Out of Office, Permanently

An honest guide for corporate leaders weighing franchise ownership, from a consultant who owns two.

Empowering you to write your next chapter.

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YOUR FRANCHISE MENTOR

A Thursday in Tampa

I spent an afternoon with my mom in Tampa not long ago. It had been longer than I'd like to admit since my last visit.

She lives in assisted living now. Her memory comes and goes, but she still knows who I am. Sitting with her, I realized that's something I can't take for granted, and I'd been acting like I could.

For most of my corporate career, the job came first. I moved where it needed me, traveled when it asked, and told myself family would understand. They usually did, which made it easy to keep going.

A main reason I became a business owner was to own my time. What I didn't expect is that freedom doesn't change your habits for you. Nobody tells a business owner to take a Thursday and drive to Tampa. Over time, the old patterns crept back in, and busy started to feel normal again. Ownership gave me the chance. Using it well is still on me.

I start with that afternoon because of the question underneath it, and it's the question this book is about: Who decides how you spend your Thursdays?

For three decades in corporate, my answer was someone else. A boss, a board, or a reorg I read about in an email. If you're reading this, I'd bet the answer is someone else for you too, and some part of you is starting to mind.

Maybe the restructuring email already came. You know the one. It has the word restructuring in it, or rightsizing, or a phrase somebody in HR workshopped for a week.

Maybe your job is perfectly safe. You've been in the same seat for a few years, you're very good at it, and the next promotion keeps going to someone on the fast track. You're getting tired of building something that belongs to someone else.

Or maybe you've simply done the math. Twenty years of salary and bonuses that stop the day the job does, and you'd rather own equity you can grow or sell.

Whichever one sounds like you, this book is for you. It's the straight version of what I wish someone had handed me before I traded my badge for a business: What you're buying, how to pick a business that fits your life, how to know your number, how to vet a brand, and the questions every leader asks me on the first call. It comes from three seats I've sat in: Corporate leader, franchise owner and franchise consultant.

The right business should fit your life. Not replace it. Let's find out if there's one that fits yours.

Your Career Is the Qualification

Almost every corporate leader I talk with brings up the same worry early on: "I've never run a business."

I'd argue you've been running one for years. The only thing missing is your name on it.

Think about what your last 20 years involved. If you've led a sales region, you've hired, coached and held people to a number. If you've run operations or programs, you've managed budgets, vendors and deadlines across teams that didn't report to you. If you've led engineering or IT, you've built processes other people count on every day. Those are the jobs inside a franchise.

Franchisors look for exactly that: Leadership, a willingness to follow a system and the drive to build something of your own. Your industry matters less than you'd think. The strongest owners I know are often the people who led the team, more than the people who did the technical work. Leadership, budgeting, team building and customer service are the skills that help a service business grow.

I know this from my own seat. My career ran through operations and customer experience: Card operations at a bank, participant services at a retirement company, contact centers, and eventually a division COO job running 700 people, pulling four acquired companies in 16 offices into one. None of it was in fitness. In fact, here's a confession: I don't like working out. I own two fitness studios anyway, because owning one takes business judgment, good people and a proven system, and my career gave me the first two. The hiring, the scheduling, the customer experience and the numbers all came with me.

Before you read on, make a list of what you've done for 20 years: Led people, managed budgets, solved problems, built teams, kept customers. That list is what a franchisor looks for.

What You're Buying When You Buy a Franchise

When you buy a franchise, you buy a business someone has already figured out. The franchisor has tested the model, built the brand and written down how to run it. You get the right to run it in your market, with their training and support behind you.

For a corporate leader, that setup should feel familiar. There's a playbook, a brand and a support team, and you're the one running the P&L.

What you pay for it

- **The franchise fee:** A one-time fee to join the system. It's part of your initial investment.
- **The initial investment:** Everything it takes to open, including the franchise fee, build-out, equipment and opening costs. Every franchisor publishes its estimate in its Franchise Disclosure Document.
- **Ongoing fees:** Most franchisors charge a royalty, usually a percentage of sales, and many add a contribution to a shared marketing fund. These are separate from the initial investment and continue for as long as you own the business.

Three ways in

Build a new location. You start from the ground up: Find the site, sign the lease, hire the team and open the doors. You shape the culture from day one.

Buy an existing location. You step into a business that already has customers, staff and a track record you can study. Some are thriving. Others need a turnaround, and in the hands of an experienced operator, that can be a real opportunity.

Grow to several locations. Many owners start with one unit and add more, or sign for several territories from the start. Multi-unit ownership suits leaders who want to run the business through managers and a team.

I've done the first two. In February 2021, I opened The Exercise Coach in Alpharetta, Georgia, from the ground up, with the lease, the payroll and the 6 AM staffing gaps that come with it. In September 2023, I acquired an existing location in Peachtree Corners that was struggling and turned it into a profitable one. The first taught me what it takes to start a business. The second taught me what it takes to turn one around, and I bring both lessons to every business I help a client evaluate.

Before you read on, circle the way in that sounds most like you.

