

Red and white Fish Window Cleaning logo

Franchisee Q&A

Tell Us A Little About You

Katie Wesselschmidt sitting in a room with a lamp and tree in the background.

Katie Wesselschmidt

Concord, CA – September 2012

Katie Wesselschmidt: So I'm Katie Wesselschmidt. My office in Concord, CA. That's right outside of San Francisco, about 45 minutes. It's in a suburban type environment. I don't have a lot of high-rise in my territory and that's a good thing because everything is low-rise that I can easily clean. So I am an engineer by training here from Missouri. I lived in Missouri all my life and then we were transported to California through my husband's business and I needed something to do and so that's why I was in FISH but again I had no background in managing part-time employees or really I hadn't managed employees for a while. I was able to stay home with my kids when they were little. I was a music teacher at St. Luke's preschool here in St. Louis and then when I went to California I worked for a political consultant and was their office help but really what the emphasis for being a business owner came about, we had a family friend who bought a small hotel in St. Helena California up in wine country gives me a call one day and says hey Katie why don't you come up and help me run the hotel and I said oh that'd be fun and so I did that for a while, renovating the hotel. We took it down to the studs, that was really fun. It was a 12-room boutique hotel. Running a hotel wasn't so fun but that was my first foray into really managing part-time employees, providing services, and being in that service industry that we are. That was my first foray into that and then I thought you know what can I do for myself.

How Did You Find FISH?

Katie: You know you do the personality profile, I think I used FranNet, isn't that funny I hardly remember their name anymore but it was FranNet. And it was so funny because I was going to the initial appointment and my husband Keith was going with me and we're going down the road and it's the first time I ever in my life I saw I go hey, window cleaning! There was a van that went by that was window cleaning and I said now there's an interesting business and low and behold, 2 weeks later when I go back she says well Fish Window Cleaning's one of them. And it was from St. Louis. And it was red and I love the color red.

How Did You Feel About A Window Cleaning Franchise?

Katie: So I said to Keith you know this might really be intriguing. It might be meant to be. I saw a window cleaning van and I love red and it's from St. Louis and this is the one I have to investigate. And so I never had any negative connotations or thoughts about a window cleaning business. I thought that it was something that I could easily wrap my head around. You know, it wasn't building iPhones. It was cleaning a window so I could probably learn how to do that.

Why Did You Choose FISH?

Katie: In the service industry, there are many models, right? And FISH appealed to me so much because it fit a lifestyle you know I'm not 20 starting a business. I'm 60 starting a business and so what could I do

that really fit the rest of my lifestyle? And this business model really did that. I got calls when I was in the hotel business, I got calls at 3 a.m. saying you know they're fighting in the hallways what do I do now? I didn't want to have to deal with those. I saw retail spots of restaurants where you have to be open. There's no choice. And in our business you don't have to do the business the day you said it. You can always do it the next day. And we work Monday through Friday. We really do. Saturdays are unusual for us. Our office opens at 7, we close at 4. In those first few months, there were times, again, when I would work late or would be up early thinking what am I gonna do tomorrow or what am I gonna do today? How am I gonna get that done? That doesn't happen anymore. Now my operation is such that we show up at 7 and we go home at 4 and we don't think about each other until 7 the next day. So that fits my lifestyle.

What Was Your Start-Up Like?

Katie: I opened in September of 12, 2012, and the story behind my opening is that I like several franchisees had no one to help me. My husband had a full-time job. It was just gonna be me tackling this and I think there's some franchisees who start with more experience in the kind of service industries that I did not have but you know you weather that storm and then all the sudden it's better and so you just kind of have to plow through those hard times when you start and you know all those things of starting are managing part-time employees. I didn't know how to do that. I hadn't done that before. I had done some quick books management so that part was okay but for me it was my knees knocking for three days and when I officially opened the door to go out and go into my first business to try to sell and I got an instant go the very first business I walked in and I thought oh this is gonna be easy. There's no problem here at all. It's not always that easy but it can be and if you just weather the storm and keep working, you'll be fine.

How Is Your Business Today?

