, I’m going to ask how, so we can replicate it.

What has been your greatest success?

Personal: Raising two fantastic boys with my wife. I love talking to their teachers and hearing them tell me how much of a pleasure it is to have them in their classes and how polite they are. Work: I told people when I was a delivery driver that I was going to run the company someday. Of course, most of them laughed, but I was serious. So, it’s hard not to say becoming the CEO because I’ve had my eye set on it for a very long time, and more importantly, I believed.

Any regrets? Regrets, no. Things I would have done differently in the business? Of course, but every failure has been a learning lesson. I love my family, my friends, and my co-workers, and I jump out of bed to come to work, so I think life is good. If I wasn’t having fun, I’d do something else—period.

What can we expect from your company in the next 12 to 18 months?

We have officially announced that we are working our way toward a world-class franchise company in how we support our franchisees and how we structure the company to do so as well. We are refranchising a majority of our company stores to get to a 10% ratio and to have the bulk of our efforts focused on our franchisees. I expect to grow and to sign deals with new and existing franchisees because of the work and support that we bring to enhancing their bottom-line profitability. Life is too short to not have a Toppers Pizza near you. Trust me. ■

“Culture must be simplified and relatable to everyone in the organization ... If no one can recite it, they’re likely not living it.”

Cup of Joe

Scooter’s Coffee CEO draws on 40-year history

Written by **KERRY PIPES**



JOE THORNTON CEO

Company: **Scooter’s Coffee**

Units: **754**

Age: **56**

Years in franchising: **20**

Years in current position: **1**

Joe Thornton kicked off the new year as CEO of Scooter’s Coffee. He may be new to his position, but he’s an old hand at franchising, coffee, and Scooter’s Coffee.

Thornton spent four decades in leadership roles with Blockbuster Video, Starbucks, HMSHost, and Jamba before joining Scooter’s Coffee as president in the summer of 2022. During those 40 years, he has been involved in operations, new store expansion, marketing/branding, employee development, franchising, and store optimization. He’s a leader who gets results.

As a senior vice president at Starbucks, he was responsible for more than 2,400 stores and led large-scale strategy and operations. By

the time he left 11 years later, the coffee giant had expanded to more than 12,000 locations in the U.S. Thornton served as executive vice president and COO at HMSHost, where he oversaw more than 1,600 food and beverage locations throughout North America, partnered with more than 300 brands, and led more than 30,000 associates in the restaurants. Thornton also served as senior vice president and COO of Jamba Juice, where he helped optimize the business and sales around speed, taste, and friendliness.

In addition to leading large-scale growth companies, Thornton has been a business consultant and authored multiple books. *The Power of Or: Choosing and Doing What Matters Most* was released in 2020, and *The Hostility of Change: Breaking Through Deep-Seated Barriers* followed a year later. His third book, *The Depths of Mediocrity: Eliminating Indifference*, will be released soon.

Look for Thornton to continue doing big things with Omaha, Nebraska-based Scooter’s Coffee, a brand that already has more than 750 locations. His efforts will be centered around a collaborative leadership style and strategies focused on supporting franchise owners as they grow the brand.

He says you can expect more expansion, new menus, fun offerings, and more exciting brand building during his first year on the job.

LEADERSHIP

What is your role as CEO? To inspire. Great CEOs are inspiring storytellers who bring the teams along for strategic and cultural journeys. I’m here to hire and direct a team of great leaders and to support our franchisees and their families.

Describe your leadership style: Collaborative, imaginative, thoughtful.

What has inspired your leadership style? Hope. I want to save the world and instill hope in those who have become hopeless.

What is your biggest leadership challenge? I’m already thinking about the next thing, and there are times when I need to slow down.

How do you transmit your culture from your office to frontline employees? Culture

“Tough decisions best involve some level of collaboration. By definition, tough decisions often have interpersonal, cultural, or financial ramifications, so you better be sure that you are sure. I believe that change is not a process; change is an emotion.”

must be simplified and relatable to everyone in the organization. If you cannot describe your culture in an “elevator speech,” you have made it complicated. If no one can recite it, they’re likely not living it.

How can a CEO help their CMO develop and grow? It is all about strategy and brand. From there, you can unleash the CMO to create the right marketing plan.

Are tough decisions best taken by one person? How do you make tough decisions? Tough decisions best involve some level of collaboration. By definition, tough decisions often have interpersonal, cultural, or financial ramifications, so you better be sure that you are sure. Also, I believe that change is not a process; change is an emotion. Be prepared for the emotional responses sprouting from tough decisions. I make tough decisions as quickly as I can. Sitting on the decision too long often complicates the problem. If it is inevitable, get to it sooner.

Do you want to be liked or respected? Both. Both are achievable with the right balance of leadership.

Advice to CEO wannabes: You must want it for the right reasons. The title comes with a lot of responsibility, so ensure that you are prepared for the weight of that. Your decisions could impact the lives of hundreds or thousands of employees as well as other business stakeholders.

MANAGEMENT

Describe your management style: Collaborative, imaginative, thoughtful.

What does your management team look like? As balanced as any team that I have ever led. Diverse in every way and with a strong command of their respective functions. Oh, they also like to have fun.

How does your management team help you lead? Collaboration. We meet every Monday afternoon for three hours and every Tuesday afternoon for three hours, and we often run out of time. We’re constantly calibrating and aligning on strategy, initiatives, and messaging. They offer suggestions and alternative ways of solving problems, and they challenge each other.

What makes you say, “Yes, now that’s why I do what I do!”? Hearing success stories from those I have helped along the way.

OPERATIONS

What trends are you seeing with consumer spending habits in your stores? There has been some softness in spending, and yet we are seeing the potential for better days ahead soon.

Are commodity/supply costs any cause for concern in your system? Fortunately, no. We have our own vertically integrated supply chain, which was a competitive advantage during the pandemic and continues to be as

fractured supply chains scramble to reassemble themselves. Of course, there have been pressures on costs we cannot control that can impact us to a lesser degree.

PERSONAL

What time do you like to be at your desk? By 9 a.m. By that time, I will have read the news and calibrated the calendar for the day.

Exercise in the morning? Always in the evening. It helps me reflect on the day.

Last two books read: My own! I am a published author of two books with a third book releasing soon. I prefer to practice leadership rather than read about it.

What technology do you take on the road? Laptop, phone, and headphones.

How do you relax/balance life and work? Love to go to the movies and concerts, write books, and play golf.

Favorite occasions to send employees notes: Every day. I send a daily inspirational message called “Cup of Joe,” and I send anniversary and birthday notes every day.

BOTTOM LINE

What are your long-term goals for the company? Create the opportunity for franchisees to realize their dreams. Build a brand that makes a difference in people’s lives wherever we show up.

How has the economy changed your goals for your company? It hasn’t. The industry is still growing, so if we don’t grow, it will be more of a result of what we didn’t do.

What has been your greatest success? Developing people. To look across other organizations and see other C-level executives that I had a hand in their development is very rewarding, whether that is helping a franchisee building their business or someone in their career development.

Any regrets? Always. This becomes a part of continuous improvement. Learning from regrets is the most important thing.

What can we expect from your company in the next 12 to 18 months? More expansion, new menus, fun offerings, a new loyalty program, and an exciting bowl game sponsorship. ■

INDUSTRY VOICE

IFA supports policies to improve franchising

Written by **MATTHEW HALLER**

As 2024 is under way, many of us have been tackling the goals we set for the year to come. As you think about your year ahead in franchising, I encourage you to keep IFA in mind as a reliable partner and source for this year and many to come. Throughout 2023, we delivered on our promise to protect, enhance, and promote franchising, and we are off to a strong start in 2024.

The 2024 IFA Annual Convention, which was recently concluded in Phoenix, was an excellent place to set up for success. Recognized as the “Best Event” in franchising by Entrepreneur Media, our convention brought together the entire franchise family alongside the industry’s most prominent figures and a showstopping roster of keynote speakers. Past speakers included NBA star and Big Chicken franchisor Shaquille O’Neal and NFL legend and multi-unit franchisee Drew Brees. This year featured Deion “Coach Prime” Sanders. These leaders inspire us as we go back to our day-to-day operations and leave lasting impressions on the sector as a whole.

The IFA Convention provided unparalleled professional development opportunities, networking, and best practices throughout the event. More importantly, it gave us all a chance to gather and learn from one another. In franchising, we are at our best when we work to-

gether and take every opportunity available to make the business model even stronger than it is today.

While the IFA convention brings the entire franchise community together for a short time each year, the IFA team is working every day to protect you and your business from policies that could disrupt franchising as we know it. That includes fighting the National Labor Relations Board’s (NLRB) new joint employer standard issued in October 2023.

In my recent testimony before the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee’s Subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, I shared with lawmakers the power of franchising. I also discussed the detrimental effect this new expanded NLRB standard would have on the franchise business model. I explained that, nationally, franchising is a driver of economic growth, and individually, it’s a creator of generational wealth for people from all walks of life.

Our voices heard

In a bipartisan vote on Jan. 12, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a Congressional Review Act joint resolution that would overturn this harmful new standard. It’s clear lawmakers are listening to your concerns and want to use their authority to stop joint employer once and for all.

