

# Simplifying Healthcare Operations

An Interview with BJ Schaknowski, Chief Executive Officer, symplr

**EDITORS' NOTE** BJ Schaknowski is a seasoned software industry executive with over 20 years of experience in leadership roles across a wide variety of operating functions. Before joining symplr, Schaknowski served as the Chief Sales and Marketing Officer at Vertafore, the world's leading provider of insurance technology. Prior to that, he spent four years at LexisNexis Software Solutions in progressively ascending roles, culminating as its SVP Marketing, Sales and Services.



BJ Schaknowski

He held numerous senior and global leadership roles earlier in his career at CA Technologies, Intuit, and Sage Software. Deeply committed to philanthropic efforts, Schaknowski was recently appointed to the Susan G. Komen Board of Directors, joining an elite group of nearly two dozen executives from various industries who help govern and advise Komen, which is the world's leading nonprofit breast cancer organization. He is a Fellow of the American College of Health Data Management. Schaknowski earned a BA in Communications from the State University of New York at Geneseo and an MBA at the University of Georgia – Terry College of Business. He also served in the United States Marine Corps infantry as an enlisted reservist for eight years.

**COMPANY BRIEF** symplr (symplr.com) is a leader in enterprise healthcare operations software and services. For more than 30 years and with deployments in 9 of 10 U.S. hospitals, symplr has been committed to improving healthcare operations through its cloud-based solutions, driving better operations for better outcomes. Its provider data management, workforce management, compliance, quality and safety, and contract and supplier management solutions improve the efficiency and efficacy of healthcare operations, enabling caregivers to quickly handle administrative tasks so they have more time to do what they do best: provide high-quality patient care.

## Will you discuss your career journey?

I've technically been working since I was 14 – I actually started doing odd jobs for my aunt's businesses for \$2.75 an hour when I was 12. In college I joined the Marine Corps Infantry as an enlisted reservist, and I really consider that to be the start of my official career journey. After

spending eight years with the Marine Corps and finding my way into several technology sales jobs post-college, I then went on to get my MBA at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business. The most important things I did at Terry were rounding out my business acumen and really doubling down on my focus on go-to-market in software. The rest of my career has been an exercise in learning more and more about how every part of a software company functions, how those processes and products can be improved, and how those systems can create both meaningful outcomes for customers and financial success for your business.

I've had the benefit of working with and learning from leaders in several world-class software companies, including Sage, Intuit, LexisNexis, and Vertafore. Many of my colleagues in those organizations have risen to the "upper tier" in software and continue to be a resource and sounding board for me. I've been lucky to not only work under amazing software leaders, but beside fellow operators who are now CEOs of Fortune 100 companies, Operating Partners

at some of the biggest Private Equity firms in the world – and some who cashed out and are enjoying their time reading on the beach.

One of the things I've learned as CEO is that no matter what your original skillset or specialization may be, once you reach the executive level, you need to have a working understanding of every function of your business to truly lead from the front and build sustainable and successful results. Every role I've had has contributed to my ability to think holistically about the business, and it's my belief that this perspective has been invaluable in leading symplr during this phase of its evolution.

## How do you describe symplr's mission and purpose?

At symplr, our mission is to simplify healthcare operations in order to help healthcare providers focus on delivering quality care to patients. That sounds simple – no pun intended – but in an industry as complex and regulated as healthcare, realizing our mission is no small feat. At the same time, we see firsthand the tireless work that healthcare providers do to keep our communities, our families and ourselves healthy, and we feel honored to play a part in making those providers' jobs easier.

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Well-designed healthcare technology should enable and empower healthcare workers to do what they do best – care for patients. From a software perspective, that means that if we’re able to streamline workflows, enhance compliance, and improve efficiency across the ecosystem, we can give providers the time and energy they need to improve outcomes.

At the end of the day, our work at symplr is outcomes-oriented. We succeed when healthcare systems see us as a trusted partner that helps them achieve their ultimate mission of providing quality care for their patients.