Katie: Alright, so, when I started I bought my franchise there had not been another franchisee in the area for several years. I understand that there was one several years before I started but no continued business and I didn't acquire a book of business. I had to start from scratch. And so those first few months, you know they're just hard. Like I said you're new at everything so your experiences are just overwhelming at first but about month 4, I would go into the bank, at that point in time I went to the bank once a week on Fridays and I didn't even count the money the first few weeks if you can imagine. I would just hand them the cash and go here's my money for the week and they were so wonderful to me at this small bank in California that's really great and I am with them still but I would just hand them the money and not even have it counted. And you know today I go in daily with a pretty sizable deposit so I've been able to take the business and not by myself, I have a wonderful crew that I couldn't grow the business without but I've been able to take that business from I remember the first Friday I went in and from my weekly expenses I made like 2 cents, literally, 2 cents in the black and I thought this is really great. Maybe this is gonna work. And it did and I never looked back. I never added money to the original money that I put into the business to start with and it's just grown so much that now I'm comfortable with all those other financial pieces and my role in the company has changed to be really a business manager and not a job manager. So that's how it's changed in the 5 years from my starting with nothing to being a business with a nice fat bank account and that I don't sweat every penny that goes out the door anymore. I'm aware of every penny that goes out the door but I don't sweat it all.

Tell Us About Your Structure

Katie: So I currently have 9 employees. I have the majority of them are cleaners but I also have a General Manager and I have an office person. I don't have a salesperson currently. I'm trying to replace that salesperson and I think I have a candidate for that. We are currently training that person to be a salesperson but so that's kind of the structure that I've always followed. As soon as I could put somebody into place as a daily manager, I did, and that young man has been with me for 5 years now. He's here at the Convention today for the first time but I always wanted somebody to help me out and I always wanted somebody that could take some of the workload off of me and so again following FISH Corporate's advice, those first steps are an Operations Manager to run the crews and then you put an office person in place, and then you put you know salesperson in place. To me sales, and I tell everybody who calls me, sales are the easiest part of this business. You just have to walk out your front door. It's absolutely the business is there waiting for you to show up. And so that's the easy part. So if you can do that, do that as a business person, get used to that pricing, get used all the different types of obstacles you might run in when you're cleaning glass and that you might have to help your cleaners with and you can learn that through being a salesperson. You don't have to clean glass, you can learn all those things out there by selling and so that's still kind of our structure. My General Manager and I do all the warm leads and residential sales and we've always had a commercial salesperson and we're looking to replace that person but then my office person sometimes I've had part-time office people but I've recently rolled over to a more full-time office person and now, of course, I couldn't do without that office person so that's a wonderful piece of the puzzle when you have the right people in place and that can fill those roles and expand those roles, it really changes how you daily do your business.

What Are Your Long-Term Plans?

Katie: My long-term plans are somewhat up in the air actually. The thing that's not up in the air is coming back to St. Louis. I'm from St. Louis, my grandkids live here. As I said, I'm not 20 starting a business, I'm 60 and so we're looking at the next step and how can I, how can... I love running FISH. I love being in the office, I love the daily routine. You know, I tell my team I'm the conductor on the train to success, you know, I say that all the time to them and you know they all giggle about it but it's true. That's what I am now. And so, can I do that long distance? I think I can. And right now, my General Manager and I are making, taking steps to really see if that's possible. We're tweaking all our systems to be exactly how FISH says they should be run. We're tweaking all of our office systems to make sure that I could step away and look at that Fish 3 every day if I wanted to from a distance and know exactly what's going on in that office and make a call once a week and say hey how are you doing? I noticed this or I noticed that. People say it's possible. It's hard for me to think that because I enjoy being at the office so much every day but I also have another life that I know I'm going to love too to come back and be grandma all the time. So that would be wonderful too. But to able to straddle both of those worlds is really intriguing and we're trying to see if we can achieve that so I'm trying to put all those pieces in place for several months before I would have to step away and see if I can do it by stepping away you know just a few hours a day. To put those pieces in place and do those pieces really work that would allow me to not have to be in the office every day. FISH Corporate says it's possible and everything else they've told me has been exactly right and I've listened to their advice and I've taken their advice and been successful based on their advice so I don't see why this would be any different.

What Makes A Good Franchisee?