IFA continues to do everything in our power to stop the new joint employer standard from taking effect, including litigation with stakeholders across the business community and a robust campaign in key states to ensure this resolution makes its way to the president’s desk. We have seen the effects when a similar policy was put forward in 2015, and we want to do everything we can to ensure that doesn’t happen again.

But we don’t just oppose policies at IFA. We are for many policies that will improve franchising from the earliest stages. IFA is working to establish a strong framework for the franchise relationship through improved presale disclosure. We are doing so by encouraging the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to focus on enhancing the information available to potential franchise buyers in the FDD rather than stepping in to regulate the franchise relationship once an agreement is in place.

We believe that proactively providing the information a buyer needs to make an informed purchasing decision improves the chances of a successful relationship and benefits both sides. We will continue to work with the FTC to improve the information available to prospective franchisees so that the franchise business model can continue to thrive well into the future.

The IFA team is unwavering in our commitment to improving the outlook for franchising, and we look forward to continuing to deliver on our mission to protect, enhance, and promote the franchise business model in 2024. Whether it’s advocacy, events, education, or engagement, we’re here to work for you. ■

Matthew Haller is president and CEO of the International Franchise Association.





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Personalized Tech Tools

Brands infuse technology into local store marketing

Written by Colleen McMillar



As the president of Creative Colors International, Mark J. Bollman deeply understands the key role that social media plays in the success of franchises. Perhaps more importantly, he also understands his franchisees.

The company specializes in the repair and restoration of vinyl, leather, fabric, and plastic seating. Its franchisees offer onsite, mobile services to mostly commercial clients. Many of the franchisees are owner-operators, who, along with any technicians they might hire, spend hours every day in vans working routes of repeat customers.

When they come home after a long day, they power through their invoicing and answer requests for estimates. The last thing they want to do is sign on to various social media platforms to plug their business. The company's solution to that predicament is technology.

For the past couple of years, Creative Colors franchisees have been using a platform called Rallio, one of several social media marketing tools available to help businesses manage social media accounts. Rallio enables Creative Colors franchisees to choose from more than 75 branded templates to tailor their messages to local audiences. They can quickly and easily create promotional campaigns on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and other networks.

"A franchisee can go in and schedule an entire year's worth of posts probably in about 20 minutes—what day of the week they want it, how many times per week. It really allows

them to do them all in one place," says Bollman. "Likewise, if customers have inquiries from any of those social platforms, they all get fed through to Rallio. So, the franchisee does not need to go to Facebook to respond or to LinkedIn to respond or to Instagram. They can do it all through the dashboard."

Creative Colors is one of many franchisors that have turned to technology to help improve local store marketing support and, subsequently, drive more revenue. With tools that make it easier for franchisees to post on social media, apps that tie loyalty rewards to a local sports team's performance or individual customer behavior, and web pages that highlight amenities at specific locations, franchisors are better equipping franchise operators to promote their products and services to targeted communities.

National, brand-level marketing is as important as it's ever been, especially for maintaining consistency and awareness. Still, franchisors know that no one understands all of the nuances of local markets better than franchisees.

"It's all about local, grassroots marketing," Bollman says. While some of the franchisees dabble in advertising with local newspapers or radio stations, he adds, social media provides "the biggest impact for net return for dollar cost per average." Because of that, franchise operators quickly recognized the usefulness of social media marketing platforms.

"Everything we do is meant to try to provide value-add for franchisees that ultimately helps their cash register ring," Bollman says. "Because, if it doesn't really help franchisees make any more money or save them time, quite frankly, they're just not interested, and they don't get engaged."

The game changer

Creative Colors International, which has been around since 1980 and began franchising in 1991, has 75 locations in 26 states. Before the company adopted a social media marketing platform, it was hard to keep the brand marketing consistent on social media "because franchisees were all trying to do their own thing," says Bollman, who's been with the company since 1992.

"They were trying to set up their own Instagram account or trying to set up their own Facebook account with no set, standard branding even though we had guidelines in place in writing. It was just very tough to manage, to make sure everybody was following the same format. Obviously, we're not a brand that has 500 locations. But, if we had 500 doing it, it

would have been even more challenging. Having 60 or 70, trying to wrangle everybody, and to make sure they were all operating the same way and following the guidelines, it was sort of like the Wild West."

In addition to the library of prewritten social media messages, there's the option to create custom posts using the artificial intelligence function. Rallio doesn't just make it easier for franchisees to create local social media campaigns; it takes the work out of soliciting online reviews.

"When they complete a job with the customer, they can email or text the customer right away, saying, 'Thank you for your business. Would you mind leaving us a review?'" Bollman says. "They can send them a link so that customers can go through and complete a series of two or three simple questions on whether they are satisfied with Creative Colors' services. And then from there, franchisees have the ability to have those reviews posted on Google, Facebook, et cetera."

Franchisees can also quickly update business information on 30 different online directory listings. "If the franchisee happens to change their phone number or if they want to update their hours, they can do it through this single dashboard, then the update is pushed out within 24 hours to all the other platforms, including Google My Business, Facebook, YP.com, and a host of other online directories."

“With a franchise brand, following a system of guidelines and standards is of No. 1 importance to make sure that nobody's doing something they shouldn't be, which could harm the brand. Rallio has made that easier.”



Mark J. Bollman
President
Creative Colors International

Bollman says Creative Colors' success in finding the right tool for their franchisees has been a game changer. "From a corporate standpoint, we can control the brand. The messaging and the branding are identical whether somebody in California is making a post or the guy in Alpharetta, Georgia," he says. "With a franchise brand, following a system of guidelines and standards is of No. 1 importance to make sure that nobody's doing something they shouldn't be, which could harm the brand. Rallio has made that easier."

Another benefit: There's no need for franchisees to pay someone to put together a promotional campaign for their businesses. "From a price point, it's spot on, and our franchisees love it, whether they're a single operator or somebody who has 22 trucks," Bollman says. "It's sort of a one-size-fits-all approach. And the more that they put into it, the more they get out of it. It's really the win-win for us from a branding standpoint and for unifying the system."

Deeper customer engagement

Dill Dinkers is an emerging brand that started in Columbia, Maryland, in 2022 to ride the wave of America's pickleball obsession.

The franchise founders, Will and Denise Richards, started playing the sport in the summer of 2021. In warm weather, it was sometimes difficult to find an open court. By the time late fall and winter rolled around, it was nearly impossible because of weather conditions. After learning about an indoor pickleball facility in Pennsylvania, the couple made the trek and found an unheated barn that was packed.



Erika Spalding
Chief Marketing Officer
Dill Dinkers

"They said, 'Oh my gosh, there's clearly a need for this, and maybe we should do something about it,'" says Erika Spalding, Dill Dinkers' chief marketing officer. Just like that, a new brand was born. "They opened Columbia with six courts, and fast forward to today, we have four corporate locations that are open now in Maryland. We are about to open a location in Manassas, Virginia, and we have 105 franchise locations in development," Spalding says.

Dill Dinkers is expanding via the regional-developer model. Those who own the rights to an area will become the first franchisee there and find others who are interested in owning a Dill Dinkers location.

"For example, if you notice on our social media, we sold the east coast of South Carolina, from top to bottom, including Savannah, Georgia, in that strip. That area will become 10 new locations," Spalding says. "The model will help us to really expand more quickly. And speed to market is critical right now in such a burgeoning industry."

Because franchisees can customize the marketing to fit their locales, they're better able to address unique challenges and cater to regional needs and preferences.

The company has created a proprietary system that will pull local KPIs for franchisees. They'll have the information they need to determine what actions to take in their markets. For instance, should the franchisees put their energy into attracting customers or dive deeper into customer engagement so that retention is higher?

The company is working with a partner to provide regional developers and franchisees with a better understanding of local demographics. That's "so we understand how the demographics in your area are matching the current demographics of pickleball players in the United States. And that gives us insight into how we should adjust our marketing plan," Spalding says. "Are we attracting experienced or expert players to your facility? Or are we coming into a market with the understanding that we are creating new pickleball players? We may be able to do that just by getting a conversation going in local community groups online or in person rather than having to spend money on advertising, for example, to create new players."

Once the customers are in place, the brand aims to create a seamless experience with its player-relationship management system. Players



Tyler Kraemer
Director of Franchise Services
Penn Station East Coast Subs

will be able to book courts and customize their notification preferences for a particular facility. Each location will have its own web page and social media channels that can highlight amenities and events. The company's marketing and local-partnership collaborations.

Personalized marketing

Penn Station East Coast Subs, which has 73 franchisees and 323 locations, is updating its technology to enhance the one-to-one connection with every customer and to improve the web-ordering experience.

A new loyalty app that will launch in the first half of 2024 will allow the brand to better market directly to customers. It provides data on what they eat from which location and when.

"When we understand a customer's preferences and habits, we can better serve that person's needs through suggestive selling, geo-targeting, and platform-specific preferences," says Tyler Kraemer, director of franchise services.

Here's an example of how this hyper-personalized marketing works: After a transaction, a customer may receive a promotion code or a special offer that provides an incentive to visit a particular store or to place a digital order from that location again. "This level of marketing automation not only brings benefit to the customer—and great benefit to the franchisee from revenue—but an overall much better brand experience," Kraemer says.