**Will you provide an overview of symplr’s services and solutions?**

We offer a comprehensive suite of software solutions for healthcare organizations. Our products are designed to streamline and automate the complex operational processes inherent in modern healthcare systems. Our provider data management, workforce management, compliance, quality and safety, and contract and supplier management solutions improve the efficiency and efficacy of healthcare operations. Beyond those four main categories, we also offer analytical insights that help our customers better understand the flood of data they’re creating on a daily basis and enable the use of that data to make informed decisions that improve their organizations.

**What have been the keys to symplr’s growth?**

When I came to symplr in 2020, my strategy was to find a way to preserve company culture and accelerate the growth of the business at the same time. Coming in as CEO for a healthcare technology company during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was immediately driven by the critical nature of our work, and I wanted to ensure that our teams had the support they needed to deliver for our customers. As we moved past the pandemic, the healthcare industry

has had to wrestle with the cracks in healthcare systems that were exposed by COVID. We saw a real need across healthcare systems to improve their operations. To address those needs, we made some strategic acquisitions that I’m truly proud of, while at the same time making sure that in-house innovation and a customer-centric approach remained a priority.

People come to work here because they’re passionate about improving healthcare operations; our customers come to us for software solutions because they’re passionate about improving their organizations to better deliver for their patients. Our shared passion and commitment and our partnership approach with our customers has helped us to define our strategic growth in a way that makes a real, tangible difference in healthcare operations.

**How important is it for symplr to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?**

Healthcare is a complex and dynamic industry, and we need every team to understand the wide range of experiences and perspectives that are inherent in our industry. Innovation is a key part of what we do at symplr, and diverse ideas help drive that innovation. It’s not just about innovation, though. It’s an acknowledgement that everyone receives healthcare at some point in their life, and that the healthcare industry itself is incredibly diverse. It doesn’t matter what your culture or background is – you interact with the healthcare industry throughout your life, and we want to make sure that every patient and every healthcare professional can build stronger connections and foster trust through our software. For us to be impactful across all the different populations we serve, we need to be a diverse workforce. Within our company, we want every employee at symplr to feel valued and empowered to contribute their best work. When people feel heard, they’re more motivated to deliver on our mission.

**How did your time in the Marine Corps impact your leadership style and management philosophy?**

Being in the Marine Corps Reserves for eight years instilled in me a deep sense of duty, discipline, and self-accountability. Leadership isn’t just about top-down orders; it’s about earning respect and trust from your team. The way I try to earn that respect and trust is by being mission-focused and understanding the work that each of my teammates provides. I’ve found that being cruel has no place in leadership, but at the same time you must be transparent and direct. Otherwise, you risk your team not being aligned, which is a recipe for disaster.

Beyond that sense of discipline and self-accountability, the recognition of the value that diverse and cohesive teams bring to achieving outcomes is fundamental to the military. That recognition has grounded me in the mission-and-people framework I’ve relied on throughout my career.

**You devote your time and energy to philanthropic causes. How do you decide where to focus your efforts?**

I’m a big believer in giving back to organizations and causes that are very personal, whether that’s working with my alma mater, the University of Georgia; with transitioning our injured Veterans; or through my board membership with Susan G. Komen. My wife and I have decided to focus our efforts on organizations that have directly impacted us and our loved ones, and organizations that we know have the structural capability to truly impact others on a significant scale. We’re lucky enough to have found several organizations that combine good intentions with real impact, and I encourage others to do the same.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?**

My advice to young people starting their careers is to be curious, stay humble, and work your butts off. Never, ever underestimate the value of putting in the hard work that most others are unwilling to do. Early in your career, it’s important to explore different roles, industries, and opportunities to find what truly excites you and that at which you are really, really good. That intersection is where you will find your growth path. Sometimes you’ll find out that something isn’t for you, and that’s completely okay – in fact, it’s more than okay, it’s a success in and of itself.

Be curious about everything, ask questions, and seek out mentors who can offer guidance and share their experiences. Never assume you know everything – but don’t worry if you do, it’s a classic trap we all fall into when we experience early career success.

Beyond that, don’t be afraid to take on challenges that push you outside of your comfort zone, because those are the experiences that will help you grow the most.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly: the business world is a relationship-oriented place. People who maintain sight of that will have success throughout their careers. ●