Investment bank owner pays it forward for next generation

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Brian Egwele (BSM ’01) mentors student ventures and offers career advice to prospective entrepreneurs as an Innovator-in-Residence with the Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

As a business student, Brian Egwele (BSM ’01) learned valuable lessons from the entrepreneurs and alumni who shared their experiences with his classes at the Freeman School, lessons that gave him a leg up in launching his career as an investment banker on Wall Street.

So when the Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation asked

Egwele to serve as a mentor for student entrepreneurs, he jumped at the opportunity to become an Innovator-in-Residence.

“Tulane gave me the confidence and the skills to go out there and compete with the best,” says Egwele, managing director of Egwele & Company, a Chicago-based independent boutique investment bank he founded in 2017. “Now after 20 plus years on Wall Street, I’m ready to share my experience with other Tulane students and alumni.”

After graduating, Egwele got his start with Salomon Smith Barney (now Citigroup), first in its New York office and then in Chicago. He left in 2009 for boutique M&A firm Sagent Advisors.

"I transitioned during the Great Recession, when it was becoming increasingly difficult to conduct business as usual at some of the bulge-bracket firms,” he says. “I was looking for a smaller, independent platform with less restrictions.”

When Sagent was sold to Daiwa Securities, Egwele opted to strike out on his own rather than return to a large corporate environment. “I now have the opportunity to develop deeper client relationships and ultimately add more value,” he says. “I find it much more fulfilling.”

Egwele & Company provides strategic and financial advisory services, including advice on mergers and acquisitions and private capital raising. While the firm serves both public and private companies, it focuses on niche markets including entrepreneurs and family-owned businesses.

Egwele first started to get more involved with the Freeman School during the pandemic. With COVID-19 impacting small businesses across the region, the Lepage Center asked Egwele to advise New Orleans entrepreneurs seeking ideas on how to pivot their businesses to survive the crisis. Egwele empathized with business owners who had sacrificed everything for their dreams only to find themselves struggling to make sense of an uncertain future.

“I could definitely relate to their anxiety,” Egwele says. “You put so much into building a business and then you get this curveball out of nowhere that presents a number of challenges you’ve never encountered before. Overall, it was a very gratifying experience and I really enjoyed the conversations. I’ve been fortunate to have some really good people help me throughout my career, so likewise, if I can guide a student, entrepreneur, family-owned business in the right way, I’m always happy to do that.”

In the wake of his service in the COVID-19 consulting program, the Lepage Center invited Egwele to become one of its Innovators-in-Residence, a select group of executives, investors and entrepreneurs who mentor student ventures, serve as guest lecturers in the venture accelerator course and offer career advice to students.

In that role, he sees current Freeman students as “ambitious and forward-thinking,” but also concerned about making the world a better place. “In these pitches, I see many students asking not just ‘how do I make money,’ but more importantly, ‘how do I improve society?’”

Egwele has also been a generous donor to the Freeman School. In March, he sponsored a matching challenge for Freeman alumni as part of the fifth annual Give Green day of fundraising.

“There are a lot of organizations and a lot of places to put your time and money,” Egwele says. “I really like what Tulane is doing all across the board, and I’m excited to be a part of it.”