Third-party aggregator tools have enabled Penn Station's franchisees to take an increasing number of digital orders without changing operations. "We wanted to make sure that as we expanded our digital footprint, and we did this technology overhaul, it didn't negatively impact the restaurant—the frontline team members, the managers who are dealing with it on a daily basis," Kraemer says. "We were very mindful to build on what we had through existing channels so that it didn't change anything at a point of sale, just how we were able to customize it to come into the point of sale. Tickets still come out the same way. There's a very minimal lift for the restaurant to do anything different to accommodate these channels."

Anytime new tech is introduced, he says, franchisees worry about its effect and whether it will slow operations. The brand's tech committee helps to ensure that won't happen. According to Kraemer, it's important because exceptional service is the best local marketing a business can have. That's how Penn Station plans to separate its restaurants from the others.

"We're very intentional with what we do," Kraemer says. "We've been successful for decades now, running a simple and straight-line operation. So, when we put technology into place, it's an evolution, not a revolution, in the restaurants."



Joanna Bonder
Senior Director of Loyalty
& Digital Channel Marketing
Zaxby's

Tailored marketing

Last fall, Zaxby's boosted its digital app activations by collaborating with local sports teams

"We're very intentional with what we do...We've been successful for decades now, running a simple and straight-line operation. So, when we put technology into place, it's an evolution, not a revolution, in the restaurants."

in two markets, says Joanna Bonder, senior director of loyalty and digital channel marketing.

With the University of Georgia football team entering the 2023 season fresh off back-to-back national championships and predicted to contend again for a title, the company launched its Big Zax Sack marketing campaign.

If UGA sacked the opposing quarterback during a home game, that would trigger an offer to loyalty members. They were notified via app that they could come into their local store the next day for a particular buy-one-get-one-free offer.

Zaxby's was able to take advantage of the Bulldogs' huge following. The university's athletic program also pushed the promotion, which fans could opt into at any time in the stadium and on its social channels.

"It was a true partnership where we were communicating to our guests about it, and they were communicating to their fans about it as well. It was very successful," Bonder says. In fact, it was so successful that the campaign, which was originally limited to home games, was extended to include the Bulldogs' appearances in the Southeastern Conference Championship game and the Orange Bowl.

The company, which is based in Athens, Georgia, has 247 of its 941 restaurants in its home state. It formed a similar partnership in the same designated market area with the Atlanta Falcons.

Zaxby's also tested a collaboration with the University of Louisville's athletic department. Every win by the football team triggered an offer. That promotion also led to increased app activations. "It was a smaller audience in general but still very effective," Bonder says.

Zaxby's has had sports sponsorships before, but the company had never linked them to its digital loyalty program.

"We started in college towns. We've always had a connection to college sports. But, in the past, we struggled to connect that to activations in our digital channels," says Erin Todd, senior director of digital customer experience. "So that was something we were looking to do: to connect with those users not just in the stadium at the sports event, but on their devices to bring that full circle for them."

Area franchisees have raved about the results and want to expand the program.

"We haven't officially planned anything for the fall. We'd like to also understand how we can create offers that franchisees can hopefully activate themselves in the future," Bonder says. "Let's say they're working with a local high school. Can they create an offer where they're helping to support that? We haven't figured out exactly what is coming next this year other than we will likely get greater excitement to build across different franchisee groups."

What is clear is that this trend of aiming tailored marketing to local audiences will continue, Todd says. "That's really what this boils down to," she says, "being able to deliver targeted offers, specific products, that a user is interested in. So, it's really an overall investment in personalization." ■

A CUT ABOVE

Building
“an army of brand
advocates” at
Scissors & Scotch

Written by **KERRY PIPES**



Azalia Hoelting always dreamed of a television career. She spent more than 15 years in the field. She wrote and produced for broadcasts and ultimately worked as a promotion director for several TV stations. She honed her craft for developing and implementing marketing strategies that helped grow ratings and revenue. But the world of franchising was just around the corner.

In 2014, she was hired by Massage Heights as a communications coordinator before quickly moving to field marketing manager. Her franchise career was off and running.

During the ensuing years, she worked as a marketing executive for Mr. Gatti's Pizza and Gigi's Cupcakes. She then served as VP of marketing for a large multi-unit Amazing Lash Studios and Massage Heights operator before being hired as director of marketing for WellBiz Brands' beauty division. Here Hoelting was the marketing lead for Amazing Lash Studio and Radiant Waxing salons and marketing support for Drybar Shops. All of this experience prepared her for her next stop at Scissors & Scotch.

In June of 2022, she was hired as VP of marketing at Kansas City-based Scissors & Scotch. The emerging brand offers its customers grooming services along with a fully stocked bar. It has grown to more than 30 locations and more than 17,000 members nationwide. Hoelting has been busy continuing to build the brand's story by taking a holistic marketing approach to attract new customers.

She says the brand does so by "leveraging market insights, consumer trends, and competitive analysis to develop initiatives that enhance brand visibility, engage our target audience, and drive business growth."

The core marketing focus at Scissors & Scotch is driving new customers to try the brand and then retaining them. "The ultimate goal is to establish a loyal customer base that consistently returns," she says. The brand executes that strategy with a heavy focus on digital marketing and grassroots efforts.

Hoelting says it's all about the guest experience: "If your clients genuinely enjoy the experience, feel acknowledged, and perceive value, you not only secure their loyalty, but also earn their recommendation. You build an army of brand advocates."

Describe your role as CMO. I am responsible for shaping and executing holistic marketing strategies for both consumers and recruitment that align with the brand's ob-

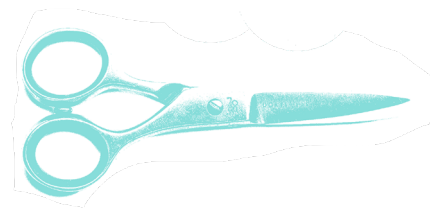
jectives. I work closely with cross-functional teams to ensure a consistent and compelling brand message across various channels both online and offline. This involves overseeing the development of creative assets, campaigns, and promotional materials that resonate with our audience and reinforce our brand values.

In addition to brand management, my focus extends to optimizing customer experiences. This includes refining the customer journey, enhancing touchpoints, and implementing strategies to enhance satisfaction and loyalty.

What's the most challenging part of being a CMO today? The ever-evolving digital landscape has undergone a significant transformation with the emergence of AI, revolutionizing marketing strategies by introducing new avenues for personalization, automation, and data-driven decision-making. While these advancements present incredible opportunities, they also bring challenges, such as finding the balance between harnessing technology and preserving brand consistency. It's not just a matter of understanding how to leverage AI for the brand; it involves navigating the aspirations of owners and local teams eager to embrace and utilize this technology at their level. Striking this balance is crucial for ensuring a cohesive and resonant brand identity across all levels of the organization.

How has Covid-19 impacted the way you have led your brand's marketing efforts? While I wasn't with the S&S brand during Covid, I can speak to the broader impact it had on shifting perspectives regarding the significance of self-investment. Working from home and living in virtual meetings suddenly put everyone in the spotlight. When those usual services weren't around, it hit home just how crucial it is to make that investment in yourself to feel super confident and on top of your game. This realization has been beneficial for our industry as more men acknowledge the positive impact grooming has on their overall appearance and self-confidence.

What are the three most important keys to being an effective CMO leader today? One crucial aspect of being an effective CMO leader today is transcending the traditional role of a brand marketer. It's imperative to be fluent and deeply understand the business operations and how those operations intricately weave into the customer journey. I refer to myself as an operational marketer. By understanding the full consumer journey, you gain insights into the levers that need to



"If your clients genuinely enjoy the experience, feel acknowledged, and perceive value, you not only secure their loyalty, but also earn their recommendation. You build an army of brand advocates."

be pulled to impact both the profitability and sustainability of the brand.

Another key attribute is the art of listening. It goes beyond verbal communication. It involves attuning oneself to the unspoken nuances of franchisees and teams. As the saying goes, "All boats rise with higher tides." Being a perceptive listener allows you to identify underlying challenges, aspirations, and opportunities that might not be explicitly communicated. This empathetic understanding contributes to fostering a collaborative environment where everyone's insights are valued and, collectively, the entire organization thrives.

The third key element is effective communication. In executing any brand campaign, gaining buy-in is crucial, requiring you to be an adept communicator and establish trust within the system. This trust is foundational for ensuring that our message resonates, leading to successful campaigns and the overall success of the brand.

How do you prepare a marketing plan and execute the strategies? I analyze what KPIs are most important in moving the needle. From there, we start to delve into research, identify necessary components required across all the departments to effectively execute, establish a realistic timeline for seamless implementation, and apply tracking mechanisms to monitor progress and measure performance against predetermined benchmarks.

Communication plays a pivotal role throughout the process. Clear and concise

communication involves articulating the “why” behind the chosen strategy, outlining the approach, and aligning on goals. This ensures alignment across the team, fostering a shared understanding and commitment to the marketing plan’s success.

How do you measure marketing results and effectiveness? Within our specific brand, our primary drivers of success revolve around encouraging new client trials and fostering client retention. While there are additional factors that contribute to our success, closely monitoring these two metrics helps provide initial insight into how our campaigns are influencing overall engagement and satisfaction.

Discuss your core consumer marketing strategies and objectives. Our two core strategies are digital marketing and grassroots efforts. We have a fun and playful consumer voice that allows us to infuse creativity into our digital marketing endeavors. We’re an experience-based brand, so actively participating in community activations and highlighting our unique qualities has proven to be highly effective.

