Key to success: Stay true to mission

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At first glance, the keynote speakers at the 35th annual Tulane Business Forum couldn't have been more different. Laurie Ann Goldman helped build spunky shapewear manufacturer Spanx into an international brand with $250 million in annual sales, while David Dunlap heads Superior Energy Services, a $4.6 billion company that specializes in hydraulic fracturing and oilfield services.



Laurie Ann Goldman, former CEO of Spanx, talked about some of the entrepreneurial lessons the company taught her as a keynote speaker at the 2014 Tulane Business Forum.

But despite their differences, the two executives had a similar message for forum attendees on Thursday (Sept. 18): Stay true to your company's unique mission, and success will take care of itself.

Goldman, a third-generation Tulane alumna, said one of the keys to Spanx's success was identifying the apparel company's true mission: to help customers improve their self-esteem.

"We defined the look better-feel better connection with an accessible, best-friend mentality," Goldman said, adding that the company helped women laugh about fashion challenges like the dreaded muffin-top.

“Laughing about imperfections is really just a part of sharing and helping women get comfortable with whatever they consider their problem areas to be,” Goldman said. “That spirit of fun and irreverence is really what separated Spanx.”

Dunlap, who became CEO of Superior Energy in 2010 and president in 2011, said the companies driving the current domestic oil production boom are looking for something that the big players in the industry — companies like Halliburton, Weatherford and Schlumberger — can’t provide

“The new customers want reliability, they want innovation and they want cost efficiency,” Dunlap said, noting that those were advantages traditionally associated with small companies.



David E. Dunlap, president and CEO of Superior Energy Services, said the developers driving the current domestic oil boom are looking for oilfield services firms with a small-company mentality.

Despite Superior’s large size, Dunlap said the company’s unique philosophy — buying regional, often family-owned companies and keeping those companies’ managers in place – has made it a good match for today’s market environment.

“[Our employees] have what we call a founder’s mentality,” Dunlap said. “They think about doing things faster and better and cheaper and easier. That’s the kind of mentality of management we’re looking for because that’s the kind of mentality of management that thinks like a small company.”

The forum, which took place at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, kicked off with welcoming remarks by Dean Ira Solomon and also featured presentations by Laura Cox Kaplan, principal-in-charge of Government, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy at PricewaterhouseCoopers; Iftikhar Ahmad, executive director of the New Orleans Aviation Board; Gregory C. Feirn, CEO of LCMC Health; and Wan Kim, CEO of Smoothie King.

The Tulane Business Forum is an annual presentation of the A. B. Freeman School of Business and the Tulane Association of Business Alumni (TABA), which uses funds from the forum to support a wide array of student-focused programs.