

From Flight Decks to Franchising: Finding Purpose and Building Opportunity Beyond the Uniform

By Lou Schager, CAPT, USN (Ret) & VetFran Committee Member

When service members transition from the military to civilian life, one question often rises to the surface: “What’s next?”

For many veterans, that question goes beyond finding a job. It’s about rediscovering purpose — that same sense of mission, teamwork, and service that defined every day in uniform. After 27 years in the U.S. Navy, flying F-14s and F/A-18s, graduating from TOPGUN, and ultimately serving as the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station Oceana, I faced that same question myself.

I didn’t want to fly for the airlines or take another government role. I wanted to reinvent myself — to apply my leadership experience and operational mindset in a new arena that still served others.

That opportunity came through the franchising eco-system and Mosquito Joe, a Neighborly Company. I had been a customer for years when the founder approached me about joining the Mosquito Joe Corporate team with the vision that I might one day lead the brand. I’d been impressed not just by the results, but by the people — the technicians who showed up at my home were thoughtful, friendly, and deeply professional. They took pride in their work, and it showed. I realized there was something special happening behind the scenes.

I joined Mosquito Joe’s corporate team in 2017 as Chief Operating Officer and became Brand President later that year. Since its founding in 2010 and start of franchising in 2013, the company has grown to over 400 locations across 38 states.

A Mission Reimagined

In the military, the mission is always clear: protect, serve, and accomplish the objective as a team. I found that same sense of purpose in franchising and at Mosquito Joe. Mosquito Joe helps families enjoy their outdoor and indoor spaces safely — improving health and happiness in the communities. And behind every franchise concept is an entrepreneur realizing their own dream of ownership.

That blend of service and entrepreneurship resonated deeply with me. In many ways, franchising mirrors the best parts of military life: structure, teamwork, accountability, and a shared mission.

Why Veterans Thrive in Franchising

Veterans have long been drawn to franchising, and franchisors have recognized the match. Although veterans make up only about 7% of the U.S. population, they represent 14% of all franchise owners — double their share of the population. The reason is simple: veterans bring the qualities that franchising depends on. They understand leadership, discipline, process, and teamwork. They know how to motivate others, improve systems, and accomplish defined objectives. In both military and business settings, success comes from executing proven systems with precision and collaborating effectively to achieve the mission.

The training parallels are also powerful. The military provides structured education, repetition, and mentorship — the same building blocks of successful franchise systems. Franchises are designed to teach new owners everything they need to know through comprehensive training and ongoing support. That means veterans can enter entirely new industries and still thrive by following the franchisor’s model.

VetFran: A Gateway to Opportunity

That’s where VetFran — the International Franchise Association’s veteran initiative — plays a vital role. VetFran connects service members and veterans to franchise opportunities, offers education on business ownership, and often provides financial incentives or fee reductions to make the transition more attainable.

A recent VetFran survey underscored this strong relationship between veterans and franchising. An incredible 99% of franchisors said they believe veterans are a good fit as employees within their company, and 97% said veterans make excellent franchisees. Even more telling, 70% of franchisors reported they brought on a veteran franchisee or corporate employee within the last year alone.

The opportunities are out there — and VetFran serves as a trusted gateway for veterans to explore them.

The Next Mission

For veterans asking “What’s next?” after service, franchising offers an answer that combines independence with community, structure with creativity, and business with purpose. It’s a way to lead again — this time in your own company, with a mission that strengthens families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Do your homework. Research different brands. Look for those with a strong track record, aligned values, and systems you can believe in. And above all, find something you love — because when passion meets process, great things happen. The uniform may come off, but the mission doesn’t end. It simply evolves.