How do you go about creating a customer-centric marketing and brand philosophy? Our tech stack is exceptional, enabling us to conduct segmentation based on the consumer’s position in their journey and engage with them consistently throughout the journey.

Why is it so important for the marketing department to have a personal touch when it comes to helping the brand connect with franchise prospects? Guided by our core values as our North Star, we prioritize establishing a people-first philosophy from the beginning. By prioritizing the well-being of our team, we believe they, in turn, will take care of our guests. Additionally, we guide prospective franchisees through the entire process, ensuring they are well acquainted with the team that will support them at every step once they become part of our franchise community.

How does this help your franchise sales and development effort? It’s incredibly advantageous for franchise prospects to see the early investment our founders made in technology and data stack. This investment serves as a testament to the dedication and commitment we have toward ensuring the success of our brand and our franchisees.

What ways/tools do you rely on to do this? Two of our core values are to create real relationships and to give a damn. Prospects encounter these values firsthand when interacting with our team. We ensure they have diverse touchpoints, both virtually and in person, facilitating opportunities for in-depth discussions. They explore our operational approach and witness the passion each team member brings to the table. This provides insights into our organizational culture and demonstrates the unwavering support they can expect throughout their journey when they become part of the S&S family.

How is today’s consumer and marketing data helping you fine-tune your marketing initiatives? Leveraging our technology and data stack empowers us to make informed, metric-based decisions. This data-driven approach ensures that our marketing strategies are finely tuned to align with current consumer trends and preferences, fostering a more targeted, personalized, and effective outreach.

Describe the evolving role of social media in your brand’s marketing efforts. Our primary focus is educating our locations on the pivotal role Google My Business plays in enhancing visibility and boosting the effectiveness of our paid digital campaigns.

As the social media landscape shifts toward a more pay-to-play model, our emphasis has shifted from organic strategies to crafting compelling content that seamlessly aligns with our paid efforts. In response to the evolving features and algorithms of these platforms, our strategies have adjusted to leverage social impact for local visibility and engagement.

How do you work with other internal departments, and does technology help? Our collaborative approach is fundamental to the success of our endeavors. The execution of all programs and campaigns relies on the smooth integration of insights, resources, and support from every internal department. This collaborative synergy increases our chances for success as we analyze data from various perspectives, considering all aspects when implementing subsequent steps or projects.

Do you see vendors as business partners? Why/why not? I view our vendors as an integral extension of our team. They must be able to grasp the intricacies of the brand and our processes, enabling them to serve as

valuable resources for our teams. Their input, ideas, best practices, and expertise support and enhance various aspects of our operations.

How have marketing strategies/tools changed over the past decade? How have you adapted? The digital landscape has undergone significant shifts. I recall a time when leveraging organic social reach was prominent; however, in recent years, there has been a shift toward a more pay-to-play model. Despite these changes, it’s truly exciting to witness this evolution, presenting opportunities for more personalized and mobile-centric approaches. Additionally, the impact of AI on strategies adds another layer of excitement to an already dynamic landscape.

How is your marketing/branding strategy developed, and how does it flow through the system? The core of the approach is aligning our strategies with the overarching goals and values of our brand. We operate as a cohesive team, conducting in-depth analysis of metrics, consumer behavior, and the competitive landscape to identify both opportunities and challenges. From there, we engage our brand agency to develop creative and compelling marketing strategies and work cross-functionally to develop training and educational tools. Implementing the strategy seamlessly throughout our system is facilitated by our “four times, four ways” process. This involves communicating the strategy through various channels and multiple approaches, ensuring comprehensive knowledge dissemination across the entire system. We encourage the teams to use the same process to communicate with their shop teams. This structured approach helps strategies and tools to be better understood and embraced at every level. ■



EXPERIENCE LEADING GROWTH

CONGRATULATIONS to the recipients of the inaugural Franchise Customer Experience Certification, validating practices that drive franchisee profitability through outstanding franchisee and consumer experience.



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The Paramedics of Property Damage

 **Wild Birds Unlimited**
Nature Shop

How does your brand's customer experience drive franchisee profits?



ASHLEY SCHUETZ

Chief Marketing Officer
Massage Heights

The value of customer experience is integral to driving franchisee profits and especially important for service-based brands like Massage Heights. Propelling excellent experience stems from your commitment to quality and consistency and equipping franchisees with top-of-the-line service offerings and retail products.

At Massage Heights, our primary focus is to equip franchisees with high-quality services, consistent innovations, elite products, strategic marketing materials, and operational protocols to create an exceptional customer service experience every time. Remaining committed to consistency and excellence drives franchisee profits by developing consumers into loyal members, thus building long-term relationships and connections with our brand. When customers become loyal members, they develop a routine with the brand, increasing both customer retention and lifetime value.

The backbone of Massage Heights' customer experience is our reputation and customer satisfaction. When you have a satisfied customer, they serve as an ideal brand ambassador as they organically share their experience in the communities you serve by word of mouth and online.

Building notoriety and a legacy can be highly beneficial for any brand as consumers will know what to expect when engaging with your business. We are known as a premier wellness retreat and continue to share this message with communities nationwide to both retain existing members and attract new ones, ultimately helping franchisees maintain and grow their profits month to month. A positive reputation within the community also lowers acquisition

costs, which is essential as our brand expands into new markets.

Multiple revenue sources can provide a multi-faceted benefit to your business. On one hand, you are providing your franchisees with the opportunity to boost revenue in different avenues. On the other hand, you can provide a wider variety of service and product offerings to your consumers.

Outside of our traditional services, Massage Heights believes it is vital to offer our franchisees additional revenue opportunities. We offer the highest quality retail products to be sold in our retreats. The products we sell are also used in our treatment offerings, allowing consumers to see the products in action and experience them firsthand before purchasing. By providing alternative revenue streams that are compatible with our service offerings, Massage Heights franchisees may have an added boost in their total revenue.

At the core of great customer experience is a well-rounded brand and team that supports its guests throughout the entirety of their experiences. Successful brands know that behind positive customer experience is a company that will innovate and evolve to match the desires of their everyday consumers. With customer satisfaction as the priority, profitability will inevitably follow.

Massage Heights has decades of experience led by pivotal leaders within the industry, all to boost franchisee success. In using our multi-faceted backgrounds and specialties, we can provide the premier experience that boosts brand reputation and, in turn, franchisee profitability.



By centralizing marketing creative at the corporate office, we ensure franchisees benefit from a unified and compelling message that demonstrates our brand promise.



SHARON VILLEGAS

Chief Revenue Officer
Re-Bath

Customer experience plays a pivotal role in driving franchisee profits for Re-Bath, and the success can be attributed to a strategic approach that encompasses expanding our reach, a comprehensive one-stop-shop model, and consistent messaging.

Re-Bath's commitment to expanding our reach is not only about geographical presence, but also reaching a diverse demographic. The brand underwent a large operational shift seven years ago to have greater direct exposure to consumers. We delved into significant consumer research and identified that a quality product alone wasn't enough—consumers sought an entire experience, which often has an emotional component.

This realization led to the development of a brand promise and one-stop-shop concept, offering free design consultation, removal, installation, and warranties. This move to include full-bathroom remodels and a focus on aging and accessibility broadened the service offering, making Re-Bath relevant to a larger customer base. Additionally, Re-Bath has emphasized strategic partnerships with big-box retailers to reach more consumers, ultimately resulting in more business for franchisees.

The remodeling process can be emotional as it's a high-cost investment that involves transforming personal spaces while navigating challenges and decisions involved in making changes to your home. As a result, remodeling is often a fear-based process, but our one-stop-shop model has proven to be a cornerstone in alleviating the fears.

In a highly fragmented and fear-based industry, Re-Bath's approach provides an effortless remodeling experience in which customers no longer worry about projects going over budget or wavering from the agreed-upon timeline. This model simplifies the entire process and empowers franchisees to focus on delivering exceptional customer service, fostering lasting relationships, and ultimately boosting profitability through repeat business.

Our pledge to a seamless, consistent customer experience plays a pivotal role in driving franchisee profits. By centralizing marketing creative at the corporate office, we ensure franchisees benefit from a unified and compelling message that demonstrates our brand promise.

Through the processes we've implemented, franchisees have the flexibility to choose from in-house digital agency services, media buying options, or approved vendors. Then, they can deploy digital assets and broadcast media in a standardized manner, following a plug-and-play model. This streamlines the marketing process while allowing franchisees to focus on their day-to-day business activities. In turn, customers across our network receive a consistent experience that contributes to customer loyalty and increased franchisee profits.

CONTINUED

How does your brand's customer experience drive franchisee profits?



MICHAEL STANFIELD

Chief Marketing Officer
Mathnasium

Mathnasium has established itself over 20 years as the math-only supplemental education market leader. Key to our brand's success has been our unique teaching method that instills a deep understanding and love of math in children, making it a big draw for parents and students.

For decades, the Mathnasium Method has transformed the way kids learn math. The method builds a foundation for math mastery through deep understanding by starting with what the student already knows, addressing any learning gaps, expanding their mathematical thinking, and adding new concepts in sequence. Making sure the curriculum is fun and engaging keeps kids coming back and provides more confidence to each student as they progress through their education. When students want to keep coming back (and referring their friends), this builds a steady stream of clientele for the franchisee, thus increasing their bottom line.

