

## Red and white Fish Window Cleaning logo

### Franchisee Q&A

#### Tell Us A Little About You

*Bridget and Chad Gilding sitting side-by-side in a room with a lamp and tree in the background.*

#### Bridget & Chad Gilding

##### Madison, WI - 2008

**Bridget Gilding:** We're Chad and Bridget Gilding from Madison, WI. We own an Executive territory which we opened with a Standard and then expanded about a year later.

**Chad Gilding:** So I was an engineer, a product engineer, for 15 years at two different companies. I was always an engineer. I went to college for an engineer but I never really liked it.

**Bridget:** And I was an allocation manager with Famous Footwear at the corporate office in Madison and then I would say for about 8 years and then they announced they were going to consolidate offices and move everyone to St. Louis so we grew up in the area that we live in and all our parents are there and didn't want to take the kids away from grandparents so we decided we weren't gonna move so that's kind of where, and I remember kind of in this whole process Chad saying when he started looking into different businesses I remember him saying I cannot retire being an engineer. I cannot do this until retirement. I have to find something else. That kind of kick started it and then we my job leaving was kind of like perfect. It just worked out perfect.

#### How Did You Find FISH?

**Chad:** So I didn't start at the same time as Bridget. I kept my job for two and a half years. I actually was the one looking for a franchise. When we started, I searched on my own a little bit and that was going nowhere. I would always find a problem with the company or just wasn't a good fit so I filled out an online form for a franchise consultant with FranChoice and that put us in touch with Dick Bissell. That kind of got it rolling. At the same time, Bridget's company, Famous Footwear, shut down in Madison so she was out of work so it kind of changed our plans. I was the one that was originally gonna start the franchise but Bridget ended up doing it because of that. But anyway FranChoice brought us four choices and FISH was the one that ended up winning out of the four.

#### How Did You Feel About A Window Cleaning Franchise?

**Bridget:** When we were doing all our research we had little kids. I think our youngest was, we had a 2, 4, and 6 year old at the time and so you know we could only talk to them the both of us together when they were in bed so I remember Chad said okay we have a scheduled call with FranChoice and they're gonna shoot some options out for us. So we scheduled it after they went to bed and I remember we sat down at the kitchen table across from each other, we both had a phone and we were both taking notes and listening to the options and I remember they gave us a few different options and one of them the next one they came to was Fish Window Cleaning and I remember pulling the phone away from my ear so they couldn't hear me and I was like no way and you know we kind of chuckled and wrote down some notes and hung up and I was like yeah I'm ruling out this one right away. I'm not doing window cleaning cause I knew I was gonna start it and that did not seem like anything that I wanted to do. No interest. So

really the only reason we kept it on is because Chad seemed to like kind of the business model and then we just started to kind of dig into the details more so and then I kind of starting coming around to liking it also so yeah in the beginning I was not having it.

### **Why Did You Choose FISH?**

**Chad:** We started doing the validation process and right away two stood out. So it was FISH and another company and the more we went through it we realized the business model just fit better. It was number 1, days no nights, no weekends and the other one had a little bit of that. But the residual income you get once you have a customer you kind of keep that customer. You don't have to go out and get brand new customers to backfill the ones that you've lost when you finish the last job with the other company. So it was the residual income and the fact that you could go out and get new customers whenever you wanted. The other companies relied heavily on marketing, expensive marketing, so you would mail out the marketing and the plan was you'd wait for the phone to ring. With FISH, you could go get business from day 1. I figured she'd be a great salesperson anyway.

**Bridget:** I think that was one of the things that I loved about it cause I, we were really nervous. I mean I was like so scared to do something on our own so I was really afraid to take the risk and I one of the things I loved about FISH was exactly that. I remember telling Chad at least if I'm sitting in the office and feel like we're struggling, I can get up and go out and do something about it. Whereas other companies, you send out all this marketing and you just cross your fingers and wait and I didn't love that part of it so I think that was kind of huge in the decision making.

### **What Was Your Start-Up Like?**

**Bridget:** So we opened in December of 2008. What I felt like was terrible time to open cause everyone was off every time I went to bid anyone I called Chad and he was still working at the time and so I remember calling him and being like there's nobody at these places. They're all on vacation. It's Christmas. But it was cold and I remember when I got back from training we I hired two people right away. Just two cleaners, we had no business, we had not one single job but they were willing to go out and sell with me so that's what we did every day. I took them and myself and I trained them how to sell and we'd go out to an area in the same car and we'd all split up until we covered the area and we'd get back in the car and move on. So I think that was great for our open because I think it got us off to a really fast start and so even though it was very very cold and we were walking through snow drifts upon snow drifts bidding buildings we really tried not to skip a single thing. We really tried to do what Corporate kind of trained us to do.

