



Reeling in the big fish

Yvonne Mtsolongo was a high-flying HR executive when she decided it was time to fish in different waters and open a food franchise...



Running her own business in the food industry has always been Mtsolongo's dream. "I was successful in my chosen career as a human resources professional, but there came a time when I wanted to get out of the corporate world. And instead of simply trading one job in HR for another, I decided to pursue my passion," she explains.

She began investigating franchises. As it happened a friend had just bought into the Old Fashioned Fish and Chips franchise and told her about it. While she looked at lots of concepts, Old Fashioned Fish and Chips was the one franchise that she kept revisiting because "it was reasonably priced, would be successful in the right location, offered good margins and the food offering appealed to a broad market".

She decided to pursue this opportunity and soon contacted the franchisor. Armed with all the necessary information and with the prospect of a great location – the brand-new Veranda Centre in Springs – Mtsolongo was ready to go for it.

"The head office team performed a comprehensive viability study on the site, which showed it was going to be a great location. It was the first mall in an area where more than four million people lived, and it was on key commuter routes."

Following the set-up of her store, Mtsolongo spent one week undergoing practical training in all aspects of the business, from how to cut and fry the chips to how to extract reports from the till and look after stock.

Training normally lasts for two weeks, but as Mtsolongo was still working, her training was fast-tracked. The staff that she would open the store with spent two weeks training at head office.

Motivating employees is tough, even for someone who has worked in HR. But Mtsolongo isn't afraid to lead by example. "I'm very hands-on, I lead by example and work alongside them so that they can see exactly what I want and that I am willing to put everything into practice myself." Mtsolongo also gives her employees constant feedback, but makes sure that it is always constructive. Incentives are important too, she says.

To be successful in this franchise, you need to be prepared to roll up your sleeves and work, Mtsolongo advises would-be franchisees: "While the franchisor will give you all the support and guidance you need, and has great systems in place, it is still your drive that will be the difference between a successful outlet and a not so successful branch."

Since launching just over a year ago, Mtsolongo has seen continued growth. "I really can't believe that I am at the point that I am with my business," she says. "I've set targets along the way. One of these is how many orders we get out in a day. My first target was 600 orders per day. When we achieved this, I moved it to 700 orders, then 800, then 900. Today, we're sitting at 1200 orders per day."

"What this tells me is that we have the right systems in place, our customer service is good

– not great, because there is always room for improvement – our customers really like our food and also believe we offer value for money."

Would she recommend the concept to would-be franchisees? Mtsolongo has no doubts whatsoever. "For would-be investors, the franchise is great value for money and the returns are good if you work hard. You have to be patient because as with any franchise you can't expect to get rich over night and you have to be disciplined with your finances."

The Old Fashioned Fish and Chips concept dates back more than 40 years, when founder Alfredo Perreira first decided he wanted to put a chippy on every corner. Forty years of hard work followed, and today Perreira's niece Emilia de Sousa is at the helm of one of the fastest growing franchises in South Africa.

While franchisees are putting their stores on our corners, head office promotes the brand and supports franchisees. Regular field trips also aim to maintain clinically clean stores, the open-plan kitchen, high standards of hygiene and food preparation.

Tapping into the trend towards healthy eating, Old Fashioned Fish and Chips uses organically sourced products where it can.

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