

Two handymen find different fixes

One is independent, other has franchise



By Jennifer Heldt Powell / Small Business Matters

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Chuck Newman and Joe Zeliger both make their money helping people with the odd jobs around the house that homeowners either have no time or expertise to do on their own.

Although they are in the same field, they took very different paths to get there. One started from scratch and the other bought a franchise. As they have found out, each comes with its own set of advantages and challenges.

Zeliger of Natick started his company after he had lost his high-tech sales job. He wasn't able to find a new job, partly because he didn't really want to. Instead, he wanted to start a business, although he wasn't sure doing what. He met with a business adviser who steered him toward a franchise and helped him find one that fit.

Mr. Handyman was appealing because Zeliger liked to fix things around the house. Still, he didn't consider himself an expert at it and didn't want to do it directly



Photo by Ted Fitzgerald

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RE-PAIR: Natick's Joe Zeliger says he got a business road map by signing up with the Mr. Handyman franchise, while Winthrop's Chuck Newman, not pictured, likes the flexibility of operating on his own.

for other people. Buying the Newton franchise allowed him to hire people to do the handy work while he concentrates on sales and business management.

He had to pay a franchise fee on top of buying the trucks and having them painted to conform to the company's standard. He also pays a monthly franchise royalty.

The benefit is that he has an established reputation since the franchise has been in the area for several years. He has guidance on running the business and can tap into a network of fellow Mr. Handyman franchise owners.

Three months into it, he's ahead of his expectations.

"If I had started out on my own, it would have been difficult for me to understand how this business works," he said. "By buying into a franchise, there was a road map in place."

Newman started his company slowly in Winthrop about four years ago. He had left his job as a production manager to stay at home with his young daughter. At first, he just picked up a few jobs here and there for friends and friends of friends, but as the calls increased it became clear it was time to turn the work into a formal business.

Newman descriptively named his company One Man Jobs. He got a logo and a truck and he was ready to go with no franchise fees or royalties. He is not bound by a territory. However, he is largely on his own. He doesn't have the benefit of a broad marketing campaign and instead relies on referrals. He can only take on so much work at a time and still ensure that he can meet customers' expectations.

"It's been steady, but the problem is that there are only so many hours in a day," Newman said.

He likes that he has been able to build the business at his own pace and that he has complete control over it, allowing him to maintain a flexible schedule. Now that the work has picked up, Newman is considering hiring a few workers so that he can take the business to the next level.

The challenge will be that the company has been built on his personal reputation. When customers call, they expect to see him at the door.

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