We have experienced a record increase in student enrollments as the spike in supplemental education continues and math scores show an alarming decline since the pandemic. With the ever-evolving challenges in education, we are here to help improve students' grades and love of learning math, increasing their confidence in themselves and all of their studies. This results in real and measurable academic growth for the students, which is a key factor in attracting and retaining customers.

Multiple independent studies have shown that Mathnasium improves student performance on standards-based math tests in 20 sessions or fewer. Ninety-four percent of parents report an improvement in their child's math skills, and 93% of parents report improved attitudes toward math.

Overall, the real results achieved by Mathnasium in improving students' math skills and confidence directly contribute to the success and profitability of the franchisees' businesses. Consistent revenue, positive word-of-mouth referrals, and a strong reputation in the community all contribute to long-term profitability.

Mathnasium's personalized assessments deliver tailored learning plans, fostering trust and satisfaction among students and parents. We know empirically that students and families stay longer if they feel engaged by Mathnasium owners through the main stages of the math skill mastery process. Our centers regularly communicate with parents through progress reports, care calls, and quick but effective moments at the car with the students. These frequent parent engagements lead to longer-lasting customer relationships, increased retention rates, and positive word-of-mouth referrals, all of which contribute to higher enrollment and revenue, ultimately driving franchisee profit.



Our strategy revolves around embracing the entirety of our families' educational journeys, whether they're new or long-standing.



LAURA RICE

Chief Revenue Officer
Celebree School

At Celebree School, cultivating an exclusive and personalized experience for our families takes precedence. When prospective families reach out to us, our primary focus goes beyond transactional details, such as tuition rates. Instead, we invest time in understanding both the children and parents, delving into the aspirations for their child's education. By aligning each enrollee with the right program, we ensure a tailored learning environment that fosters growth.

This commitment to enhancing the family experience elevates our brand reputation and proves more enticing to potential franchisees. Our strategy revolves around embracing the entirety of our families' educational journeys, whether they're new or long-standing. Our dedication extends beyond the initial enrollment phase by organizing fun and enriching events for our families year-round. This emphasis on our families enables us to foster stronger connections within our Celebree School communities, which translates to repeat business, referrals, and positive reviews, ultimately boosting profits.

Ensuring uniformity in the experience for potential families touring either a corporate or franchise location is a top priority for us. We place a strong emphasis on consistency, aiming to provide each family with an identical and positive encounter. To achieve this, all family inquiries are directed to our centralized enrollment center rather than individual schools. This approach ensures that every call is promptly answered, and customers receive assistance in a standardized manner.

Our corporate team has crafted a streamlined process that spans multiple touchpoints, encompassing our website, social media, enrollment center, and on-site interactions. This cohesive strategy guarantees a consistent experience across all platforms. As part of our commitment to maintaining high standards, we employ secret shoppers who pose as families interested in enrolling their children. This firsthand insight enables us to gauge the experience families have at our locations. Implementing such a streamlined process enhances operational efficiency and contributes to heightened customer satisfaction, positively affecting our profitability.

As a brand in the early education space, it is important to continue to adapt and grow as each generation enters our doors. In our commitment to support our families, we consistently enhance and expand our extensive training programs to uphold brand standards. Regular feedback from our families is integral to our continuous improvement efforts, influencing positive changes across all schools. This has benefited franchise profits by ensuring Celebree School is at the forefront of early childhood education.

LISTEN UP!

Podcasts “touch the brains” of potential candidates

Written by **JACK MONSON**

In the current dynamic marketing landscape, businesses must continually explore innovative ways to connect with their target audience and establish meaningful relationships. The popularity of audio podcasts has skyrocketed, offering a unique and powerful platform for companies to engage high-level B2B customers.

Franchise brands likewise are attracting and educating new franchise candidates and potential business owners with audio podcasts. Sport Clips Haircuts and The Joint Chiropractic as well as franchise consultants, such as FranNet and FranServe, are finding great value in audio podcasts for lead generation and building relationships.

Here are a few reasons why franchise brands should consider incorporating podcasts into their marketing strategy and content mix.

Personalized engagement

One of the key advantages of audio podcasts is the ability to deliver content in a more personalized and intimate manner. Unlike written content or even videos, podcasts allow businesses to communicate directly with their audiences through the power of voice. This “touching of the brain,” as one successful talk radio host would say, creates a strong emotional connection, making it easier for candidates to relate to the brand and its message.

Thought leadership

By featuring knowledgeable speakers and experts from the company, businesses can share insights, discuss industry trends, and position themselves as thought leaders. This enhances the brand’s credibility and attracts candidates who are actively seeking help from a trusted source.

Many brands are featuring interviews with current franchisees discussing their journey, their businesses, and most importantly, what their lives are like. Think of this recording as an evergreen validation call!

Accessible and convenient

Who is your ideal candidate? Is it someone who watches lots of long corporate videos and scrolls YouTube continuously in between Netflix binging?

No. The candidates who are most likely to be successful business owners are very active people. Offer them information on a flexible and portable medium that they can quickly consume while commuting, working out, or multitasking.

Building a community

Podcasts create a sense of community by fostering ongoing conversations and interactions. Through regular episodes, franchisors can connect with their audience, address concerns, and encourage questions. This is perfect for franchise development marketing as it goes beyond transactional relationships to build a community of engaged business owners.

Once upon a time ...

Storytelling is a powerful tool in marketing, and podcasts provide an excellent platform for businesses to tell compelling stories. Whether sharing the company’s journey or your franchisees’ successes, storytelling humanizes the brand and fosters a deep connection with the potential franchisee.

Changing habits

As consumer habits evolve, businesses must adapt their marketing strategies to stay relevant. The rise of podcast consumption reflects a shift toward audio-centric content. By incorporating podcasts into their franchise marketing efforts, franchisors demonstrate adaptability and a willingness to meet their audience where they are.

I mentioned earlier that audio podcasts are evergreen. I have episodes that are more than 10 years old that get streamed or downloaded every day. Audio platforms change and evolve, such as moving from MP3s to streaming and



from Google Podcasts to Spotify. You can also expect changes for podcasts within YouTube and TikTok. However, the audio content remains unchanged. The podcasts in which you invest this year can still be marketing your franchise a decade from now.

Multiple channels

Make sure you don’t just record the podcast, post it on your website, and forget it. Sure, your interested candidates will find it while researching you, but let’s get that podcast in many more ears.

Audio podcasts seamlessly integrate with other marketing channels, creating an immersive brand experience. It needs to be found on Apple, Spotify, and a dozen other audio platforms. It should be posted on all of your brands’ social media accounts and your executives’ social media accounts. Embed it in your emails, transcribe it into a blog post, and text it to everyone in your sales funnel. And give it to your franchise sales team to share with anyone for whom it may make a difference.

Make sure that your message resonates across all touchpoints, increasing the chances of reaching potential candidates through their preferred channels.

Examples

We’ve collected all of our current franchising podcasts in one place for easy access at www.socialgeekradio.com/franchise-podcast-directory/. You’ll find audio podcasts created by franchisors, franchisees, suppliers, IFA, other associations, brokers, consultants, and more. If your brand starts a podcast, I would love to include you here. It can be a game changer in building meaningful connections and driving your success! ■

Jack Monson is the CEO of franchise development marketing agency Brand J and has been helping franchisors with digital marketing for 15 years. He is also the owner and host of “Social Geek,” the top podcast in franchising.

“Shrinkflation, Greedflation, and Tipflation”

Why customers are less loyal than ever before

Written by **JOHN DIJULIUS**

Since the pandemic, customer experience in nearly all industries has dropped to a two-decade low. Customers, patients, clients, tenants, guests, or whatever you may call the people buying your services and products have been frustrated during these tough times.

Due to an unprecedented booming economy, leaders started taking shortcuts, solely focusing on sales and profit, reducing their hiring standards to fill positions because of rapid growth. They expected and demanded more of their employees, including their customer service representatives, yet they did not invest in the employee culture and customer experience. All of this caused employee burnout, low employee morale, and high turnover—enter the Great Resignation. Add to that the supply chain issues, and the customer service recession ensued.

If all of that wasn't enough, customers had to deal with inflation, and then to improve margins, organizations started introducing “shrinkflation,” “greedflation,” and “tipflation.”

Shrinkflation

When brands are faced with rising costs of production, traditionally they have two options: raise prices, which could result in a loss of sales, or accept lower margins (profits), which will result in unhappy shareholders and dropping stock prices. However, a third, self-serving option that many brands chose to apply is the strategy known as shrinkflation. It's a form of retail camouflage where consumers pay more without realizing it. By shrinking typical item sizes and net weights, businesses aim to cover rising labor and material costs without increasing the prices of their products. They hope consumer spending will remain at the same level.

This cagey method of value adjustment is particularly reflected in food prices. You probably wouldn't notice if a bag of chips had

five fewer chips or if your roll of paper towels contained fewer sheets. Manufacturers don't think consumers will realize these seemingly small adjustments have been made. For example, Gatorade reduced its bottle size from 32 to 28 ounces while charging the same price, which is equivalent to a price increase of about 14%. Even packages of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, beloved by many for decades, have seen a 0.10-ounce decrease in size since the early 2000s.

