

## FRANCHISE PLAYERS

# How This Couple Created the Largest Tutor Doctor Office in the World



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*Franchise Players* is Entrepreneur's Q&A interview column that puts the spotlight on franchisees. This week, in honor of Valentine's Day, we're honoring power couples in franchising. If you're a franchisee with advice and tips to share, email [ktaylor@entrepreneur.com](mailto:ktaylor@entrepreneur.com).

Jon-Anthony and Clarissa Lui didn't plan on going into business together. The couple was dating when Jon-Anthony took over his first Tutor Doctor location, and

Clarissa would step in to lend a hand behind the scenes. However, soon the duo realized that together their combined skills could be greater than the sum of their parts. In just five years, the couple has built the largest Tutor Doctor office in the world, with a network of 350 tutors who serve more than 850 families. Here's what they've learned.

**Names:** Jon-Anthony and Clarissa Lui

**Franchise owned:** We are the proud owners of ten Tutor Doctor franchise territories throughout Greater Toronto.

**How long have you owned the franchise?**

I opened my first franchise territory, Tutor Doctor Vaughan, in 2009.

**Why franchising?**

I was introduced to the world of franchising at an early age, as my father was in franchise sales for the majority of his career. I started working for him in the summer and learned a lot about the sales process. I also learned about business systems and what it took for companies to start franchising. I've always wanted to own my own business. After learning the ins and outs of franchising from my father, it stood out to me as the best route to business ownership as it comes with the backing and support of an established company. I also knew that it would provide better opportunities initially and long-term.

**What were you doing before you became a franchise owner?**

Prior to Tutor Doctor, I spent five years working as the director of learning solutions for an eLearning firm. This experience gave me a solid background in sales and marketing. It also made me realize the growing need for interactive learning programs that are tailored to each person's individual needs versus the 'one-size-fits-all' approach that saturated the industry at the time. Clarissa, on the other hand, worked as an office

manager for a major electrical distributor, and later opened her own business making custom suits for women.

When my father's colleague became a Tutor Doctor franchisee, he hired me to manage the day-to-day operations at the age of 25. Under the terms of my employment agreement, I had the opportunity to purchase the franchise if certain performance benchmarks were met within two years. As it turned out, I reached those goals in just six months and decided take over his territory. In 2009, I became the youngest franchise owner in the system.

### **Why did you choose this particular franchise?**

It was easy to fall in love with Tutor Doctor because of the positive impact the company has on the hundreds of students and families it serves. I was intrigued by the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives through education. With my background in education, Tutor Doctor's one-to-one approach to learning really resonated with me, as I understood what it took to engage students and inspire them to become enthusiastic about learning.

I also recognized the company's tremendous growth potential and saw it as a flexible business model that I could scale to fit my needs. Tutor Doctor requires low overhead and has high earning potential, which also stood out to me as a young professional. Although it was a young company when I joined, I truly believed that I was making an investment in a brand and concept that is about to explode. Fast forward several years, Tutor Doctor has grown into the fastest growing "in-home" private tutoring franchise and will continue to excel as the global private tutoring industry is set to surpass \$102.8 billion by 2018.

### **How was the process of becoming a franchise owner different for a couple versus an individual?**

We didn't plan on going into business together initially, it just happened organically. Clarissa started her clothing business around the same time I took over my first franchise territory. Tutor Doctor Vaughan grew faster than anticipated and Clarissa's strong administrative background proved invaluable as she often stepped in to lend a hand with the paperwork. By year's end, we joined forces and decided to grow the business as a couple. It has been great adding her diverse skill set to the table.

**How much would you estimate you spent before you were officially open for business?**

The average cost to invest in a single franchise territory is \$40,000.

**Where did you get most of your advice/do most of your research?**

When I first became interested in opening my own franchise, I made a list of personal goals and what I was looking for in a franchisor. Growing up familiar with the franchise model, I had a good idea of how to identify what type of venture would meet my needs. When I measured Tutor Doctor against that list of criteria, it was the perfect fit. More importantly, my vision and philosophies aligned with the brand, which is essential when choosing a franchise to invest in. I knew it was a company I could grow with while making a difference in my community.

**What were the most unexpected challenges of opening your franchise?**

Learning how to juggle personal and professional commitments was definitely an unexpected challenge. We had to learn how to exercise discipline in compartmentalizing and setting boundaries between work and our personal lives. Luckily, we are both very goal-orientated, which made it easier to work as a team to overcome this challenge. We started by identifying our business goals and developed a detailed plan to achieve them, which included scheduling days off.

One way we enjoy making our down time count is by volunteering. This also encourages us to make the best use of our time when we are at work. As a result, we are more focused and efficient when we do return to work. While you never want to miss an important phone call or email, the discipline to leave work at the office and trust our system has been the key to establishing a work-life balance.

### **What have been the biggest challenges and positives of running a business with your spouse?**

One of the biggest challenges of working together has been learning how to keep the business and marriage strong. The key to overcoming this challenge goes back to maintaining that work-life balance. We have learned to minimize disagreements by understanding and acknowledging each other's strengths, and delegating responsibilities that play up those strengths. For instance, I'm more on the frontlines of business, focusing on customer service and marketing initiatives, while Clarissa is more on the backlines, handling administrative work such as scheduling and billing.

The positive side of working together is that we get to spend a lot of time together. We have also learned how to solve problems together, which is huge not only for our business, but for our relationship. We recently looked back at the goals we set when we first started our business and realized that we have accomplished everything on our list. That's a great feeling!

### **What advice do you have for individuals and couples who want to own their own franchise?**

When you are in business with your spouse, it is important to keep the lines of communication open, but at the same time, you also have to know when to shut it off. Setting clear boundaries around when not to talk about work is essential. We set boundaries by regularly scheduling time to discuss business matters. If I'm thinking

about a business-related issue or come up with an idea during dinner, or as we're getting ready for bed, I'll wait to bring it up in an upcoming meeting or schedule time the following day to discuss it with Clarissa.

You must also continue working on the business rather than just in the business. For couples in business together, it is just as important to discuss your personal goals because your business is your life. We do this by holding off-site meetings each quarter to review our personal, spiritual and business goals, and then plan out how we are going to achieve them as a team. For example, if we want take a vacation, we will bring that up in a quarterly meeting to make sure we are on track to meet our business goals before planning a major trip. While communication is one of the keys to a strong marriage, communicating both personally and professionally is essential for a successful business and marriage.

### **What's next for you and your business?**

As the largest Tutor Doctor office in the world, we are very proud of how far we have come and know that we couldn't have done it without each other's unique contributions and support. As we continue to grow our business, we will continue working together to achieve our goals and build the largest tutoring empire in the world. We are always looking for exciting new ways to improve the franchise system and will continue to share our ideas and test new strategies in the coming years. We also look forward to the continued improvement of our students' lives, and by extension, their families' lives. When a family knows there is someone out there helping them address their child's needs and reach their goals, it reduces stress and gives them more opportunities to focus on spending time with each other, time to be a family. At the end of the day, that's what it's all about.

**Link:** <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/242706>