

## Golden Corral Franchise Owner Looks at Advancement Opportunities within the Restaurant Industry

By Annette Payne | December 13, 2023



*How to move up the food chain from operators to franchise owners.*

In our journey through the dynamic landscape of the restaurant industry, my business partner, Jace Stickdorn, and I have had the privilege of witnessing first-hand the professional growth opportunities that are available to restaurant workers.

Jace's remarkable journey with Golden Corral began in 2002, when he served as a multi-unit director for the corporate team for nearly two decades. Similarly, I joined Golden Corral in 2007 to oversee the operations of one restaurant location. In 2016, I jumped into franchise ownership with Golden Corral, signing for three buffets, and opened my first in Dayton, Ohio. Soon after, our roles became intertwined when we became partners of our first joint location in 2021 and eventually co-CEOs of Vitall

Partners in 2022. Since then, our portfolio has grown to encompass nine Golden Corrals across Ohio, Kentucky and Michigan. We plan to continue developing new restaurants and have recently signed an agreement for two more Golden Corrals in the Cincinnati market.

As many operators focused on maintaining their existing portfolios, we put our trust in Golden Corral and grasped the opportunity to open additional buffet locations. Since then, our parking lots have been filled, and our sales have soared. We knew that the brand's leadership team would support us through our transition into franchise owners and provide ongoing support to us when it came to operations, training and marketing. Our connection to Golden Corral was so deep-rooted that it was not only the best option but the only option that satisfied our visions for career growth.

Like Jace and I, [80%](#) of restaurant owners started their careers in entry-level positions, and the same can be said for 90% of restaurant managers. A great way to learn about the opportunities and pathways to professional development is to ask other general managers or restaurant owners about their journeys within the industry. Finding mentors within your industry is as important as choosing the right company to grow with. Additionally, shadowing people in different positions is a great way to get additional insight into the day-to-day tasks of different roles. This can also be helpful when looking at how you want to develop your skills — if business ownership is not right for you, becoming an area manager might align more with your goals.

The restaurant industry offers many opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs. Without the strength and national presence of the Golden Corral brand, the support offered by its team and the tremendous growth potential, we would not be where we are today, and for that, we're incredibly grateful.

*— Annette Payne, current Golden Corral franchisee, joined Golden Corral in 2007 as a manager and became an owner of three locations in 2016. She then joined forces with Jace Stickdorn in 2021 to open their first of many jointly-owned locations. Founded in 1973 and based in Raleigh, N.C., Golden Corral is the nation's largest grill-buffet restaurant chain.*