

Taking the next step to becoming a McDonald's Franchisee

Invest in You

Also inside:

Expertise for
everything
you need

Timeline:
A legacy of
innovation

**How our training program
helps set you up for success**



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Making your mark starts with world-class training



“It was tough, but I wouldn’t change a thing.”



Becoming a McDonald’s Franchisee isn’t just about running a restaurant. It’s about being the CEO of a resilient, high-performance business in one of the most demanding industries.

Unlike other franchise models, McDonald’s doesn’t hand you a manual and expect you to figure it out. Our training program immerses you in every aspect of operations and business management.

People who complete our training program not only learn how to operate a McDonald’s, they develop their knack for leadership, hone their financial acumen, and cultivate the strategic thinking needed to help build a successful enterprise. The program’s intensity separates McDonald’s from competitors, where training is often minimal and lacks the operational depth required to confer resilience.

Flexibility is built in, ensuring candidates, whether first-time business owners or seasoned entrepreneurs, can train while balancing other responsibilities. But make no mistake: the program pushes candidates to commit. The hours can be long and the coursework demanding.

Yet, time and again, we hear new Franchisees say the same thing: “It was tough, but I wouldn’t change a thing.” Because when you own your first McDonald’s, you’ll realize you’re not just running a restaurant, you’re building a legacy and making your mark.

Dialogue

Where leaders meet



Restaurant Investment Success and Execution (RISE) is an important part of the McDonald's training program. It's where aspiring franchisees get valuable information about how to assess business opportunities and take the last big step before becoming an Owner/Operator. It's also a time when applicants meet each other and forge the relationships that will help them in their new careers.

In this conversation, **Donte Cleaves** and **Lauren Mitchell**, Owner/Operators in Atlanta, reflect on how RISE sparked not only a strong friendship, but a professional partnership that continues to grow. Their story shows how McDonald's training connects you with the people who'll have your back when it matters most.

Lauren: It's funny to think how everything started at RISE. We barely knew each other, and now... we talk almost every day.

Donte: It's wild. From that first conversation, I knew you were someone I could build with. And now here we are, sharing wins, solving problems, showing up for each other. I'm so glad you moved to Atlanta.

Lauren: You helped make it happen by introducing me to the field office. Running restaurants is no joke. There's always something. But having someone who really gets it makes all the difference.



Lauren outside of Hamburger University

Donte: It's more than just business support. It's trust. If I call, you pick up. If you're dealing with something, I want to help. That kind of connection is important.

Lauren: And it's not just us anymore. Our families know each other now. That part means a lot to me. It's community, not just collaboration.

Donte: Exactly. We've built something solid. We push each other, we share what's working, we check in. No competition. Just alignment.

Lauren: That's the kind of energy people don't always see behind the scenes. But it's a big reason why things work the way they do.

Donte: The playbooks are great. But having someone to text in the moment? That's what keeps you going.



Donte at RISE



The mentor behind the counter

Name and title

Ivan Ip, Franchise Business Partner

What's your area of expertise?

I focus on relationship building and analyzing data. I lean on my curiosity to continue learning about upcoming McDonald's procedures and the business challenges that are an inevitable part of the business.

How long have you been part of the 'McFamily'?

I've been with McDonald's for almost four years. In that time, I spearheaded the creation of the Digital Ambassador Workshop, which is now a national program aimed at training employees to make the digital experience easy for customers.

What's your favorite part of the training journey?

What I love most about the training process is our Field Office's Shift Verification. It's a 3- to 4-hour session where the candidate runs a shift and simulates a Brand Standard visit. It gives me a chance to ask questions and see how well they've absorbed the most critical elements of the training. You can really see it all click for them as they connect the dots and realize why time in each station matters.

What's a memorable success story?

The first registered applicant I helped through the program sticks in my memory. He was new to McDonald's, but he was determined to learn as much as he could as quickly as possible. He was so dedicated and enthusiastic, I had to slow him down a bit to make sure he didn't miss the small details. He also asked great questions, so I knew he had what it takes to run great restaurants. I'll never forget the phone call we shared when he got his approval email!

What's your favorite menu item?

McDouble; no cheese, no ketchup, no mustard, add lettuce, and mac sauce with a chocolate dipped cone, please!

What's one thing you wish every Franchisee knew before starting?

To be a successful McDonald's Franchisee, you must run great restaurants, be involved in daily operations, and frequently reinvest in both your restaurants and people!

The road to resilience: How McDonald's stayed strong during the pandemic

When the pandemic upended business as usual in the spring of 2020, John Carnagio, who owns and operates 12 McDonald's restaurants in the Chicago area, did what many business owners did: he paused to consider the impact on his hundreds of employees. But unlike many business owners, he didn't have to face the uncertainty alone.

“From the very beginning, the health and safety of our crew came first,” Carnagio recalled. “And the way we came together as a system really made all the difference.”

In a moment defined by disruption, McDonald's vast network turned into a powerful support system. Communication was constant, transparent, and focused on action. Carnagio and his colleagues shared best practices. Corporate partners worked to make sure everyone in the restaurants had what they needed. A robust supply chain meant that McDonald's had supplies when other restaurants struggled to keep menus the same.

The depth and breadth of McDonald's global organization paid off. While other businesses faced severe disruptions, Franchisees like Carnagio could draw on the power of a well-coordinated global company to keep employees safe and customers satisfied.

By the fourth quarter of 2020, McDonald's reported that it had recovered 99% of 2019 global same store sales.¹ Other restaurant businesses did not recover as quickly.

“We call it the three-legged stool”, Carnagio reflects. Our suppliers, the Franchisees, and the company itself all work together. “Looking back on the pandemic, the three-legged stool allowed us to have the safest work atmosphere for our employees and provide a needed service to the communities in which we do business.”

