Creating a culture of innovation

September 21, 2015

Many people tend to think of email as an indispensable tool for organizations to communicate, collaborate and innovate, but not Adam Bryant.



New York Times "Corner Office" columnist Adam Bryant said the first step in fostering innovation is getting the culture right.

In his talk at the Tulane Business Forum on Thursday (Sept. 17), the *New York Times* “Corner Office” columnist said email is actually one of the biggest deterrents there is to innovation in the workplace.

“Email does nothing to build a culture,” Bryant said. “It does nothing to build relationships between people. It’s more like it damages the connective tissue that’s already there.”

Innovation was a recurring theme at Thursday’s forum, an annual presentation of the A. B. Freeman School of Business and the Tulane Association of Business Alumni (TABA). With the title “Changing Landscapes: Business Leaders Taking Action,” the

conference showcased executives embracing disruption to develop innovative solutions.

Bryant, a Tulane parent, has interviewed over 200 CEOs for his column since it began in 2009, and last year he wrote a book, *Quick and Nimble*, based on some of the lessons of those interviews. Bryant said one of his key takeaways is that to foster innovation in an organization, it's essential to get the culture right first.

"Innovation comes from the people who are out on the front lines," Bryant said. "They know what the problems are. They know what the customers are saying to them. Do you have the kind of culture where the person can come into work in the morning and share with their boss or colleague—'Say, you know when I was brushing my teeth this morning, this crazy idea popped into my head. Can I share it with you?' That's where the magic is."



Warner Thomas, president and CEO of Ochsner Health System, said Ochsner is embracing technology to develop new ways to build consumer relationships.

For his presentation, "Shaping the Future of Healthcare," Ochsner President and CEO Warner Thomas said innovation has played a key role in the company's growth over the last 10 years.

“As traditional organizations, we have to disrupt ourselves if we’re going to be successful,” Thomas said.

Thomas cited the example of Ochsner’s O Bar, a lounge modeled on the Apple Store’s Genius Bar where patients can install physician-recommended health apps on their phones, tablets and smart watches.

“We see this as an opportunity to engage patients in a very different way,” Thomas said. “The smart phone that you look at 1,500 times a week can also be part of your health care management.”

In addition to Bryant and Thomas, this year’s speakers also included Catherine McRae, vice president with Shell Energy Resources Co.; Andre Champagne, CEO of Hollywood Trucks; Anne Donovan, U.S. human capital transformation leader at PwC; and Thomas Ryan, president and CEO of Service Corp. International.