

DRIVING THE SYSTEM:

HOW FRANCHISEES CAN FUEL THEIR OWN SUCCESS



Franchising is all about following a proven system. It's about applying certain methods at the local level. It's about working as a team with the franchisor, as well as working with other like-minded franchisees. Indeed, every bit of working for yourself, but not by yourself.

The chances of success for franchisees are often tied to replicating the success of the franchisor. For franchisees, that's something you think would be a real no brainer. Even for franchisees who have never actually owned their own business before, knowing that you can turn to a pre-produced plan in order to both grow your business and avoid pitfalls can be comforting to say the least.

Although a system is in place, there's always room for improvement. It's often the case that many of the most successful ideas come from existing franchisees. The Egg McMuffin was originally proposed by a franchisee, provided to corporate for testing and ultimately deployed creating a new breakfast product for a

chain primarily known at the time for its hamburgers. What did the franchisee that came up with the idea get? A really cool gold plaque! Oh, and a billion dollar breakfast menu leveraged by corporate and benefiting every fellow franchisee. I'm guessing there were a few franchisees that expressed their appreciation over and above the gold plaque.

Franchisees can follow a system and franchisees can play an active role in the advancement of the system. Indeed, every new franchisee represents an asset to the chain. Creativity and innovation are encouraged in order to benefit the brand and the system as a whole. Ideas can be conveyed to the franchisor who takes on the challenge of considering, producing, testing and deploying the idea without risk to franchisees. If it works, everyone wins. If it doesn't work, only the franchisor takes the hit. But, when it all comes together, a seemingly trivial idea can significantly advance the system.

A Trip to Vegas - "Are we there yet?"

Ever driven to Las Vegas? It's pretty much in the middle of nowhere. But, for some reason, a whole lot of us drive to places in the middle of nowhere or through the middle of nowhere to get somewhere.

It's about a five-hour drive from where I live in San Diego to the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. The quickest route is Interstate

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15. But, there are times, especially around the three-hour mark where the road in front of you seems to stretch on for a thousand miles. You come over a ridge, another thousand miles. You wrap around a mountain pass and there are the lights of Vegas, right? Nope, another thousand miles.

Why do people drive to Las Vegas especially when the shortest route goes through hundreds of miles of empty desert? Why do they stay on Interstate 15 and not take one of a hundred side roads that surely must provide a more direct route to Vegas and with less traffic?

Understanding that I’m running a bit adrift with my analogy here, let me explain. People go to Vegas because they are seeking something they feel they will find when they get there. It’s not so much the journey; it’s what’s at the end of the journey that drives people to make the trek. “What’s” at the end is the “why”. Drinks, great shows, Elton John, gambling, hanging out at the pool, meeting Elvis... it’s all part of the experience when you get to Vegas. Everyone has a different “why” and yet millions of people drive the five-plus hours often multiple times a year to end up in the middle of nowhere where it’s 115+ degrees in the shade.

In franchising, the franchisor’s system is, in a sense, a very reliable vehicle. Not necessarily a Porsche or a BMW, but a really nice Audi or Ford. Every franchisor

provides the vehicle. It is what has made other franchisees successful.

For your drive to Vegas, you’re being provided with a proven vehicle to make sure you get to where you want to go. It is not a 1974 Ford Pinto that could get rear ended at any moment and explode. It’s a

proven, reliable, economical, fun to drive, yet practical car.

On your way to Vegas, the franchisor advises you to, “Take Interstate 15 North the whole way and don’t sidetrack until you hit Tropicana Blvd.” In fact, they don’t just advise you, they are all over



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you about staying on course. It's tough sometimes, however, to follow that long, boring, seemingly never ending road out in the middle of nowhere. There are times when the 15 North heads more North than East and you happen to know that, as the crow flies, "Vegas is East, baby!" You're often tempted to take a shortcut by exiting the interstate and taking one of them there dirt roads that seem to be headin' ta Vegas. But, we all know that those dirt road alternatives out in the middle of nowhere lead to nowhere in the middle of nowhere. No bueno!

The franchisor provides a great, reliable, proven vehicle for you to get to Vegas. The franchisor also provides a proven and easy-to-follow roadmap (a term used for thousands of years until recently when people found it easier to simply say, "GPS"). Nonetheless, the roadmap lays out a specific route to get to Vegas using your proven and reliable vehicle. Again, a real no brainer. Just drive the car and follow the map and you'll get to Vegas!

You've got your vehicle and your roadmap and you're set, right? Nope again. There is a third component, one that the franchisor does not provide. It's the fuel. It's the drive. It's the passion. It's the willingness to drive the car while following the map to achieve your goal...having a great experience in Las Vegas, Nevada!

It's more than just pulling over to fill up your tank. It's actually pressing down on the gas pedal too. Sound silly? Try it when you're at the three-hour mark and the "Highway to the Opposite of Heaven" seems to go on and on and on and with zero help from angel, Michael Landon (may Little Joe rest in peace). Try it when the kids keep saying, "Are we there yet?"

Try it when your French fries end up dripping ketchup all over your shirt while you're on cruise control and trying to steer with your knees. It ain't easy! Sometimes, you just want to back off the gas, pull over and call it a day. "Oh well, we tried." "Oh well, no you didn't."

The end of the rainbow, the lights over the next hill, the "why" to why you became a franchisee in the first place is what it's all about. The "why" gives you the energy to fill up your tank and push down on the gas pedal and drive the vehicle while following the roadmap. When you feel yourself starting to get overwhelmed or, worse yet, dismayed, think about what you'll experience when you get to Vegas. Shows. Gambling. Margaritas! Then notice how your foot presses down more on the pedal. There is no stopping you now!

The vehicle. The roadmap. The fuel. All three elements are needed to achieve a franchisee's "why." The why of "Vegas" is an analogy for most franchisees. For some people, Las Vegas really is their "why," but that is a subject for another unrelated article entirely.

What drives you? What are you passionate about? Why did you sign up to become a franchisee? Remember when you were doing your due diligence and calling other franchisees for validation? You haven't been that high since your first hit in college. That's what you need to pull out again as your franchise "why." After all, you've got everything you need to get to your "why." All you need is to press the gas pedal.

Growing the system. Growing the brand. Two prime directives that both franchisees and franchisors can agree to. However, following the system, even when it's right



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in front of you and proven to a large degree requires that extra "umph," that extra willingness to stick it out. The attitude of most success-minded franchisees is to hop in the vehicle, whip out the map, point themselves towards Vegas... and floor it! A winning combination.

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