Start With the Life You Want

Most people shop for a franchise the way they'd read a job posting. Does the title sound right? Is it an industry I've heard of? Would my old boss be impressed?

It's a lifestyle decision. It's not a job decision. This is money you're investing in the next chapter of your life, so we start with the life and work back to the business. Three questions do the sorting.

Question one: What do you want most?

More income, more time or more control over your own life? "All three" is the most popular answer, and it's the one I push back on, because every business trades a little of one for another somewhere. Pick the one you'd protect if you could only have one.

Question two: How involved do you want to be?

- **Owner-operator:** You run it day to day. You're the face of the business, and the upside is yours. A strong fit if your answer was income or control.
- **Semi-absentee:** A manager runs the day, and you run the business. You can keep a job, a consulting practice or another location while it grows. A strong fit if your answer was time.
- **Manager-run:** The most hands-off of the three, and the one that asks the most of your hiring. A strong fit if you want to lead the business while a team does the daily work.

Match the model to the answer you wrote down. If you want your Thursdays back and you choose owner-operator because the upside looks bigger, you'll be in the building every day anyway.

Question three: What's the right investment level for you?

The number that lets you build with confidence and without stress. It shapes the whole search, so it gets its own chapter next.

One client, a software engineering director, wrote that I helped her get crystal clear on what she wanted her future lifestyle to look like. Four strong contenders came out of it.

Before you read on, put your three answers on one page, then talk through question two with the person who shares your bank account. For me, that's my wife. Business decisions always include her.

Know Your Number

Your number has two parts: The capital you can invest without betting the house, and the runway your household lives on until the business pays you. Put both on paper before you fall in love with a brand.

We settle your investment range on the first call, from your capital, your runway and your comfort with risk. Every brand on your shortlist sits inside it, so you evaluate each one with

confidence. If the numbers point to a smaller business or a later start, that's a good answer too, and I'll tell you so.

If you have a severance package, put it on the runway side of the page. Severance is runway. It pays the mortgage while the business finds its feet, and a new business needs that time more than it needs another dollar of investment.

Six ways to fund a franchise

Most of my clients fund the business from more than one source, and a franchise with a proven model is a lot more financeable than a start-up with no track record. These are the six routes we look at together, with lenders who do franchise funding every day:

SBA loans:	Small Business Administration lending programs
Private lenders:	Funding from private lending institutions
Retirement funds:	Eligible retirement savings, properly structured
Investments as collateral:	Using non-IRA investments to secure funding
Equipment leasing:	Programs that reduce the overall start-up cost
Lines of credit:	Unsecured lines of credit

A note on retirement money: Certain retirement-funding structures can let you use eligible savings without early-withdrawal penalties when they're properly established. They carry real tax and compliance requirements, so they belong in a review with qualified professionals and a lender who does this every day.

Fill in these four lines and bring them to our call:

Capital I can comfortably invest: $_____

Monthly household budget: $_____

Months of runway I want before the business pays me: _____

My investment ceiling: $_____

Ready to talk? Connect with Eric **HERE**

The Questions I Hear Most

Every leader brings a few worries to the first call. Here are the ones I hear most, and what I tell them.

"Am I too late for this?"

The leaders I work with are usually in their late 40s to early 60s, and they bring the one thing a 28-year-old can't: Twenty years of knowing how to run things. I started Your Franchise Mentor after 30 years in corporate and four years as an owner, so I'm a little biased.

"What if I'm wrong?"

I understand that question because I've lived it. I also talk to a lot of executives who've been "seriously considering" owning a business for two or three years. Thinking doesn't produce an answer. Looking does. That's why the process has so many checkpoints: Your three answers, your number, the disclosure document, your calls with existing owners and Discovery Day. You decide at every step, and you can stop at any of them.

"I don't want to be the one opening the door at 6 AM."

Good. Then we look at businesses built for someone else to open the door. Semi-absentee and manager-run models exist for exactly that, and question two sorts it out early.

"My spouse isn't sure."

Bring them to the first call. I'd rather answer their questions this month than after a franchise disclosure document arrives, and the decision belongs to both of you.

"Isn't a franchise consultant just a salesperson?"

Fair question. Here's how I'm paid. There's no fee to you. The brands pay me if and when you move forward. That could create pressure to close. I decided early that it would do the opposite: I tell you when now isn't the time, or this isn't the path. My recommendations are based on fit, profit potential and durability, not on who pays the biggest referral fee.

That's why my LinkedIn headline says it plainly: I'll tell you when it's the wrong move, no broker spin.

How to Vet a Franchise

You've run vendor selections and budget reviews. Vetting a franchise uses the same skills, pointed at your own money.

I can reach hundreds of franchise and business options across more than 30 categories. Your three answers and your number narrow them fast. Loving the product is a fine place to start, and it's rarely where you finish. If you love coffee, you'll gravitate to coffee franchises, and owning a coffee franchise has very little to do with loving coffee. Part of my job is to show you models you'd probably never consider on your own.

