Coleman Ridley, CEO, Business Council of Greater New Orleans & the River Region

Coleman Ridley ended up in New Orleans almost on a whim, drawn by a unique program at Tulane Law School. That was 21 years ago. Today, after several years practicing law, he leads a group of business leaders working to ensure clear predictable laws that foster honest, efficient, transparent and accountable government. The goal: a highly competitive business environment that attracts productive businesses and families to the New Orleans area.

He says working in New Orleans has been an education in a specific way of doing business. “New Orleans is a very relationship-driven community. It’s a small town pretending to be a big city. There’s really only one degree of separation between people here.”

That relationship-driven mentality has its advantages. “You can accomplish a lot by picking up the phone and asking someone to get together. And when you do, you’re bound to run into someone else who can help you achieve your goal. Developing and forging and nurturing relationships is how you prosper in this city.”

Despite the small town feel, he feels the city has enormous promise, particularly due to the growth of new businesses that has fueled the city’s emerging reputation as a startup hub. “I’m very encouraged by the entrepreneurial spirit and the influx of talent into the city. It has slowed and potentially eliminated the brain drain that the city once experienced. And the barriers to entry are relatively low for entrepreneurs in New Orleans, unlike Austin or Portland, where they’re so incredibly high. ”

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“Opportunities are as much driven by who you know in New Orleans as by what you know. You can accomplish a lot by picking up the phone and asking someone to get together. And when you do, you’re bound to run into someone else who can help you achieve your goal too. Developing and forging and nurturing relationships is how you prosper in this city.”

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