Greedflation

“Greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works.”

Contrary to the words of Gordon Gekko, the ruthless character from the movie “Wall Street” played by Michael Douglas, greed leads to unethical behavior. Today, as a society, we seem numb to corporate scandals: Enron, WeWork, Theranos, Uber, Arthur Andersen, Facebook, Lehman Brothers, and BP. The list goes on and on. When unethical corporate behavior becomes the norm, brands lose the trust of their employees and their customers.

However, even if an organization is not behaving illegally, it can still behave unethically. Greedflation refers to how employee compensation is falling behind relative to senior-level executive pay. The last time the federal minimum wage was increased was in 2009, so it has declined by 26 percent since then. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that CEO compensation has grown 1,460% since 1978 while typical worker compensation has risen just 18%. In 2021, CEOs of the top 350 firms in the U.S. made \$27.8 million on average—400 times more than a typical worker.

Tipflation

Not only has the average tipping percentage increased dramatically, but who we tip has expanded. It doesn't matter if you are picking up an order to go or a cashier is ringing out

items you selected to purchase. The employee spins the iPad around asking how much you would like to tip. Consumers feel pressured to not only tip, but tip well with the employee standing there watching. This is known as “guilt-tipping.”

Tipflation and tip creep are terms to describe the recent widespread expansion of gratuity to more industries. Traditionally, it was prevalent in only full-service restaurants.

The most frustrating part is how businesses are trying to put the burden on their customers to provide their employees with a livable wage. We no longer reward excellent service with a generous tip. The increase in asking customers to tip is causing a poor customer experience.

DoorDash is working the guilt-tipping movement. Recently, DoorDash started sending out an alert to customers who choose not to tip, saying, “Orders with no tip might take longer to get delivered—are you sure you want to continue?”

The app also shares this alert with customers: “Dashers can pick and choose which orders they want to do,” says the alert, which refers to its delivery drivers as Dashers. “Orders that take longer to be accepted by Dashers tend to result in a slower delivery.”

One DoorDash driver shared with Business Insider that his earnings have plummeted over the past five years, and DoorDash's pressuring customers to tip has not helped his earnings. Since the announcement of the no-tip warning, he's noticed a drop in tips, he said. “It's pretty crappy that they're turning on us,” he said of DoorDash. “I do feel like the customer should tip us a bit better. But at the same time, DoorDash should pay us better.”

Earlier this year, DoorDash started sending messages encouraging their customers to tip their drivers more. These messages told customers that they could increase tips for 30 days after a delivery. ■

John R. DiJulius III, author of *The Customer Service Revolution*, is president of The DiJulius Group, a customer service consulting firm that works with Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, Ritz-Carlton, Nestle, PwC, Lexus, and many more. Contact him at 216-839-1430 or info@thedijuliusgroup.com.

How are you using tools such as AI and ChatGPT in your lead generation and recruitment efforts?



VANESSA YAKOBSON

CEO

Blo Blow Dry Bar & LashKind

As we head into 2024, Blo Blow Dry Bar and LashKind will be using AI and ChatGPT tools to not only create efficiencies in our franchisee prospecting efforts, but also to enhance brand awareness and the overall customer experience.

From a franchisee prospecting point of view, we're able to leverage AI within our CRM platform to aid in content creation and ongoing outreach to keep potential candidates moving through the franchise funnel. This allows us to efficiently walk them through our awarding process, share specifics on the business model, and continue to build reverence.

When it comes to our brand awareness, specifically on various online platforms, AI helps automate our posts and create consistent content that illustrates our brand identity and builds engagement. It also aids in determining who is most likely to engage and hold interest in pursuing a franchise opportunity, leading to more efficient recruitment.

One of the fundamentals of a successful franchise system is bringing on franchise partners whom you can trust to represent your brand. While AI can certainly help ensure that candidates are properly vetted and educated in a step-by-step manner, it's important to note

that nothing can truly take the place of establishing trust through a natural human connection. The benefits of human interaction lie within what we like to call a "DNA fit," which requires a mixture of good, old-fashioned gut instinct, experience, and spending quality time establishing trust with one another.

Partnerships with franchisees can last decades as they build legacies within their communities that can be passed down from generation to generation. One of our internal and external mantras at Blo Blow Dry Bar and LashKind is that "we're here to make you shine." This is a commitment woven into every thread of our culture so that you can feel it every time you enter one of our bars and interact with our franchisees and stylists.

AI has grown to play a crucial role in our brand's operations. Although its benefits are undeniable, make sure you find a balance between using it while still prioritizing a personal connection and interaction with prospective franchisees.



AI aids in determining who is most likely to engage and hold interest in pursuing a franchise opportunity, leading to more efficient recruitment.



JOSH YORK

Founder & CEO
GymGuyz

As the wellness market grows from being a \$53 billion market in 2022 to an industry with \$74.9 billion in projected revenue in 2030, GymGuyz remains steadfast in its commitment to expand its reach and empower clients.

Closing out 2023 with record-setting growth numbers, we are expanding into an additional 170 cities with a projection of 75 more territories for 2024. With this aggressive growth, we have started using ChatGPT to help us research prospective franchisees, execute key franchise messaging, and save time on daily tasks. It opens up more creative time for our team and allows us to elevate our sales messaging.

One of the ways we make use of ChatGPT is by using it on our web platforms to filter new franchisee leads. When you go on our website to research franchise opportunities with GymGuyz, we have an AI-powered chatbot that can answer questions and help collect contact information to fuel our franchise development efforts. By automating this process, we created a responsive and efficient platform that shares pre-approved messaging and facts about us.

ChatGPT helps us gather information about what prospective franchisees are curious about, so by the time we connect with them on the phone, the conversation is more personal and addresses deeper questions earlier in the process.

The majority of our franchise owners take a very hands-on role within their businesses, especially in the recruitment process. Our clients value having the one-on-one experience of personal training, so finding candidates who align with the GymGuyz attitude tends to be about conversations that happen in person. We do have certain certifications that trainers are required to have to offer personal training sessions, and we use ChatGPT to scan resumes and applications for that essential qualification. By leveraging AI technology to do this initial sweep of candidates in our franchise owners' recruitment efforts, we save both franchise owners and candidates' time.

Core to GymGuyz's mission is to emphasize the importance of the human connection, especially within fitness. By making use of ChatGPT, our franchise owners are saving time on repetitive, time-intensive tasks.

CONTINUED

How are you using tools such as AI and ChatGPT in your lead generation and recruitment efforts?



GREGG MAJEWSKI

Founder & CEO
Craveworthy Brands

At Craveworthy Brands, our mission is to build and invigorate new, emerging, and mid-level brands, transforming them into high-growth, high-performing multi-unit franchise locations recognized across the country. We aspire to be unrivaled in the global restaurant industry, but our true passion is in our commitment to helping our team members reach their full potential, empowering them to achieve remarkable success within our organization and in their individual lives.

With the use of AI in the lead generation and marketing space, we've been able to fine-tune sales messaging to be more effective, execute sales communication campaigns with automation that increases engagement, and fine-tune ad spends and remarketing efforts. As a result, we've had an impressive volume of inbound leads in the past five to six months, including more than 50 serious candidates worth an estimated \$3.3 million in potential deals. Our strategy is to grow a portfolio of diverse, relevant, and highly efficient brands into an unbeatable proposition for both consumers and prospective franchisees.

As everyone has access to free AI tools, either directly online or through integrations into popular software, one could argue that the unique advantage it provides is what you make of it. After all, technology is a tool, and AI is no different. We are creating a best-in-class support center with a suite of shared services to enable efficient operations. Each brand will maintain its distinct identity while building an organization with a shared cultural foundation. Overall, AI tools are helping our team speed up tasks that generally take more time and even remove redundant steps.

“AI has been an asset in helping to narrow down prospective candidates. By incorporating AI algorithms, we can quickly analyze and assess potential franchisee profiles.”



TOM WOOD

CEO
Floor Coverings International

Over the past three decades, Floor Coverings International has leveraged the latest innovations in technology to perfect our business practices. We pride ourselves on the relationships we build with customers, and by implementing artificial intelligence and tools like ChatGPT, we have been able to strengthen those relationships while also enhancing our franchise development strategy.

From candidate vetting and content creation to data analysis and lead management, these technologies are contributing to increased efficiency, informed decision-making, and a more streamlined process. We consider AI an essential tool in our arsenal. Every day, our corporate team uses it to support our franchisees; local owners and sales and design associates make use of it to streamline communications with clients.

For our franchise development efforts, AI has been an asset in helping to narrow down prospective candidates. By incorporating AI algorithms, we can quickly analyze and assess potential franchisee profiles. AI helps our team filter inquiries, so promising candidates are separated from those who might not be the best fit for our business model. This expedites the process and ensures that only qualified candidates move forward in the selection pipeline.

AI is instrumental in gathering information on potential growth markets and assessing their availability. Floor Coverings International

uses AI to analyze specific ZIP codes, which helps direct lead generation efforts. Rather than manually researching the regional competition, AI helps us gather insights that aid in strategic decision-making regarding market expansion. This data-driven approach helps in optimizing resource allocation and focusing efforts on areas with high-growth potential.