Read the FDD

Every franchisor gives you a Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD) before you sign, and federal rules require you to have it at least 14 days before you sign anything or pay any money. It runs to 23 sections, called Items. These deserve your closest read:

- **Item 6, Other Fees:** The ongoing costs, including royalties and marketing fund contributions.
- **Item 7, Estimated Initial Investment:** What it takes to open, franchise fee included.
- **Item 19, Financial Performance Representations:** Item 19 is where a franchisor can share financial performance representations, and not every franchisor does. When a brand does, we read it together and validate it with existing owners and qualified advisors, because an average can hide a wide range of results.
- **Item 20, Outlets and Franchisee Information:** How many locations opened, changed hands and closed, plus contact information for current owners and owners who recently left the system. Your call list starts here.
- **Item 21, Financial Statements:** The franchisor's own financial health.

Talk to the owners

Before you sign anything, you talk to people who own the brand today. One intentional conversation is worth a month of websites. Ask them:

> - What does a typical week look like for you?
> - What did it take to get started, and how long until the business paid you?
> - What surprised you in year one?
> - What does it take to grow from here?
> - What do you know now that you wish you'd known before you signed?

I own and run franchise locations myself, so I know what year one feels like and where owners get surprised. I'll help you hear what's behind each answer.

Before you make a purchase decision, you'll review the FDD and franchise agreement with qualified advisors, talk with existing franchisees, evaluate the financial information and attend Discovery Day when the brand offers one. Discovery Day is your chance to meet the franchisor's leadership team and see how the system runs up close.

This week, find one franchise owner in any industry and ask three of the questions above.

How We'd Work Together

It's the IFPG matching process I run with every client, structured and low-pressure on purpose, and free to you.

1. **Information gathering:** Your goals, your funding options, your experience and your preferences. The three questions and your number. Plan on an hour or two.

2. **Researching your options:** I research and speak with franchisors on your behalf, against your criteria, so you skip the website chasing. Two to four brands come back.

3. **Discussing your future business:** We walk through each brand: What it asks of you, what it pays back and why it made the list. You green-light or red-light each one.

4. **Speaking with the franchisor:** You talk directly with the brands you're excited about and with their owners, and you complete your due diligence.

If you decide to move forward, we build the plan beyond "sign here": How you'll fund it, market it, sell it, staff it and measure it. Then you open the door.

Most people I work with came in unsure whether franchising was the right move. They left with a clear picture of their options, a short list and a number. Some moved forward with ownership, and others decided the time wasn't right yet, which is a good outcome too.

Get Back on the Elevator

At my first IFPG conference, I was brand new to franchise consulting, still questioning my decision, and knew absolutely no one. Opening night had nearly 1,000 people. I got on the elevator and was so nervous I felt like I was going to throw up. I went back to my room.

Then I made a deal with myself: It's OK to be nervous, it's OK to be awkward, and I'm going back down to meet 10 people. Dinner was a buffet, so I made a plan: a new table for the salad, another for the appetizer, another for dinner and another for dessert. Two hours later, I had barely eaten. My goal was 10. I met 53, and many of them I now consider friends.

> *"You don't have to feel confident to take the first step."*

Your first step is 30 minutes on the phone with me. Bring your answers and your number. Bring your spouse if you can. I'll tell you honestly whether franchise ownership fits, and if it does, what the first two to four brands would be and why. The call is free, and you'll leave with a plan either way.

Whatever you build, leave room for the people who matter, and then use it.

Book a 30-minute introductory call

Or text 229-231-4140 | eroberts@yourfranchisementor.com | yourfranchisementor.com | linkedin.com/in/ericroberts3



About the Author: Eric Roberts, CFC

CERTIFIED FRANCHISE CONSULTANT WITH IFPG AND MULTI-UNIT FRANCHISE OWNER. FOUNDER, YOUR FRANCHISE MENTOR.

MY STORY: I spent 30 years in senior operations and customer leadership, up to division COO of a 700-person organization. Then one day, the company decided it could live without me. Turns out, I could live without it too. I own two Exercise Coach studios in the Atlanta area, one built from the ground up and one I turned around, with a top-5 sales conversion rate in a system of more than 200 locations and client retention above 95 percent. In 2025, I became a Certified Franchise Consultant and started Your Franchise Mentor.

WHAT I DO: I help senior corporate leaders figure out whether franchise ownership is the right next chapter, and if it is, how to choose and run the right business. Straight talk and real numbers, an operator's view of the day-to-day, and a plan for running the business as well as buying it.

WHAT CLIENTS SAY: "Eric was instrumental in helping me weed through all of the opportunities and finding the businesses that fit me best." Allen Hall, owner, TruBlue Home Service Ally. "We never felt rushed, pressured, or sold to. Instead, we felt championed." Wendy Lally, software engineering director.

AWAY FROM WORK: I'm a dog-loving freak. I live in the North Georgia mountains, garden for the flowers, follow astronomy and basketball, and love live music of nearly every kind. My wife and I travel out of the country three or four times a year, and after 24 years she's still my friend and my confidant.

READY TO TALK? Book 30 minutes | Text 229-231-4140 | eroberts@yourfranchisementor.com

YOUR FRANCHISE MENTOR