### **How Is Your Business Today?**

**Bridget:** When I came back from training, I hired two cleaners and they went out selling with me so we didn't have any work at the time. I just used them as salespeople in the beginning and eventually slowly they would sell part-time, clean part-time until we got enough work them just to clean. I mean there were days where I didn't have work for them and they would go out and hang doorhangers in neighborhoods. I was like I never just gave them off, I was like here's what you're doing today and some days they weren't thrilled about it but they still went out and they just did it. So that slowly we ramped up and then they were just full-time cleaners and it got to be I don't even know maybe a year in that I didn't really feel like I needed an Ops Manager yet so I had one of my cleaners become just a Lead

Cleaner so he did all of my training. So he just took a lot of that kind of stuff away from me and maybe it was like six months in. I can't really remember the timing but it got to the point after a couple years where we just it was too much for me to do on my own so it was either Chad was gonna have to quit and join which was our plan originally anyways and then it was either that or I was gonna have to hire some more people to help me.

**Chad:** So about two and a half years in she grew it enough in two and a half years to make it financially make sense for me to leave my job as an engineer and join on rather than hiring an Ops Manager kind of going manager way I kind of filled that role. I did cleaning but I did the office stuff but after two and a half years it was we were able to make the jump from me having an engineering job to support the family while she grows the business from the start to we were able to support ourselves on the business. So it was a good time for the transition.

**Bridget:** Yup and kind of it was a great feeling because it was what we set out to do but I never really knew if it was actually gonna work. Not that quickly so after two and a half years to be finally saying like maybe you should quit cause I need help so I can't do it by myself and I think that was probably a great time for you too because he had been waiting to do something else for a long time so to finally reach that point was awesome.

**Chad:** I was excited.

### **Tell Us About Your Structure**

**Chad:** We have seven cleaners, we have a really good group of guys that have been with us all of them except for one for three years. Dan's been with us

**Bridget:** since we almost opened

**Chad:** since March of the first year. Wayne's been with us like nine years so we have a real solid group that they show up every day. They do everything that they're given. The window cleaner portion of the employee part is awesome.

**Bridget:** I mean we do struggle with it sometimes. I mean I'm sure everybody will say that. I mean we have a really great core so we're really lucky to have that but you know when we get busy we'll hire up a couple more and we're always I think we'll never get away from it we're always gonna have those one or two people who flake on us, who don't show up, who just end up going away. I mean that's happen in any business and that I think can be really stressful and I think there were times in the business where we didn't have such a solid core maybe a couple where it would be stressful hiring and having them leave or doing interviews and not liking anybody so I think we're lucky in that aspect but I think that's just how it is for everybody. You're always gonna have employees that you don't love a few of them and they're gonna come and go.

**Chad:** It's a numbers game. It's like writing estimates. You go through a certain number of employees and you're gonna find the right guys and I think right now, in almost 10 years, we have the best group of guys we've had since the beginning.

**Bridget:** I think it's helpful to have the cleaners that have been a long time cause once the new ones start, they can give them all the positives. You know how much money they're making and that they get

holidays off and they don't have to work nights and weekends. They can kind of tell all those things and I mean I think that's probably helpful.

**Bridget:** Well we don't have an Ops Manager and we do not have a salesperson right now even though we probably should have a salesperson. Maybe not necessarily an Ops Manager. We have two Lead Cleaners so they do all our training and I mean they pretty much handle it while we're gone when we're away.

### **What Makes A Good Franchisee?**

**Chad:** Failure wasn't an option. This was it. We went into it knowing this has to work. With failure not being an option and following the system she was able to grow it really fast so I think if anyone goes in with that attitude, it'll work.

**Bridget:** I think you just have to be you just have to work hard. You have to put in the time and the hours and do exactly what they train you to do at training because if you come back and you slack on any part of it it make work, it just might be a slower start. But if you come out and you just get out there selling that is probably the biggest thing. Just get out selling right away and do it yourself it will help you have a fast start which that then makes you feel so great and makes you wanna just keep going.

**Chad:** Takes a lot of the pressure off.

**Bridget:** Yeah it does. It makes you realize that it works. This works and then you just wanna keep going and going and going and going. So I think that you know when you first come back from training, I think the first couple weeks are a little bit like uh what am I doing cause you know you're just starting so if you can just get back, get yourself situated within like a day and get out there right away. Don't give yourself a week. Don't give yourself two weeks to just try and figure things out in your office. Literally, first day, go out and start selling. And you will see the jobs start rolling in.

**Chad:** There's a common theme with the people that are successful in FISH. Number one, they follow the system. You spent the money on the system. Follow the system. It's pretty simple. The other thing is drive. You can tell when you talk to someone whether they're a kind of undriven person and just how they talk about the company and the people we talked to were really positive about FISH but you could tell it was them that did it too. It wasn't just FISH.

