FRANCHISE MADE

FREE QUESTION BANK

The Franchise Validation Question Bank

55 questions to ask existing franchise owners before you sign anything

By Todd Mayo, Founder of Franchise Made

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Why Validation Calls Matter

The FDD tells you what the franchisor is required to disclose. The owners tell you what it's actually like.

Validation calls are the most important homework you'll do before buying a franchise. Nothing in a sales presentation or a discovery day will teach you as much as honest conversations with the people already running the business. My job is to make sure you walk into those conversations prepared, and that you know what to do with the answers.

This question bank gives you more questions than any single call needs, sorted into nine categories. Pick the ones that matter most to you, print them, and take notes as you go. You're not looking for one perfect answer. You're looking for patterns.

Todd Mayo
FOUNDER, FRANCHISE MADE

Before You Dial: How to Run a Great Validation Call

- **Start with Item 20 of the FDD.** It lists current owners and those who've left the system. Don't limit yourself to the franchisor's hand-picked references.
- **Call enough owners to see patterns.** Aim for six to ten conversations across different regions (markets, locations, territories, or geographic areas), tenure levels, and performance levels. If several owners give you the same answer, that's the answer.
- **Respect their time.** Owners take these calls as a courtesy. Ask for 20 to 30 minutes, schedule ahead, and show up prepared. These calls should reflect you at your best.
- **Print your questions and take notes.** It's easy to lose track of your questions in the moment. A printed list keeps the call focused and your notes comparable across owners.
- **Expect the first call to feel awkward.** Almost everyone finds their rhythm by the third conversation. Start with owners outside your target territory to build confidence.
- **Listen for what isn't said.** Hesitation, vague answers, and topics several owners avoid are information too. When something feels off, dig deeper on the next call.

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CATEGORY ONE

Their Story and Why They Bought

> Start here. These questions open the conversation naturally, and understanding how an owner's background compares to yours will help you judge how well their experience applies to your circumstances.

- [ ] **What did you do before you owned this business?**
- [ ] **Why did you leave that career to become an owner?**
- [ ] **Why did you choose this franchise over the others you looked at?**
- [ ] **How long did your research take, from first conversation to signed agreement?**
- [ ] **How many franchise owners did you speak with before you bought?**
- [ ] **What made you confident this business would fit someone with your background?**

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CATEGORY TWO

Training and Opening

> A strong system proves itself in the first year. These questions test whether the franchisor gets new owners open, trained, and supported when it matters most.

- [ ] **Did the initial training genuinely prepare you to open your business?**
- [ ] **How long did it take to open from the day you signed?**
- [ ] **Did your opening go according to plan? What would you change about it?**
- [ ] **What support did you get from the franchisor in your first 90 days?**
- [ ] **What additional training does the franchisor provide after opening?**
- [ ] **What was the biggest challenge of your first year?**
- [ ] **What's the biggest mistake a first-year owner can make in this system?**

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CATEGORY THREE

Day-to-Day Operations

> Ownership looks different from the inside. These questions give you an honest picture of what running this business asks of you day to day.

- [ ] **Walk me through a typical week. What actually fills your time?**
- [ ] **Has hiring and keeping good staff been difficult for you?**
- [ ] **What are your favorite and least favorite parts of running the business?**
- [ ] **Do you employ a manager, and how does that change your role?**
- [ ] **What happens to the business when you take two weeks away?**
- [ ] **What surprised you most once you were actually operating?**

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CATEGORY FOUR

Time, Lifestyle and the Owner's Role

> We pick the life first and the business second. These questions confirm whether this business actually delivers the life its owners expected.

- [ ] **How many hours a week do you put in today, and how does that compare to year one?**
- [ ] **Do you work evenings and weekends?**
- [ ] **Is your role in the business what you expected when you signed?**
- [ ] **How has ownership affected your family and personal life?**
- [ ] **If you run this semi-passively alongside a career, what does that actually require?**

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CATEGORY FIVE

The Money Questions

> Most owners will talk numbers more openly than you'd expect, especially when you ask specific, respectful questions. This is the most valuable part of validation, so don't skip the questions that feel uncomfortable.

