

M & A in practice: A ground-level view

First-time CEO Ronnie Ursin shares lessons learned through his experience with Tower Health

A C-Suite Conversation with

Ronnie Ursin

CEO, Jennersville Hospital



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The healthcare news cycle fills up fast these days with news of mergers and acquisitions. But what really happens at ground level as organizations are acquired or come together? Ronnie Ursin, chosen as one the 10 Leaders to Watch by *Modern Healthcare* as part of its Top 25 Minority Executives in Healthcare program, has gotten a close-up look at one of those situations since being named the CEO at Jennersville Hospital in West Grove, Pennsylvania.

Reading Health System purchased five local hospitals from a major healthcare chain. Reading renamed itself Tower Health and

hired Ursin, a former Reading executive who was working as a chief nursing officer at a hospital in his home state of Louisiana, to lead the 63-bed Jennersville facility.

“Speaking from the standpoint of Tower Health, one of the things we are working on very diligently and carefully is the organizational culture,” Ursin says. “About 95 percent of the staff at Jennersville Hospital worked in the previous culture.”

Ursin has held several “town hall”

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meetings with all Jennersville staff members since taking over.

“We are trying to take their feedback and put it into action,” he says. “We still have some people on the fence, but we are doing our best to communicate that we are going to do our best for our patients and staff, and we are going to do right by our doctors. That’s going to drive our success.”

Cultural implications can sometimes be overlooked in M & A as

most of the attention is laser-focused on financials, yet evidence is clear that few things can derail a transaction more quickly. Taking time to work diligently and thoughtfully with all affected team members is essential, for human capital remains a company’s greatest asset.

Actions speak volumes for leaders

Jennersville’s previous owner was hampered by large financial losses at its facilities across the country. Ursin and his team have come in and targeted tangible improvements to infrastructure and equipment, demonstrating a willingness to invest in its staff and demonstrating good faith at the same time.

“We have a full plan to invest in surgical scopes and other instruments. We’re investing in getting more patient care equipment such as EKG machines, and facility upgrades. And we’re looking at potentially bringing in a Da Vinci robot device to support our service lines,” he says.

Tower Health, says Ursin, also is installing the Epic health IT system to achieve the aim of patients having just one chart across the entire health system.

Carrying through on promises builds credibility for new leaders, and

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employee engagement rises. That, in turn, usually translates to increased productivity, something that Ursin and Tower are conscious of.

Harnessing your board

In building a new culture, Ursin and his leadership team have help. At the board level, Ursin’s directors are carrying the message as well. Since they have been interwoven into the community for some time, their involvement carries no small weight.

“Because Tower Health is new to the community, a major part of our board members’ role is to convey the message we have about advancing health and transforming the lives of the people in our community. They are taking our initial quality initiatives and are able to articulate that to members of the community.”

Board members have greater responsibility and experience higher stakes in today’s healthcare climate. The best CEOs provide information and experiences that will deepen their trustees’ skill set, and clear communication is paramount. While these relationships take time and sometimes facilitated workshops or retreats to develop, Ursin says he has been pleased to find a fierce advocacy for patient care and attention to detail in his trustees, most of whom live in the community that Jennersville serves.

“What’s heartening is that our board members are heavily engaged in what happens in the hospital,” he says. “When our chief nursing officer gives a report about falls, the directors ask relevant questions. If there’s a variance in care, they want to know why and ask very pointed questions, both clinical and non-clinical members alike.”

EXECUTIVE’S TOOLKIT:
Building a successful leadership team with your existing talent

Creating a successful team from the ground up doesn’t necessarily mean hiring new team members. We often find that organizations overlook high potential talent that has been there all along.

Without a clear map of the talent in your organization, which more than 50 percent of organizations admit they do not have, it can be very difficult to understand your bench of talent. Many leaders believe that succession planning and talent mapping responsibilities belong to the Human Resources department, but it’s actually the responsibility of every leader within an organization to map out their teams and know at any given time where there are gaps and where their high potentials are headed.

It can take some time to develop this map, but not nearly as much time as it takes to find, vet and acquire new talent. Not to mention

the time it takes to onboard and integrate that new talent.

3 Quick Tips for Succession Planning/Talent Mapping

- 1. Take small bites. Small but meaningful steps toward a larger map will help the process feel far less overwhelming.
- 2. Tap into each leader. Start by creating a list of all the leaders in your organization (or grab an existing org chart). Then, ask each one to create the map for their direct reports/team members.
- 3. Empower data-driven decisions. Implementing talent assessments, like the Hogan Assessment, and/or 360° reviews for team members to get a better sense of their potential and decrease the potential for bias.

Clinical training and decision-making

Ursin is thankful that his clinical training, as a nurse who rose to become a chief nursing officer, has prepared him well for his first CEO position.

“My transition has been very positive,” he says. “My role as a CNO at a larger hospital was really helpful in my transition. As a CNO, I was well aware of what was going on from an operations standpoint. I was heavily involved in physician

relations. I was involved in the strategic planning process and quality improvement plans. I dealt with the board as well.”

Ursin has an MBA with a focus in finance, as well a doctorate in nursing practice, to supplement his considerable experience. With a clinical background in his portfolio, Ursin has more time to delve into areas of the hospital he wasn’t as familiar with: environmental services, dietary services,

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pharmacy and rehabilitation.

Jennersville's payer mix is growing rapidly in Medicare with older patients, so it should benefit in the future from Tower Health's ambitious plan to create a new branch of the Drexel University

medical school near Tower's flagship hospital in Reading. Ursin is excited about the move but knows he has more immediate needs while he waits for the first group of medical students to graduate. He hopes to add

additional practices to the physician cohort at the hospital, including a surgical one.

"Our key driver right now is finding some very good physician providers to join our team to take care of our community." **MPI**

Resources for Action

ARTICLE: Executive Team Performance

Want better team performance? Check out this article to jump-start your plan for better team cohesiveness.

From assessing individual leaders to evaluating culture and aligning with organizational goals, the key to developing a strong executive leadership team doesn't have to be a mystery or a guessing game. Unlocking these strengths is complex, but having a solid plan with authentic, meaningful metrics is critical.

5 steps to unlocking your team's potential:

1. Assessment and awareness
2. Facilitated development
3. Alignment and measurement
4. Refinement
5. Action planning and execution

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