Alum pioneers AI solutions at Entergy

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Andy Quick (MBA ’01), chief AI officer with Entergy, speaks at the 2024 Nuclear Information Technology Strategic Leadership Conference in New Orleans. In his current role, Quick is one of just a handful of chief AI officers dedicated to solving problems in energy production and distribution.

For some people, the thought of Artificial Intelligence elicits worries over job loss, data theft, proliferating misinformation and other contagions.

Not so for Andy Quick (MBA ’01). “When it comes to technology, I'm an eternal optimist,” says Quick, who serves as chief AI officer for Entergy Corp., the Fortune 500 company that provides power to 3 million customers in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

At Entergy, Quick leads a team dedicated to creating AI-based business solutions. “I’m responsible for helping leverage AI at scale to create value for our key stakeholders: our customers, communities, employees and owners,” he says. “I get up every day wondering how we might transform our industry with AI. We're constantly looking at ideas that are different or new or innovative that nobody's thought of.”

The novelty is the appeal for Quick, a New Orleans native who earned an undergraduate degree in computer science from Louisiana State University. Quick went on to work as a consultant for Accenture before taking a job at Entergy. When Entergy generously offered to pay for an MBA degree through the Freeman School’s Executive MBA program, Quick jumped at the opportunity. Since then, Quick has had a 29-year career with Entergy, working in robotic process automation, enterprise architecture, telecommunications, data analytics and other areas.

Today, Quick is one of only a few Chief AI Officers in the energy industry working to solve problems in energy production and distribution. Under his leadership, Entergy deploys AI in a variety of ways, from predicting equipment failure to improving the customer experience.

“One common use case is predictive asset health,” Quick says. “We can use system data to predict when a certain piece of equipment might fail, enabling us to get ahead of failure by proactively maintaining or replacing it. This has all kinds of positive impacts. It's less expensive, it may prevent an interruption to your power and it’s more efficient.”

To find and inspect equipment, the company can employ additional AI technologies. “We’re developing AI solutions that will use aerial imaging to detect problems with our system,” Quick says.

The technology has already proven beneficial, but Quick points out that it’s still in its infancy. “We may be able to use AI to help determine that there's a problem with a transformer,” he says, “but we may not know exactly when it's going to fail. The challenge is figuring out how imminent that failure is. That’s a little bit harder to predict.”

It’s a challenge that just might necessitate the creation of a new job, a potential byproduct of AI that Quick is hopeful about.

"The jobs that will exist in the future don't exist today,” he says. “We can't even imagine what those new jobs will be. There will be some jobs that will go away, but they'll be replaced by more challenging, higher paying jobs. So, it all levels up, I would argue, in terms of the types of jobs AI will create.”

“What's interesting is how to combine these new AI technologies,” he adds. “The trick is figuring out how we can radically transform how people work by automating as much as possible through a combination of generative AI, software, data science, big data and computer vision.”

To prepare for the future of work, Quick says Freeman students should familiarize themselves with the AI tools at their disposal. “Expose yourself to AI tools and be open to using them. Because over time, using an AI tool is going to be like using Word, Excel and PowerPoint. It's just going to be something you have to use to be successful.”

And while AI and business can complement each other, Quick recommends that entrepreneurs begin by building their business before considering how AI fits in. “If you're thinking about starting your own business, start with the basics, fundamental findings like inefficient markets and frictions in people's lives, and build a business around it. Take advantage of AI to build a business, but don't build a business

around AI.”

Quick owes his own business success in part to the Freeman School’s EMBA program, which he says was pivotal for his career success. “I had capability gaps that I filled by getting my MBA. The program enabled me to do my job better because I could bring a business-facing lens to technology. I learned to speak the language of accounting and finance and valuation, which resonated with the people that I work with in leadership and ultimately made me more effective in my job.”

Quick entered the EMBA program as a technologist, but because the program draws professionals from a wide array of industries, he was able to meet people with wildly different careers. “I was learning from someone in health care, someone in city administration, someone in finance, someone in media. It was all over the map. We all brought our special talents. We were like the Avengers. Everybody had a distinct superpower.”

Today, Quick relishes bringing his superpowers to Entergy, where the future of AI is still being defined.

“At Entergy, we're embracing AI in a big way,” Quick says. “We're trying to do something transformational.”