How Franchising Helped This Founder Scale His Business

Former NFL player Tafa Jefferson launched a business to provide care to senior citizens. But he couldn’t do it on his own.

July 18, 2019 3 min read

This story appears in the July 2019 issue of *Entrepreneur*. Subscribe »

Tafa Jefferson’s mother spent years working in healthcare, and she encouraged him to do the same. But Jefferson had different plans: He joined the NFL in 1996 as a Chicago Bear — then a career-ending injury set him back a year later. So he finally took his mother’s advice, becoming a certified nursing assistant, and in 1997, he launched Nurse Registry, an agency that worked with independent contractors. But years later, when he identified an increasing and overwhelming need for nonmedical care for seniors, he once again changed his plans. In 2006, he shuttered his registry business and started Amada Senior Care with business partner Chad Fotheringham a year later. After a successful start, the pair decided to franchise — and the San Clemente, Calif.–based business boomed. Today, Amada Senior Care has more than 130 franchised locations across the country, continuously attracting the attention of potential franchisees, the medical industry, and clients, all of whom craved a reliable brand name in the space.

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Now that you franchise, how do you consider entering new markets?

We do a lot of due diligence in each market we enter. We look at the demographics, the household income, the healthcare infrastructure. And we make sure all our franchisees maintain full-time offices – this is not a home-based business. We have a sales team, a scheduling team, and clinicians to ensure that the customer service experience is top-notch.

What do you look for in your franchisees?

Our strategy is simple: We need a sales force. People who have demonstrated a successful career in sales companies do extremely well in our system, because so much of the role of the franchisee is interacting with physicians, case managers, and social workers, who will refer their clients and patients to us. We have that person in mind to run and manage our offices, and then we build the operational talent and staff around that individual.

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This is such a personal and emotional business. How do you train people to work with families who are going through a stressful time?

Usually our franchisees are dealing with a son or daughter, someone in the sandwich generation who's juggling kids and a career and healthcare issues related to their parents. We teach our franchise partners how to provide a total solution for care – placement services if affordable senior housing is needed, in-home placement, and technology that can help families keep tabs on mom and dad.

What's the biggest challenge your franchisees are facing?

We can't hire fast enough. With the amount of care required as more seniors are aging in place, we just don't have the workforce we need. So we're looking at changing our messaging and doing a better job of recruiting staff and reaching the workforce via technology. Seventy-two percent of our existing

staff have experience in retail and fast food, so we want to attract that niche and position ourselves as a great employer that offers staff positions and is ready to help them take on a job and career path that is challenging but rewarding.

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