

TIME TO TEAM UP?

Decision to move from independent to franchise takes time, consideration

There comes a point in many business owners' careers where they take a step back and determine if they want to continue along the path they have trudged or spur off onto a new course.

I came to that point last year with the business I'd been running for the past 19 years, Forester Pool Service. After years of being a private business owner, I decided to make the switch to being a franchisee, eventually choosing America's Swimming Pool Company to partner with. The decision didn't happen overnight, though, and took a lot of careful consideration.

Being in business for yourself can have a lot of ups and downs, and the day-to-day decisions you make can impact the future greatly. Throughout the years, as I ran the company myself, I'd always think about how great it would be to have a business partner. I saw other businesses run by fathers, sons and brothers, and I thought how nice it would be to have someone help me make those tough business decisions.

In November 2010, I received a letter from America's Swimming Pool Company that they were looking for someone to partner with in Dallas, and immediately, that thought of having a partner came to mind and my interest was piqued. I talked with them regularly for about two months and made the decision in January to switch from independent business owner to franchisee. It took two more months to get everything in line so it could be official.

I have told people the whole process is



MAKING CHANGES

Herschel Forester

a lot like dating. You don't want to just marry somebody

without getting to know them, so when you're in this situation, it's best to really understand the company, its track record and the people who are in charge. Talk to them and ask them every single question — no matter how redundant or seemingly silly or mundane it may be — and see how they respond.

When making the move from an independent company to one that is part of a larger entity, some of the changes come in the minute details. Executives from America's Swimming Pool Company spent a week here in Dallas in January, and I spent one at their headquarters the next month, going over most every aspect of the business. I was able to see firsthand how they do business. A lot will change when you make the switch, but much of it will be the little things that make the big differences.

For me, one of those changes was transferring all my workers over from independent contractors to employees. A change such as that has simplified things greatly for my business. Now I know all my workers have liability insurance, worker's compensation, and I have a bet-

ter ability to keep track of everything.

When making the switch, we bought more company vehicles, changed over all our signage, switched our business cards. We have had loyal customers over the years who were familiar with the Forester Pool Service name, so it was important to us to notify them of the name change and make it clear that we did not sell the company. We wrote a letter to let them know that things will only get better.

One of the greatest benefits I have experienced since becoming a franchisee is that now I know I have someone backing me up. I can more confidently move out into new areas and try new things — and that is all because I have knowledgeable people whom I can trust behind me. They have given me the guidance regarding what I should expect and what I should strive for, as well as goals I should have financially. It's like having my own personal physician on call, but for my business.

When making the switch from private business owner to franchisee, some of the benefits will show themselves with time. Marketing takes a little while and especially if it's a new name in the community, things won't happen overnight.

For anyone considering this, especially during our tough economic time, it's one that can give you peace of mind, and it's a constant reminder that many times, two minds are better than one.

Forester is a Dallas native. He founded Forester Pool Service in 1992 and became an America's Swimming Pool Co. franchisee in January.