

# Entrepreneur

## A One-Brand Kind of Guy

By Chloe Arrojado | December 1, 2021



Shawn Shariff's journey is like a page out of the American Dream playbook. He immigrated to the U.S. from Pakistan in the '80s, and at age 18 he got a minimum wage job at KFC. He worked there for four years before making his way into the insurance industry. Then, in 2002, Shariff was presented with the full-circle opportunity to operate a KFC of his own. And he has only grown from there. Many franchisees come to own units of multiple brands, but

Shariff decided to expand exclusively inside his corporate parent. KFC is owned by Yum! Brands, which also owns Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and The Habit Burger Grill. Shariff became the first franchisee to own each one of them in Southern California and now operates five locations throughout the region. He says he has had plenty of opportunities to expand beyond Yum! but has stayed loyal because the parent company always extended him generosity in hard times—and Shariff has been able to pass that along to his employees.

## **Why have you stuck with the same franchisor all these years?**

If you have something good, why rock the boat? I know the brand. I can open [a location] and not be worried about how the operation is going to run. I feel that if I were to go to another brand, I would be downgrading myself. All the franchise coaches we have are really nice people. I'm a fivestore operator, but I've got 40 people working behind me.

## **How has Yum! Brands been there for you as a franchisee?**

They're always coming up with new stuff, which helps us bring in more customers. And then there's the support you get. For instance, when COVID started, right away KFC and Taco Bell emailed all franchisees saying, "You can postpone your royalty sale for 60 days or 90 days.

Don't worry about it; run your restaurant and do whatever you can." That was very touching for me because I got really hurt last year when Universal Studios closed. [He owns a Habit Burger, a Taco Bell, and a KFC/Pizza Hut there.] Those were our top-performing restaurants, and we still paid a lot of people while we were closed. It's like a pass-it-forward—if the brand does good things for you, then you do the same things for your employees.



## **What can franchisees do to uphold a franchisor's loyalty?**

Do what they ask you to do. Nobody knows you, but everybody knows KFC or Taco Bell, so they have more to lose than you. If you do something bad, you as an individual will probably lose some customers. But as a brand, the name is all over the news. As long as you do what you're supposed to do, follow guidelines, pass all your inspections, and stay in constant touch with them, you'll succeed. It's not rocket science.

## **What piece of advice would you offer to new franchisees?**

Don't screw anybody over. Just do your best. If you owe your employees 50 bucks, give them 55. It's not the end of the world. Five bucks is not going to hurt you, but for them it's a meal. I was a minimum wage worker for a very long time, and I see how they struggle. We bought \$25 Walmart gift cards for 80, 90 employees. We gave them out, and you could see the look on their faces. It costs us money, but it's OK. Because if they weren't there, then we wouldn't be open. Take care of your employees and they'll take care of you.