Katie: To me, being successful means being consistent. It means being consistent with your customers. It means being consistent in how you manage your financials. It means being consistent with your employees and providing a stable work environment for them. What we do isn't rocket science and that's what's so appealing to it you know it's something that you do at your own home. It's something that you see fast food employees out with a rag and a bottle of Windex. Oh I could do that maybe. And so that's what we do. We do it better, of course. But it's that consistency of running that business that will make you successful. I believe absolutely that's the key to my success. You know, I show up at the same time every day, I try to do my best every day, and every day is different. Every day in our business brings a new challenge or a routine. But I'm consistent. I follow-up, I, and as I said, it's consistency across the board. I know what's in my Quick Books. I know what's in my financials. I know the pennies that are going out my door. I know the pennies that are coming in my door. And when I do that I think that I set the standard for what I expect out of my employees and how my business is run. It's all about you know the brand that you want to project and the image that you want to project. And I think that being consistent is the best way to project a successful business. When I started, I knew, I attended my first Convention right before I opened and I didn't even know what to ask. I knew nobody in the room but you hear names. And you see stats on the boards like the most production and the most sales and I knew that I wanted to emulate those people. So those are the questions I asked. What do those people do that makes them so successful? Well they follow the FISH system. I said okay that's what I'm gonna do. And that's what I tell everybody who calls me. Follow the FISH system. It works. It's been successful. The people that I want to emulate follow the FISH system. They have a lot of experience. They have full time people who do parts of this job as their job so why wouldn't I think that they know more about it than I do? So that's why I want to do the route optimization. That's why Price Increase Tool, I think I was the first one. I called Shaun that day and said let's go. Because they know more about it than I do. And so why wouldn't I use their expertise? And again, I tell everyone who calls me even if you're a more experienced business owner as I am or if you're like my first 6 months and called them every single day promising not to cry but sometimes there were tears. So the calls range from everything and now I still ask questions that I need help with because I'm not an expert in everything but here are folks that do this a lot more than I do that can really help me make my business stronger.

What Is Your Favorite Aspect Of The Business?

Katie: So the favorite part of my business is the something different every day. I absolutely love that. I love coming to work and doing kind of that routine stuff right in the beginning of the day. I try to keep it to a very minimum. Sometimes I don't even get to do that. But it's always something different. It's a customer calling, it's a person calling for an estimate for a building that you would never imagine that you could be a part of or some project that you never imagined that you would be a part of. I've learned my community in depth that I would never have known if I wasn't with FISH and didn't have FISH. You know I can, people reference different parts of the community or different businesses and it's like oh, yeah, I know that or oh, yeah, I know where that is, or I know how that works. And I really really love that part of it. I think that my whole life has, I've always been drawn to activities that give me a challenge and that aren't routine.

What Has This Franchise Personally Given You?

Katie: My dear husband has told me Katie, you've never seemed happier or I do, I like that challenge, I think it has, I have grown exponentially and how I deal with things that come up, how I deal, how I deal

in personal life as well as my business life. I think that I've had experiences in my life that were leading me to this path but this path has been a fulfillment of what's a challenge, how do you come up with a result that you're proud of and I'm really proud of what I've done. I'm proud of how I run my business. And I think that's the best part for me is that it's such an achievement for me. And I'm proud of that and I can point to that and it's fun.

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

Katie: I would definitely do it all over again. You know, as I said, it fits into my lifestyle. It can be as big as you want it to be. It's hard. There are days where it's really really really hard but I think the things that are worth achieving and the things that make you proud of what you achieve sometimes have those hard elements. Sometimes it's really easy. And I think that's what appeals to our employees. I think it's what appeals to all the franchise owners here. That we can build a successful business, that we can build a business that you can live off of that you can make a good earning and living off of but yet you don't have to work as hard as some other industries have to work for that same amount of money.

Anything Else To Add?

Katie: You know the customers can really be interesting sometimes. And, you know, some of them are so cute and adorable and can't clean their homes by themselves so they're the ones that really appeal to you sometimes and we have this lovely lady that's an immigrant from Germany, has a very strong German accent and she loves my General Manager, Collin. And Collin started out as a cleaner so Collin was at her house first. She will call up and every time she never wants to schedule her cleaning. She goes can you clean me tomorrow? Please? Could Collin come and clean? Please? Please please please? And so whenever we have a voicemail on our voicemails from Margaret we know that Collin might as well just have his schedule set for the next day that he's gonna be at Margaret's house and he's gonna be cleaning. So you have those favorites and that's what's really fun about the business. The favorites are what we remember and what we talk about and the fun things in the office. There are bad days and we talk about those bad things but it's those customers that just win you over that you care about, that you want to get a call from, those are the most fun parts of the business.

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