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## FRANCHISING TODAY

# Moving Up the Ladder: Franchisees Go From Employee to Employer

by Kelly Horn

Not all successful business owners follow a traditional path; many find their way to the top by working long hours as a hourly employee and saving their pennies to one day make it on their own. Franchising offers the perfect opportunity for these savvy employees to realize their dream of business ownership. With the right amount of capital in place, the motivation to achieve success and the ability to follow a proven system, franchise ownership is the ticket to financial freedom and career flexibility for many.

Jon-Anthony Lui, 29, a franchise owner and regional director of Tutor Doctor, became the youngest franchisee in the system when he decided to buy out the franchisee he was working for and open his own business.

"I was on commission-only as a general manager and the franchise owner I was working for wasn't involved in any of the daily operations," said Lui. "It was up to me to make the business a success. I slowly started to climb the ladder by reaching higher revenue targets and soon realized that I could do this on my own."

Lui, who had five years experience working for an e-learning consulting firm before coming to Tutor Doctor, understood what it took to engage students and help them learn. When he came to Tutor Doctor, an in-home, one-on-one tutoring franchise that serves more than two million children across North America each year, Lui realized it was the perfect fit for his career goals.

"I didn't want to reinvent the wheel," said Lui. "You have support and a 'family' that's in business with you. Plus, the recognition you receive from a franchise system can keep you motivated."

Today, Lui, manages seven territories for Tutor Doctor and offers the following advice to others whose dream it is to one day own their own business: "Make your dreams known," said Lui. "Find those who will support you and offer mentorship or guidance. Strive to get noticed by upper management and think outside the box."

After 12 years serving in the United States Army, Anthony Brown

began working part-time for Barry Bodiford, founder and CEO of 360clean, a 70-unit commercial cleaning franchise that provides hospital grade cleaning services to medical offices and other types of commercial offices. Brown worked



Anthony Brown worked part-time for the founder of 360clean before deciding to open his own franchise with his wife, Virginia.

"My wife and I believe you need to learn everything you can about the industry you're in and always perform at the highest level, no matter what position you hold within the company," said Brown. "As business owners, we're most proud of being able to give back to our community. It's such a rewarding feeling to be able to provide employment to those who desperately need work in this economy." It's no doubt that Brown's lengthy military career and positive attitude has had something to do with his success as a franchisee. Despite starting in a part-time position, he was running his own operation within just a few years.

"We're hoping to reach the one million dollar milestone in 2014," said Brown. "Our sales for 2013 will be just under this mark and we're confident we will surpass this goal in 2014 and continue to build on this foundation in the future."

Another franchise owner who has worked his way up from the bottom and has big plans for his business is Dan Hutchins of CertaPro Painters in San Diego. Hutchins started on the French fry station at McDonald's when he was 16 years old. Eventually he earned

for the original 360clean location for three years before moving on to become an employee of one of the system's first franchisees. Before long, Bodiford approached Brown and his wife, Virginia, about becoming a franchise owner. The couple jumped at the opportunity and opened for business in Charleston, S.C. in February 2009.



CertaPro Painters franchisee Dan Hutchins worked for McDonald's and College Pro Painters before saving enough money to open his own business.

a position as shift manager and realized that he enjoyed being in management and making decisions. Seven years later, he went on to work as a franchise manager for College Pro Painters for a few summers before investing in his CertaPro Painters franchise in 1997.



Chris Grissom, franchisee of Colors on Parade, started as a technician for the company before joining the system as a franchise owner earlier this year.

"It took me 10 years and many set-backs to finally figure out how to make my business work," said Hutchins. "I persevered through the tough times and am now realizing the vision I had when I bought the business 16 years ago."

Hutchins learned at an early age that hard work pays off. Aside from dealing with the challenging economy, his business has grown every year and is now three times the size it was in 2009. Over the next three years, Hutchins plans to double his current annual revenue.

"My advice to others looking to open their own business one day is to practice good work ethic and do each position to the best of your ability. Share your goals with your manager so he/she can mentor you along the way and help you develop."

Chris Grissom, a franchisee of Colors on Parade, a franchised mobile vehicle reconditioning service, agrees that opening a franchise is the way to go. After working as a technician for a Colors on Parade area developer for two years, Grissom opened his own franchise in September 2013.

"In my case, the area developers do not want to keep you as an employee if your ultimate goal is to open your business," said Grissom. "In addition to helping me with my skills, they helped me build a clientele and make a smooth transition from employee to franchisee."

Grissom felt it wasn't just about the work or the money; it was about the people. The time he spent working with other franchise owners as an employee made him confident that he was making the right decision for his family and their future. Going with a franchise over starting a business from scratch came with the advantage of ongoing support and an established reputation for excellence.

"I now set the financial goals I want to reach and have the ability to do so while not sacrificing time with my family, which is so precious to me."