The pandemic was a stress test but it also became a proof concept. Underpinning the scale of McDonald's are the strong relationships and shared values that allow the company to meet challenges and remain resilient in turbulent times.



Pictured:
John Carnagio
Lombard, IL

Curriculum on the cutting edge

From the Drive Thru to QSR technology that provides up-to-the-second insights on operations. See how McDonald's shares their interest in the power of technology in business.

1963

McDonald's R&D lab develops the "potato computer," an electrical sensor that determines when shortening reaches the ideal temperature for perfect fries.



1975

Crew members move from taking orders on pad and paper to using the Transactron, an electronic counter system.

1975

First Drive Thru opens in Sierra Vista, AZ, requiring state-of-the-art communication technology.



1987

Tandem menu boards added; now two customers can order at the same time, increasing capacity and boosting sales.



1998

The Kitchen Video System (KVS) allows food to be prepared with a “just in time” production process. The KVS transmitted orders from the registers directly to the kitchen for the first time.



2015

Self-ordering kiosks introduced.



2014

McDonald's is the first in the quick service restaurant industry to accept Apple Pay in the Drive Thru.



2024

Edge computing is brought to pilot restaurants to give operators a real-time view of operations.

Innovation under the Golden Arches

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of McDonald's? I'm willing to bet it's not cutting edge technology. You probably thought of fries, not firewalls. McNuggets, not machine learning.

As a member of McDonald's technology board, I've had a front row seat to something that many people don't realize about McDonald's: we are the technology leaders of the quick service restaurant (QSR) industry.

Here are just a few examples:

With more than 175 million users across more than 60 markets, McDonald's runs one of the world's largest loyalty programs. That is data management at scale across every customer touchpoint and driving better experiences on the app and in the store.

Behind the scenes, we've transitioned key infrastructure to a serverless, globally replicated cloud database, which has cut our database compute costs by 50% while increasing consistency and

resilience across our global footprint. For a brand in over 100 countries, that's game-changing.

On the ground, new formats like McDonald's Go and Order Ahead Lanes with conveyor systems are completely reimagining what “quick service” means and setting the standard for engineering amazing customer service with the help of technology.

Looking ahead, we are experimenting with AI-powered voice ordering and robotics-enhanced automation.

But here's what inspires me most. The technology we use serves a single, unifying purpose: it's designed to empower our restaurant teams, simplify operations, and create better experiences for every customer who walks in, drives through, or orders on the app.

Blending my interest in technology with my passion for running great restaurants is one of the reasons I am grateful to be part of the McDonald's family.



A second-generation Franchisee in Southern California, Nathan Carter is on the McDonald's technology board.



A week in the life:

Make your mark and make
training work for you

From hands-on experience in restaurants to online courses you can complete at your own pace, the training that precedes becoming a McDonald's Franchisee is critical. Many of the people who go through our program are balancing family and a job while they complete their training. Lauren Mitchell shares how she made it work and the reward at the end.

How did you find balance between franchise training, work, and family life?

Finding balance was definitely a challenge, but it came down to prioritizing and planning. I treated training like a temporary "sprint." The work was intense, but I knew it would not be forever and certainly worth the reward. I communicated clearly with

my family so they knew what to expect and when I'd be stretched. Scheduling specific times for training, work, and family helped me stay grounded and focused.

What was the biggest challenge you faced during training—and how did you overcome it?

I had my second child while I was in training, and it was an incredibly demanding time, both physically and emotionally. I was exhausted, and the volume of information I needed to absorb felt overwhelming. Early on, I made it a priority to identify the right resources and connect with experienced operators I could learn from. As I progressed and

eventually became an operator myself, I often found myself revisiting topics. Whenever I had questions or faced uncertainty, I reached out to the knowledgeable individuals I had built relationships with during training. Their guidance, along with the support of mentors and fellow Franchisees, helped me navigate challenges and gain clarity when I needed it most.

Did you have a daily routine or strategy that helped you stay on track?

Yes, I built a simple but consistent routine. I started each day by reviewing my to-do list and setting

2–3 key goals. I blocked off time for focused study or training, and I also carved out short breaks to avoid burnout. Sunday evenings were my planning time for the week, which helped reduce stress and kept me on track.

How did your family or support system play a role during this time?

My family was essential. They were patient, encouraging, and helped pick up the slack when I was tied up with training. Just knowing they believed in me gave me the mental and emotional support I needed. I also leaned on a few close friends and

fellow Franchisees who’d been through it before. They offered both advice and motivation.

What advice would you give to someone just starting their franchise journey?

Prepare yourself mentally for a steep learning curve, but don’t panic. It gets better. Stay organized, ask questions, and don’t try to do everything perfectly from day one. Trust the system, lean into your support network, and take care of yourself along the way. Lastly, remember why you started. Keep your long-term goals in sight during the tough days.

A week in Lauren’s life:					
Morning		Afternoon		Evening	
Sun	Exercise	Family time	Clean playroom	Dinner with mom and dad	P&L unit review
Mon	Restaurant training	Meet with mentor	Meet with house stager for 300 Maple Drive	Pick up kids from soccer	Complete online accounting unit
Tue	Exercise	Restaurant operations	Finish paperwork on 300 Maple Drive with county	Talk to mentor about possible restaurant locations	
Wed	Restaurant training	Complete P&L module	Check staging at 300 Maple Drive	Pick up kids from soccer	
Thu	Exercise	Restaurant operations	Errands	Finish food safety module	
Fri	Restaurant training	Meet Smiths at 300 Maple Drive	Meet Taylors at 300 Maple Drive	Study for safety and security review	Parent-teacher conference
Sat	Exercise	Family breakfast	Soccer game	Finish online module	Movie night



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journey with McDonald's today

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