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Executive Voice

Executive Voice: She takes over in Morrisville in a time of challenge and opportunity

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Ascom's business is focused on health care and mobile workflow solutions. The company manufactures nurse-call and emergency-call systems, as well as mobility handsets purpose-built for health care and other mission-critical environments.

It's Kelly Feist's job to manage the Americas region for the Baar, Switzerland-based company, a region that includes the U.S., Canada and South America.

From Ascom's Triangle-based regional headquarters, Feist manages 174 full-time staffers, 132 of whom are located in Morrisville. Worldwide, the company employs 1,300 people across 18 countries.

What are your responsibilities? As the top executive in this region, I am responsible for the sales performance, overall operations and profitability of the business in the region. In addition, as a member of Ascom's global extended executive committee, I provide insights to Ascom's board of directors and executive global management.

How long have you been at Ascom? My first official day was April 6, and it's certainly an understatement when I share that it's been a challenge to assume the



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Kelly Feist manage the Americas region for Ascom.

top regional leadership position at a health care technology company in the midst of a pandemic! However, I could not be more impressed with our team and our partners. I was drawn to Ascom because I recognized the transformation the company is making: moving from a previously hardware/capital equipment vendor to a company that is uniquely positioned to offer mission-critical capabilities that are comprised of truly end-to-end, integrated communications and clinical workflow solutions, but are also vendor agnostic and can integrate with the existing technologies that our customers rely upon. Electronic medical records, medical devices, and fire and safety systems are examples of these.

How has the pandemic impacted your business? Despite the fact that most of us are now largely working remotely, together we've responded admirably to an unprecedented demand for our health care solutions. Yes, I said "unprecedented demand" during this very difficult time. As I know you are all aware, field hospitals were set up in many cities around the country to prepare for the potential rapid increase in patients affected by this coronavirus. Ascom was tapped to supply and help implement the nurse call and communications infrastructure in several of these field hospitals in cities such as Chicago and New York. These systems were stood up on short notice and in often very trying conditions. ... We've also taken this opportunity to understand how we can more efficiently serve our customers. As a result, we have virtualized our training wherever possible and amped up our technical support. Our region is in great position to lead the way for Ascom globally in 2020.

What have you learned during these months that can serve as lessons ahead?

First, people tend to act with the best of intentions, even if the outcome is not what might have been expected. So assuming positive intent becomes really important to managing the current situation and ensuring strong cross-functional teamwork. Additionally, when the environment creates uncertainty as we see today, it is imperative to have good visibility to the business. Visibility enables the business to pivot and redirect from the perspectives of incoming order management and, most importantly, supply management. We all know that supply chain disruption has been part of what we all are experiencing during this pandemic, and it is no different for Ascom. Visibility makes it possible for us to get ahead of potential disruption and continue to meet the needs of our customers. Finally, uncertainty also creates opportunity. Clinical workflows and communications are already changing and health systems across the country are trying to determine how to

make permanent changes in their workflows and care plans to limit contact with at-risk patients, to eliminate the potential for cross-contamination, and ensure timely communications with all stakeholders.

What have been the biggest challenges in your new role? Simply the fact that my start date coincided with a pandemic. This required that I start my new role as the leader of the business in this region remotely. I also “met” my senior leadership team remotely, and we’ve worked to build relationships over Skype and Zoom. Not being able to see people in person, to learn their working styles, to meet their functional and extended teams has been difficult. It is harder to build trust and understand and impact culture when all interactions to-date are virtual.

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve received? Have courage and trust yourself. Don’t be afraid to take a risk and stretch in your career. It may not always work out as you expect, but you will learn something that will serve you in the future. I think this is especially important for women as they look to advance in their careers. My family has been instrumental in providing this advice and instilling these concepts as foundational in my career.

What do you do to relax? I do a lot of photography, and love to photograph landscapes and water. I also do a lot of cycling. Cycling requires that you to be fully present in what you are doing and it feels very freeing.

What books are on your nightstand? I usually have a couple of books spread out around the house. I enjoy non-fiction and one of my favorite authors is Michael Lewis. I am currently reading “Guns, Germs and Steel,” by Jared Diamond; “Indianapolis,” by Lynn Vincent and Sara Vladic; and “Flash Boys,” by Michael Lewis.

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