

# Bluebird Leaders' SOAR 2025 Recap

Written By: Kate Gamble, Managing Editor at *This Week Health*

**October 1, 2025** – “SOAR was a vibe.”

That was the consensus among attendees. But in fact, SOAR 2025 had multiple vibes:

- Leaders who earned recognition for their achievements (Erica Williams, Zenith Leadership Award, and Laura Marquez, Rising Star)
- Leaders who were encouraged by mentors to attend (Lindsay Demboski, SVP, Integrated Psychiatric Consultants, and Kayce Degenhardt, VP of Clinical Applications, Inova Health, to name a few).
- Leaders who opened up about their struggles — and were embraced for their authenticity.
- Leaders who spoke about their career experiences, passing along lessons and encouraging others to rise up, rather than shrink.



It was also:

- An author who taught attendees how to identify ‘jerks’ and create a supportive environment.
- A parent who is using art to help others cope with stress and grief.
- An industry expert determined to spread compassion.
- A founder who urged others to stop running on the hamster wheel.
- Partners who peeled back the curtain.
- Male allies who weren’t afraid to show their sparkle.
- Data geeks, patient advocates, innovators, nurses, designers, consultants, and so much more.

After three days of keynotes, panel discussions, educational sessions, networking events, yoga and breathing sessions, and an incredible gala, attendees walked away feeling energized, inspired, and buoyed by the strength of the Bluebird Leaders community.



We asked a few Nesties to share their thoughts on the event, and how they plan to carry it forward.

## What was your biggest takeaway from SOAR?

“The unabashed authenticity that was prevalent in every interaction. People showed up as their most authentic selves because the vibe afforded everyone that safe place – even with 200-plus in

attendance. The conversations on stage and in the hall were transparent and ‘real.’ The networking was genuine. I know I made life-long friends there...folks that I have read about on LinkedIn, but seeing them face-to-face and being able to hug them and have a great conversation was worth it all. I haven’t felt more inspired at a meeting like this in a very long time.”

**- Heather Nelson, SVP & CIO, Boston Children’s Hospital**

“The incredible sense of community and the powerful reminder that we are better together, stronger together, and that each of us owns our power – both collectively and individually. From the moment we gathered, there was an easy, instant connection. What stood out most was how seamlessly the learning and fun were woven together. Every keynote and panel felt refreshing – not only because of the content, but also because of the group’s energy: open, curious, and genuinely supportive.”

**-Tracy Elmer, Chief Innovation Officer, TrueCare**

“The main takeaway for me was positive energy. From the sessions that focused on leadership and empowerment, to the events where people talked about their professional experiences, I felt a community of trust, joy in serving others, and valuable insights. As a leader who goes to a lot of healthcare conferences, it’s refreshing to attend an event where you learn, but also feel relaxed and comfortable sharing your story and your challenges at work and with your career.”

**-Erik Pupo, Director, Commercial Health IT Advisory, Guidehouse**



**How will the lessons learned shape you going forward, either personally or professionally?**

“I will continue to mentor and be a mentee. I made new connections that were powerful and inspiring. It ‘filled my cup’ so I can bring back that enthusiasm to be a change maker with my team and within my organization.”

**-Heather Nelson**

“The greatest lesson I’m carrying forward is that true impact isn’t about owning power – it’s about proving it through action, lifting others as we rise, and mentoring along the way. Personally, it’s a reminder to lean into authenticity and courage. Professionally, it’s a call to model what’s possible, empower others to see their own strength, and cultivate spaces where collective brilliance can thrive.

**-Tracy Elmer**

“A few things stood out to me. One, Bluebird Leaders is an incredible community of health IT leaders with abundant energy and support available for all. You definitely feel that positivity and want to experience it again. And, it’s open and inclusive. As a male ally, I felt included, involved, and able to listen and to express. I learned a lot about self-improvement. I gained a potential executive coach and many new friends and contacts.”

**-Erik Pupo**





To Bluebird Leaders, that’s truly what it’s all about. As Crystal Broj (Enterprise Chief Digital Transformation Officer, Medical University of South Carolina) said, **“Take these learnings home. Bring them to your teams, both men and women – and lead with courage, empathy, and authenticity.”**

In just a few short years, Bluebird Leaders hasn’t just grown; we’ve soared.

Thank you for being part of this incredible event, and we hope to see you next year in Austin, Texas!