**Bridget:** I feel like the system can work for anybody. I mean I feel like if you go through training and go back to your office and just implement what you learned it will work. But if you go back and just sit in your office and spend lots of hours doing office stuff that you don't need to do yet because you just opened so how much office stuff do you really have? It's just easier to sit in your office but if you can get back and make sure that you go out and follow the system that they trained you on you will be successful and when I started, we had three little kids, two, four, and six at the time and I was about to cut back my hours at my other job before we found out that it was relocating the office to St. Louis and so I went from about to cut back to back to working 40 hours a week but I knew I wanted this to work and I just think it takes it does take a lot of hard work in the beginning. Where you have to be willing to put in the time, and you have to be willing to do exactly as they trained you to do to make it successful and I think that's what got us off to a great start in the beginning was just following everything.

### **What Is Your Favorite Aspect Of The Business?**

**Chad:** We work less hours than we used to.

**Bridget:** We probably put in combo'd 40-60 depending on the time of year. I would say winter, way less. We're not as busy but spring and fall, I mean there are days where he's literally almost writing estimates all day long day after day after day just to keep up so.

**Chad:** But we don't work Fridays. Even in the spring and fall, we don't go to the office on Fridays.

**Bridget:** We have our two Lead Cleaners that cover for us when we're gone so I started not working Fridays before you started and I don't know why. I don't even remember what made me not work Fridays. I probably took a Friday off and decided I never wanted to work that again and then when he started, he was gonna start working Fridays and I was like wait, hold on, we don't work Fridays. So we just don't unless we're so busy that have to go in.

**Chad:** Every once in a while I'll have a few estimate on a Friday.

**Bridget:** Yup.

### **What Has This Franchise Personally Given You?**

**Chad:** I have nightmares of having to go back to a product engineering job that 8-5 five days a week, that's scary.

**Bridget:** I think that's the best part about this, the freedom it has given us because with our three kids at the time, back when we opened, they weren't in sports, they were little. They after school would bus home to my mom's house she would watch them so that made that a lot easier but now They're you know 10 years later they're 11, 14, and 15 now and it's we're running all the time with them. So we always have sports, we always have school stuff and the freedom that it allows us now to just step away when we want to for a school thing or a basketball tournament or whatever we have is the best and I always say to Chad can you imagine if we were still working 8-5? How would we do this? How would we get our kids here? How would we make this soccer game? How would do any of this? And right now it's summer and I'm pretty much home all the time with the kids. I mean, I probably work 10 hours a week but we're a little slower these couple months so it works out but I would never be able to do this if I had an 8-5 job so I think that's probably been the most rewarding thing for both of us.

### **Knowing What You Know Now, Would You Do It Again?**

**Bridget:** Yeah, 100% absolutely we would do it again. I just think it's been a positive experience all around. I mean I think it's the best thing that we've ever chosen to do. I mean of course there are stressful times and there are stressful moments and there I'm sure there are times in the office where he's like can you just go home? I actually prefer when you're not here so many hours but it's been the best thing for our family. I mean, I just always think of our kids when they get older and how they'll be able to say gosh, my mom and dad went to everything. They didn't miss any of our stuff.

**Chad:** I don't even think they realize how lucky they are.

**Bridget:** But they will some day. When they get older.

**Chad:** Hopefully, yes.

**Bridget:** Yes, hopefully.

**Chad:** And they're even here with us today so I don't think they realize how lucky they are that we're able to do this stuff for them especially in the summer, even school stuff, after school stuff that other families have to make a choice. One or other spouse has to go or neither of them go just cause it's not possible and it's been the best thing that we could've run into and I'm glad we made it through the validation process and we chose this one.

**Bridget:** And I'm glad that he talked me into even looking more into window cleaning because I would've been out 10 years ago.

### **Anything Else To Add?**

**Chad:** I still do all the warm leads and I think we get a much higher percentage of those as far as go's because they've met the person that owns the company. A lot of owners, homeowners especially, will ask you if you're the owner of the company and I think it's a huge plus so with their model and the owner being the one that gets it started really helps that you're the one that's doing it not a salesperson, it's not a cleaner on their own even though we used cleaners but she was always there with them.

**Bridget:** Yeah and you know I think when you go out and I remember thinking this at training too when you go out and write an estimate, like how many people are really gonna want an estimate? But really it's pretty easy. I mean I found that when you go out and give them an estimate, it's free and most of the time they're willing to accept it and a lot of the times I think they think it's gonna be more expensive than it really is and I mean I would have you know even buildings call and be surprised thinking we never thought about window cleaning before but we always thought it would be too pricey for us so I think that was a surprise for people and kind of a surprise for me too that you know people were so willing to accept the estimates and were surprised about the cost of it.

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