Content creation is another key area where AI technology has made a significant impact on Floor Coverings International. For example, we leverage it to maintain an active online presence by promoting our brand across various platforms, including social, website, e-newsletters, and more. Automated content creation assists our team in creating consistent messaging, which allows for a more cohesive and recognizable brand image.

For lead management, we use AI to create key recruitment messages that play a vital role in maintaining communication with leads and guiding them through the franchise funnel. Automated texts prove successful in both scheduling appointments with franchisee leads and with potential customers for our franchisees. This helps ensure a seamless process that is engaging for candidates and customers alike. In the future, we will be integrating tools like HubSpot and Lumen to further enhance efficiency and take our use of AI to the next level.

A Guiding Hand

The right mentoring program serves everyone

Written by **EVAN HACKEL**

A great mentoring program increases the success rate of your franchisees and the likelihood of an excellent reference/validation of the system that can lead to improved franchise sales. Mentees who become raving fans are wonderful people for prospective franchisees to meet.

Everyone loves the concept of mentoring, but it doesn't always work. There are two reasons: 1) people often don't know what mentoring really is, and 2) most franchisors don't set proper expectations or do the appropriate training when they roll out the program.

Mentoring is nuanced and complex. It requires a strategic alignment of personalities, hands-on/hands-off supervision, and a bit of interpersonal magic. When I come across a mentoring program that's well done, everyone is happy. The mentee appreciates the advice and support, and the mentor learns through providing advice and assistance.

Proper vetting

It's not enough to choose mentors who are successful franchisees. Pick mentors who adhere to the requirements of your franchise system. This vetting process ensures that new franchisees will learn practices that are both effective and in line with your brand. If you select mentors who do things their own way, new franchise owners can learn bad habits. You certainly don't want that.

Consider personalities

The success of any mentoring relationship hinges on the chemistry between the mentor and mentee. For example, a mentor's eagerness to share knowledge is critical. Having a positive attitude about the franchise system is also essential. The mentee will look up to their mentor, so make sure the mentee is the type of franchisee you want to grow inside your franchise system. Your franchise business consultants can help you find franchisees who would be excellent mentees.

Structure your approach

While you don't want to hover and micromanage what your mentors and mentees are doing, remember that a loose structure will produce loose results. Set up clear definitions and a structure that includes regularly scheduled meetings with well-planned agendas.

At the beginning of the process, focus on the business goals the mentee wants to achieve and how the mentor can support them. Also, decide when and where meetings will happen. These two steps provide clarity for both parties and help establish consistency.

A typical agenda might cover updates on the progress toward goals, discussion on what's working and what's not, and time to address the mentee's specific questions. During the meeting, you want to establish new objectives and goals to be addressed before the next meeting. This structured approach helps guide both mentor and mentee toward achieving well-defined goals.

Mentor recognition

Ongoing support for your mentors is essential. Regular check-ins and forums where mentors share experiences and challenges can significantly bolster your program's effectiveness. Recognizing and rewarding mentors' contributions also serve as powerful motivators, reinforcing the value placed on their role within the franchise community.

A monthly online meeting with all mentors is a powerful and efficient way to keep everyone's interest levels high and an opportunity to provide training and idea exchange.

For new franchisees, a site visit of the mentor's business is key. It's a great way to start the relationship because the mentor and mentee get to spend quality time together, and the mentee can see what happens day to day in the business.

Spread the support

While mentoring new franchisees is key, don't

forget that mentoring can be a powerful tool at other critical moments:

- Mentors can guide franchisees through the complexities of managing multiple units, and share insights on operations and growth.
- Whether it's marketing, operations, or training, mentors with expertise in these areas can provide specialized guidance, enhancing the overall performance of the mentee's franchise.
- Mentors can help new advisory council members understand their roles and responsibilities and help them rise into leadership positions.

Teaching to learn

The constant feedback I hear from mentors is they learned more than they ever thought they would. A common comment is, "I got more than I gave." Teaching is a very powerful way to learn.

At the heart of any successful mentoring program lies a culture that values learning, sharing, and mutual growth. Cultivating this culture within a franchise system encourages both formal and informal mentorship relationships, enriching your entire network.

Continuously measure and refine the effectiveness of your mentoring program. Feedback from participants, performance metrics of mentees, and the overall impact on the franchise system are vital indicators of your program's success. This data allows you to adapt and evolve the program, ensuring its relevance and importance over time.

By understanding the complexities involved, franchisors can develop mentoring programs that support new franchisees and strengthen the entire network. The transformative power of well-executed mentoring programs can become a cornerstone of franchise excellence, benefiting individuals and your brand as a whole. ■

Evan Hackel is CEO of Ingage Consulting and Delta Payment Systems and an advisor to Tortal Training. He is an author, speaker, and entrepreneur who has been instrumental in launching more than 20 businesses and has managed a portfolio of brands with systemwide sales topping \$5 billion. He is the creator of Ingaged Leadership and author of <Ingaging Leadership Meets the Younger Generation>. Reach him at ehackel@ingage.net, 781-820-7609, or ehackel@ingage.net.

NEW BRANDS RISING

Conditions converge to grow the number of brands

Written by **PAUL WILBUR**

In 2022, the industry saw a huge jump in the number of brands entering franchising to 414 brands with 2023 looking to finish at a similarly high number. Before Covid, the industry averaged some 322 new brands a year. Since then, there has been an average of 383 new brands. That is a growth of 19% in the number of new brands per year.

In December 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau announced a huge surge in new business applications. Much to the surprise of many economists, applications are at a rate stronger than even before the pandemic. This surge comes as peoples' attitudes toward work have changed with many opting to be their own boss. Supporting this wave is the influx of cash from Covid relief and assistance programs. These financial resources provided aspiring entrepreneurs with the means to transform their ideas into viable businesses. We also saw entrepreneurs take advantage of changing consumer preferences and behaviors and building businesses that met that need in a specific "hot" industry.

The influx of new brands aligns with the fastest-growing and most in-demand sectors within the franchising landscape (see graph). Personal services, residential services, and QSRs have emerged as the frontrunners, capturing the attention of entrepreneurs and consumers alike.

Expanding rosters

Interestingly, on average about 20% of new

brands have backing from the outset, meaning these brands are either part of an existing system or receive investment dollars from private equity firms or investment angels. This financial support reduces the risk for those starting a new business and enhances the potential for success in a competitive market.

An example is Sparkle Squad, a brand offering residential and commercial window cleaning. Levine Leichtman Capital Partners manages their parent company and investment funds. Additionally, Empower Brands, known for their family of brands, including Koala Insulation, Wallaby Windows, Bumble Roofing, and others, partnered with Canopy. This strategic alliance allowed Empower Brands to integrate Canopy's premium services and innovative business model while providing Canopy with the tools, resources, and support needed to build a thriving franchise.

International increase

More than 30 brands with countries of origin outside the United States launched in 2022-23. The temporary pause caused by the Covid-19 lockdown and its aftereffects seems to be a distant memory now as foreign brands forge ahead with their plans to enter the U.S. market.

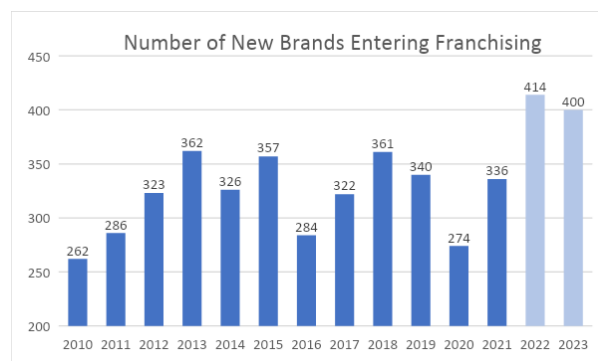
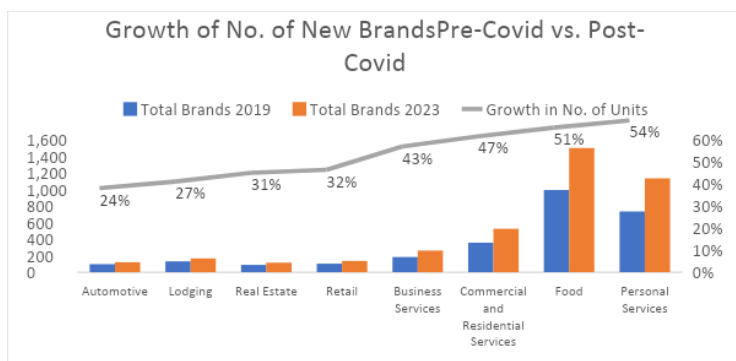
Pepper Lunch originated in Japan and has a global presence with nearly 500 locations in 15 countries. Their strategic expansion vision is to venture into various U.S. markets to reach 100 North American locations by the end of 2025.

Dynamic growth

Over the two decades preceding Covid-19, a concerning pattern emerged in the U.S. economy characterized by a notable decrease in business dynamism (according to a Brookings Report, *Surging Business Formation in the Pandemic: Causes and Consequences?*). This decline manifested across various indicators of entrepreneurial engagement, raising alarms due to the significant role young firms play in driving employment. However, the landscape has shifted in the aftermath of Covid-19. Presently, we have observed an increasing number of enterprises are actively pursuing dynamic avenues for growth with the franchise model emerging as an appealing option. Offering a blend of established success and scalability, the franchise model is drawing growing interest from nonfranchised brands seeking to expand their operations and market presence.