- [ ] **How much did it really cost to get open, compared with the estimate in the FDD?**
- [ ] **Did you have enough working capital? How much extra would you recommend?**
- [ ] **How long did it take you to reach break-even?**
- [ ] **How long before the business paid you an income you could live on?**
- [ ] **Have your revenue expectations been met? If not, why do you think that is?**
- [ ] **What has the greatest effect on your profitability?**
- [ ] **Are the royalties and fees justified by the value you get back?**
- [ ] **How did financing your start-up costs affect your early years?**
- [ ] **What separates the top performers in this system from the ones who struggle?**

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CATEGORY SIX

Marketing and Competition

> A proven system should include proven ways to win customers. These questions tell you whether the marketing support delivers real results, or whether owners are left to figure it out on their own.

- [ ] **How does the franchisor support your marketing, and does it actually work?**
- [ ] **What does it cost you to generate a lead or a new customer locally?**
- [ ] **Who are your strongest local competitors, and how do you win against them?**
- [ ] **Does the national brand genuinely help you in your local market?**
- [ ] **Do you run your own local marketing and social media, or does the franchisor?**

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CATEGORY SEVEN

The Franchisor Relationship

> You're not just buying a business. You're entering a long-term relationship. These questions test whether the home office treats owners like partners.

- [ ] **How responsive is the home office when you need help?**
- [ ] **Do you feel leadership cares about your profitability, not just their own growth?**
- [ ] **How does the franchisor respond when you raise a complaint?**
- [ ] **Are you required to purchase from the franchisor, or can you buy locally?**
- [ ] **Does the franchisor use group buying power to get owners better pricing?**
- [ ] **Is there a franchisee association or advisory council, and does leadership listen to it?**
- [ ] **What could the franchisor do better?**

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CATEGORY EIGHT

Culture, Community and System Health

> Healthy systems have owners who support each other and reinvest in the brand. Struggling systems tend to have isolated owners and departures nobody talks about. These questions help you tell the difference.

- [ ] **How often do you talk with other owners, and do they help each other?**
- [ ] **Are you aware of owners who are unhappy or struggling? What's the common thread?**
- [ ] **Why have the owners who left the system left?**
- [ ] **Are you planning to open more locations? Why or why not?**
- [ ] **Have you heard anything about the company being sold or acquired?**

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CATEGORY NINE

The Questions That Reveal the Most

Save these for the end of every call. They're open-ended on purpose, and they consistently produce the answers candidates remember most.

- [ ] **What do you wish you'd known before you signed?**
- [ ] **Tell me something I'd have no way of knowing unless I already owned one of these.**
- [ ] **If you had it to do over, would you buy this franchise again? Why or why not?**
- [ ] **Would you recommend this business to a close friend with my background?**
- [ ] **Is there anything I haven't asked that I should have?**

After the Calls: Reading What You Heard

- **Patterns are your most reliable data.** One unhappy owner is a single experience. Five owners telling the same story is information you can act on.
- **Encouraging signs:** owners who'd buy again, support they describe as responsive, results that met expectations within a reasonable window, and owners planning to expand.
- **Worth a closer look:** mixed reviews of training, marketing that owners feel they have to supplement heavily, and vague answers to the questions that matter most.
- **Reasons to pause:** several owners who wouldn't buy again, high turnover in Item 20, repeated complaints about the same leadership issues, or any pressure to sign quickly.
- **Then get a second opinion.** Bring your notes to a franchise consultant who can tell you which answers are normal for the industry and which ones deserve more digging.

Bring Your Answers to Someone Who's Heard Them Before



Validation calls will give you plenty of information. The harder part is interpreting it: which answers are normal for the industry, which ones are warning signs, and which patterns should shape your decision. That's easier with someone in your corner who's heard these answers many times before.

I'm Todd Mayo. Over 25 years I've owned five businesses, four of them in franchising, including a master franchise I built and scaled to a successful exit. I've sat on every side of these calls, and I'll help you prescreen opportunities, prepare for validation, and make sense of what you hear. There's no cost to you, no pressure to buy a franchise, and no obligation to continue if ownership turns out not to be the right path.

5x Business Owner | **17 Years as a Master Franchisee** | **Scaled to Successful Exit**

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NEXT STEP?

Book a Call with Todd Mayo

No cost, no pressure. Just an honest assessment of where you stand.

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