

Supporting Former Corporate Executives-Turned-Franchisees

Former corporate executives are highly-accomplished individuals, who are accustomed to status, recognition, rewards and perks.

By Jason P. Zickerman, CFE

Former corporate executives can be highly-successful, high-performing franchise owners. Using effective strategies for supporting them and establishing clear expectations about the franchisee-franchisor relationship can lead to greater business success and satisfaction. Here are some keys to success with former corporate executives that can be applied in any franchise system.

Provide clarity about roles and responsibilities

Paint the picture for the executives as to how their days will look as a franchisee. Help them envision whether they see themselves progressing by doing what the system offers and requires of a high-performing franchisee. Transitioning corporate executives need to know the full reality of what they will be doing as a franchisee on a daily basis and how their time will be spent, not just the most appealing aspects that initially attract them to a concept. When the reality and visions match, one has a very beneficial relationship.

Be sure they know they are not alone.

Overcome concerns about their perceptions

If it is true about a system, assure them that the relationship is not overly-controlling as they may perceive franchising to be. Clearly explain where they will have autonomy and enjoy their decision-making authority to which they are accustomed, and where they will have to follow the franchise system's obligations for the greater good of the brand. Be sure they understand the true comprehensive value of investing in a franchise versus an independent venture. Foster and embrace their desire to be entrepreneurial by leaving the corpo-

rate executive culture. Often, many of them don't realize that business service franchise concepts exist as another option for those who don't want retail consumer operations, and they become enlightened as to the broader franchising industry and how beneficial franchising is on many levels, including economic, consumer and business. Providing them details, educational points and new perspectives helps former corporate executives make the most informed decisions. It also helps them prepare accordingly with a clear outlook to become accomplished franchise owners.

Empathize, relate with your support system

Executives who were well-supported with direct staffs and plenty of human resources across divisions may have a tough reality when they experience life as a franchise entrepreneur who has to be more self-reliant. If they aren't good with administrative tasks such as sending their own faxes or changing printer cartridges, pointing out this reality for most executives can also help them realize what additional resources they may wish to plan for before embarking on franchise ownership. Whether that resource is a family member just helping out or a hired employee of the new franchise business, explaining what your system recommends, requires or sees as a best practice in other franchise units run by executives will be very helpful.

Additionally, be sure they know they are not alone after they launch their franchise business. They may need continuous reminders of all that the system has to offer, so they can take charge of their achievements by utilizing available franchise resources. Keep in mind some executives also may not be in the habit of finding out things in a self-directed manner due to a lengthy career of having

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staff bring everything they needed to them proactively or on request. Others may not dedicate the time to search and apply resources, but never doubt for a moment how important the comprehensive training and ongoing support are to executives who challenge themselves to be outstanding no matter what they do.

Seek ways to foster their new entrepreneurial spirit.

Assure a supportive environment

If they know many others have gone before them as former executives and have been successful, they are more confident about their opportunities for advancement as new franchise owners. Former executives can come to a franchise system with either broad business experience such as a CEO or president of a company or division, or with a deep functional area of expertise such as a chief financial officer or sales or marketing executive. For those with narrower business experience in a functional area, highlight the similar functional areas of expertise of other achieving franchise owners so they know that it is common to be working outside of their comfort zone of a primary executive discipline. Communicate how a corporate executive can actually experience greater professional growth across a broader business spectrum—learning new things across many functional areas, because now they are in charge of those functions for their franchise business.

Recognize and respect levels of thinking, communication

Corporate executive franchise owners often perform at a higher level and have higher expectations. They are often results-driven and strive for continuous improvement—all traits that led them to their success in a corporate environment. Because they come to a franchise system at the top of their game after a successful corporate career, they are typically experts in an industry or functional area with the latest and greatest, cutting-edge knowledge. Knowing how to tap that expertise can be a huge competitive

advantage for a franchise system. Consider inviting these individuals to serve on specialized committees to provide advice and ideas to the franchise corporate office. The challenge for any corporate office is to effectively integrate so much available expertise and still develop, produce or execute efficiently and in a timely manner. The franchise company has to be prepared for the pressure to perform and improve each year.

Communicating to franchise owners who were corporate executives requires a constant awareness of tone and style. These are sophisticated people who are accustomed to being treated with a very high level of respect from their previous corporate environments and they expect the same from the franchise system. The franchise organization cannot communicate in tones that will be received as dictatorial and expect to have the most effective result. These franchise owners will expect justification or reasoning to support requests, actions or obligations. Asking for cooperation, collaboration, participation, contributions, and suggestions, for example, will yield far better progress to whatever the system is trying to achieve.

What matters most is respect.

Be careful of appearing to quash their creativity if it doesn't exactly conform to the brand's guidelines. Seek ways to foster their new entrepreneurial spirit within the constraints of the system. Offer leniency wherever it won't harm the system, so they can experience what they set out to do by becoming a franchise owner in the first place. These are the people who will be the innovators in the field and help the system to grow and improve with new offerings and enhancements.

Furthermore, be prepared for robust challenges and debates. Former corporate executives thrive on mental stimulation and asserting their opinions, so don't be surprised if they want to engage in more hearty communications. Franchise companies should not underestimate how sensitive former corporate executives are to communication tone and style.

Keys to Effectively Engaging Former Corporate Executives



- Provide utmost clarity about roles and responsibilities.
- Overcome concerns about their perceptions of franchising.
- Empathize, relate and show them the way with your support system.
- Assure a supportive environment with peer franchise owners with similar backgrounds as corporate executives.
- Recognize and respect their higher level of thinking and communication styles.

What matters most is respect. Former corporate executives are highly-accomplished individuals, who are accustomed to status, recognition, rewards and perks. With the right attitude, commitment and self-reliance, most of them can take control of their destiny and work for themselves as a franchise owner. By keeping in mind their unique profiles and how best to communicate with and support them, mutual accomplishments can be unlimited. ■



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