The surge in new business applications and the growth of franchising reflect a notable shift in the economic landscape of the U.S. Entrepreneurship is thriving with increased support from Covid relief programs and changing attitudes towards work and consumer behavior. The rise of franchising, backed by private equity and the entry of international brands into the U.S. market, underscores the adaptability of the business ecosystem. ■

As COO of FRANData, **Paul Wilbur** is instrumental in building the research and consulting framework at FRANData. He plays an integral role in the strategic development of FRANData's suite of franchise solutions. As a close to 20-year veteran at the company, he is the franchise business model expert and plays a key role in fostering the strategic advisory relationships with some of FRANData's biggest clients.



GLOBAL INFLUENCE

6 international female leaders make their marks

Written by **WILLIAM EDWARDS**



I'd like to highlight six fabulous female franchise executives redefining success in international franchising. From navigating complex cross-border deals to building sustainable, ethical business models, these women are leaving their marks on global franchising.

NICOLA BROADHURST

Commercial Partner and Head of the Franchise Team and ESG practice

Stevens & Bolton

Based in Guilford, England, Nicola specializes in commercial law, helping businesses scale up and expand while minimizing legal risk in the supply chain. Her practice focuses on international expansion through franchising as well as licensing, agency, and distribution. Much of her work involves the casual-dining sector. She understands the need to weigh risk versus reward when advising. She provides a full range of advice to franchisors and franchisees, including setting up franchise networks and franchise agreements and reviewing and adapting international franchise agreements for compliance with the British Franchise Association's Code of Ethics. She advises clients on their choice of expansion method, including template agreements to help standardize relationships; customer service issues; and advertising and marketing compliance.

KATALIN MANDEL

CEO

Hungarian Franchise Association

Katalin Mandel earned a doctorate from the Corvinus University of Budapest in Hungary. She has organized the annual International Franchise Exhibition and Franchise Conference in Budapest as the managing director of Dakexpo. For the past 20 years, she has helped foreign brands enter and adapt to the Hungarian and European markets while also supporting local chains as they build up their franchise systems. Since 2008, she has been the CEO of the Hungarian Franchise Association. She's a lobbyist and has lectured at conferences and the Franchise Academy. She is the co-author of several books: *Franchise as a Business Model*, *Franchising in Eastern Europe*, and *Franchising in V4 Countries*.

JOYCE MAZERO

Chair, Global Franchise & Supply Network Practice

Polsinelli PC

A Dallas-based lawyer, Joyce has handled cross-border transactions in more than 60 countries, including product licensing and manufacturing, sales of manufacturing plants, master and area development franchising, joint ventures, M&A, bankruptcies, foreign investment, intellectual property disputes, and franchise relationship disputes. This representation has included clients from all business sectors—primarily outward facing in MENA and Europe. She has seen an increase in investment in U.S. franchises by multinationals. Issues range from preparing and registering franchise offerings, resolving financial security and currency exchange problems, facilitating the purchase and sale of interests, mediating disputes, appearing before government authorities, and participating in litigation.

KRISTINA UHRGÅRD PERMAN

CEO

Franchise Group Sweden

Kristina, based in Stockholm, Sweden, is the CEO and owner of Franchise Group. With a career spanning more than three decades, Kristina has unwavering dedication to shaping the future of franchising. Her entrepreneurial spirit extends beyond consultancy, leading her to invest in and co-own several franchise chains. This experience has equipped her with a deep understanding of the realities her clients face. Her experience as a consultant and subsequent owner at FranchiseKollegiet from 1994 to 2000 further showcased her commitment to pioneering initiatives, including Franchise Day and Franchise Guide. During the challenging Covid-19 years, Kristina spearheaded a virtual franchise fair that led to the upcoming launch of Franchise Arena, a virtual platform poised to revolutionize digital franchising.

FARRAH ROSE

International Franchise Director
The Franchising Centre UK

Based in the Greater Oxford area of the United Kingdom, Farrah started her career in fran-

chising 40 years ago at Burger King Europe and set up the international franchise strategy for the second-largest British fashion retailer. She has consulted with nearly 400 international brands and supported their expansion strategies. A founding member of The Franchising Centre in the United Kingdom, she implemented international franchise consulting procedures. She works with 76 of our franchise experts, supporting our clients' entry into various markets. The Commonwealth Secretariat and the European Bank named her a senior international advisor who encourages ethical franchising in more than 26 emerging countries. Farrah is a member of the Global Franchise magazine and European Franchise Federation halls of fame.

SHELLEY SPANDORF

Partner

Davis Wright Tremaine

Based in Los Angeles, Shelley has focused on franchise law for 45 years. She has represented franchisors, manufacturers, licensors, suppliers, franchisees, and distributors in all industry sectors. She has seen an uptick in inbound legal work from foreign franchisors bringing their franchise concepts to the United States and outbound projects focusing on markets in the Middle East, Asia, and Australia. In launching outbound franchise programs, she no longer sees U.S. franchisors electing primarily the master franchise/subfranchise expansion model. Instead, they are opting for various-sized multi-unit development deals often coupled with rights of first refusal or first negotiation if the foreign developer hits the agreed-upon initial development targets.

BOTTOMLINE

These experienced professionals make it easier for global franchisors to successfully take their brands into new countries. ■

William (Bill) Edwards, CEO of Edwards Global Services (EGS), has more than four decades of successful international business experience spanning virtually every corner of the world across 12 business sectors and with more than 40 companies. He is uniquely qualified to steer senior executives successfully through the complexities of taking their businesses global. Download his GlobalVue country ranking chart at edwardsglobal.com/globalvue. He is available for consultation at +1-949-375-1896 and bedwards@edwardsglobal.com.

A Key to Discovery

Get the most out of your FDD

Written by **ART COLEY**

In the current economic climate, more people are looking toward small business ownership, and there's never been a better time to review your positioning to attract and secure the right franchisees. Brands vie for attention in an ocean teeming with aspiring entrepreneurs while navigating the stringent requirements of compliance and transparency. Yet, in the mix of this competitive dance, a pivotal tool is often overlooked: the Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD).

A comprehensive FDD doesn't just fulfill legal compliance; it's an underutilized tool waiting to be transformed into a key part of your discovery process.

An FDD is more than a legal formality. By mastering your FDD, you adhere to federal and state laws and position yourself to leverage crucial sections to showcase your brand's strengths and transparency during the discovery process.

How can you use your FDD to improve recruitment?

Be transparent

Good candidates are smart. They can sniff out a nontransparent FDD a mile away. That means an FDD riddled with errors or lacking transparency isn't just a red flag; it's a stop sign for potential franchisees.

In contrast, a meticulously crafted and strategically used FDD creates a magnet, helping you pull in ideal candidates and set the stage for a robust onboarding process. With a great

FDD, you will have a guide to easily highlight your brand's success, financial performance representations, and growth opportunities to craft a narrative that resonates.

Essential information

A solid understanding of your recruitment process, including your unique value proposition and ideal candidate, will help you identify key information from the FDD that you will use in your marketing materials and lead generation to attract qualified franchise candidates. This information includes:

- **Unit economics.** I highly encourage having unit resale information in item 19. This allows candidates to see the equity event and exit value opportunity with a franchise unit in your brand.
- **Closures.** Do you have closures, and are you properly explaining them in the notes? Some of it may be by design, and this is your chance to explain any shift in business model that existing franchisees weren't cut out for.
- **Your team.** There are not a lot of requirements from the Federal Trade Commission on sharing about members of your team, but this is a place to talk strategically about backgrounds and experience.
- **Nontraditional opportunities.** There are plenty of development models outside the usual channels, and if they represent opportunities for your brand, communicate

them in the FDD. Examples include wording in FDD for a conversion, bolt-on, acquire and convert, etc.

Equip your recruiters

Once you have this information in place, it's a matter of ensuring a smooth and transparent franchise discovery process by training your team to walk candidates through the FDD effectively.

A common mistake brands make is sharing the FDD with candidates to navigate independently. This is a surefire way to lose promising candidates or, worse, move forward with unqualified candidates. Schedule time with your candidates to thoroughly cover your FDD, answer their questions, point out what is important to your brand, and give them the confidence they need in your brand. Using the FDD in the right way is a no-brainer. Results will improve.

Will you play recruitment as "cards up," be transparent, and have real, meaningful conversations about your business model? Or will you try to hide, ignore, or shortcut the challenging topics?

Brands that are transparent and strategic in utilizing the FDD can attract high-quality franchisees. On the other hand, brands that try to hide their weaknesses or avoid discussing important aspects of their business model are at a disadvantage and may struggle to find suitable candidates who align with their values and contribute to their long-term success.

Pull your team together and find out how they are using the FDD throughout the entire process, from lead generation to signing a franchise agreement. You want to know.

Let's go to work! ■



Art Coley is CEO of CGI Franchise. Using the proven Recruitment Operating System (ROS), he and the ROS Support Team help franchise companies implement and execute a predictable, repeatable, and sustainable franchisee recruitment program. The company is based in Temple, Texas, and works with brands worldwide. Contact Art at 281-658-9409 or acoley@cgifranchise.com.



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