Alum brings southern hospitality to Shake Shack

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Freeman alum Jamie Griffin (MBA '11) joined Shake Shack in 2025 as the restaurant chain's chief people officer.

When Jamie Griffin (MBA ’11) was growing up in Houma, Louisiana, hospitality was at the center of his life.

“I grew up in a place where hospitality was really important,” he says. “It was a place where people welcomed guests into their homes and made them feel at ease.”

Now, as chief people officer at Shake Shack, the multinational fine casual chain specializing in premium burgers, crinkle cut fries and milkshakes, Griffin is bringing southern hospitality to restaurants all over the world.

“It’s about putting people first while growing the business,” he says. “Our mission is to ‘stand for something good,’ and as chief people officer, my role in that is making

sure that our frontline workers feel supported so they can welcome in our guests.”

Griffin has had a long history in the quick-service restaurant industry, going back to his college days. As an undergrad at Louisiana State University, he began working as an assistant in the support office at Raising Cane’s Chicken Fingers, where he performed administrative tasks and ensured the workplace ran smoothly. He quickly rose through the ranks to become head of HR, risk management, legal and strategy.

When he was first starting out, Cane’s had just nine restaurants but was eager to grow. As part of the expansion process, Griffin learned he would be transferred from Baton Rouge to Dallas. It was around this time that he was also contemplating a return to school.

“I saw a billboard for Freeman’s EMBA program and decided to look into it,” he says. “I went to an info session and learned that I could work and go to school to get my MBA. Luckily, Cane’s said they’d help pay for school and they’d pay for me to go back and forth between Dallas and New Orleans to attend classes. I was used to the cadence of traveling for my job, so it just made sense to travel for school as well.”

The EMBA proved to be an important life experience for Griffin, personally and professionally.

“I think the theories around finance and strategy were really helpful in the expansion work we were doing at Cane’s,” he says. “One of the strengths of the program is you get to meet people who have real-world experiences. They were coming into class with real work scenarios and discussing them in practical rather than theoretical terms.

“Personally speaking, the EMBA program was a great time in my life. I was lucky to be in a class with such a diverse group of humans. There were executives from oil and gas companies. There were people with military backgrounds. Steve Gleason (MBA ’11), a former safety with the New Orleans Saints, was in my class. I met people I consider lifelong friends.”

After 13 years at Cane’s, helping to double the company in size five times, Griffin was ready for a change.

“I started receiving calls from people in the restaurant industry who were asking for advice on growing their own businesses,” he recalls. “By that point, I was ready for

something new.”

Griffin founded Consult to Grow, a boutique consulting firm focused on scaling emerging restaurant brands.

“I loved that work,” he says. “I did some consulting work in South Louisiana, and I also built a big book of business in New York. Then one day I got a call from someone at Shake Shack. They asked if I would be open to an opportunity to be chief people officer. I had always appreciated Shake Shack’s values, so it felt like kismet.”

Griffin has now been at Shake Shack for a little over a year and is loving every minute of it.

“I love New York, where I’m based, and I love working at Shake Shack because our values align so well,” he says. “We’re operating 700+ restaurants, all while using the highest quality and freshest ingredients. I’m responsible for the 15,000 people who work in our company-operated restaurants. My team and I provide them with support and help them when they have problems.”



Griffin, right, celebrates with Raheem Nugent, Talent Acquisition Partner and recipient of Shake Shack’s Stand for Something Good Award, during

2026 Team Appreciation Week at the company’s New York offices. Photo by Yuxi Liu.

A key aspect of Griffin’s job involves paying attention to the small details that create a good work experience for team members.

“When I’m doing my job, I’m thinking about every moment that our team members have to ensure they’re having experiences that are aligned with our intent,” he says. “I’m thinking about everything from the application process to what the career site looks like to the onboarding process to team member training.”

One of Griffin’s favorite parts of his job is figuring out how to “scale” hospitality.

“A lot of people don’t love chain restaurants, but that’s my bread and butter,” he says. “I’m committed to making our restaurants welcoming, hospitable places that are open to everyone. My job is to figure out how we are going to open 60-65 new restaurants this year while we continue putting community first.

“There’s a real soul to our business,” he adds. “No matter which Shake Shack restaurant you go to — whether it’s in New York or California or South Korea — you know it and feel it. That’s the wonderful part about working for this company.”