



The Four People You Will Meet

Meridian Health System · Final interviews for VP Finance · Four one-on-one conversations on the same day

4	1	5	8
INTERVIEWERS	MAKES THE DECISION	VALUES TO KNOW	QUESTIONS READY

A NOTE ON HOW THIS REPORT IS WEIGHTED

Four people, four different conversations. **David Castellano, the SVP/CFO, makes the hiring decision.** Paul Ferraro, the COO, wants to know finance will help his operators. Karen Mills runs the HR and values screen. Thomas Reid is the VP Finance who is retiring — he is not your future boss, but his opinion of you will be asked. Prepare for each of them separately. Where we found little about a person, we say so and weight our read accordingly.

01

The Interview Day

What we know about the schedule, and what we are not sure of

9:00 David Castellano SVP & CFO · 60 min	10:15 Paul Ferraro COO · 45 min	11:15 Karen Mills Executive Director, HR · 45 min	12:15 Thomas Reid VP Finance · lunch
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CONFIRMED

From your intake: four one-on-one conversations on the same day at the flagship campus, in this order.

NOT CONFIRMED

Whether the CEO stops in, and whether lunch with Thomas Reid is part of the evaluation. Treat it as if it is.

TWO PRACTICAL NOTES

Keep your answers consistent — they will compare notes at the end of the day. And bring a short, fresh question for each person so no one hears the same question twice.

02

At a Glance

Who each person is to you, and what each one is deciding

PERSON	WHO THEY ARE TO YOU	WHAT THEY ARE DECIDING	WEIGHT
David Castellano SVP & CFO LinkedIn ↗	The hiring manager	Can this person run day-to-day finance so I can focus on the board, strategy, and capital?	MAKES THE DECISION
Paul Ferraro COO LinkedIn ↗	Your closest partner outside Finance	Will finance help my operators, or slow them down?	STRONG INPUT
Karen Mills Executive Director, HR LinkedIn ↗	The values and culture screen	Does this person fit our culture, and will they stay?	RECOMMENDS
Thomas Reid VP Finance (retiring) LinkedIn ↗	The person you would replace	Will the team I built be in good hands?	ASKED FOR HIS VIEW

TIP · EVERY INTERVIEW COUNTS

There is no such thing as a courtesy interview. The weight tags above show who signs off, not who matters. Every person on this schedule is a decision maker. Treat each conversation that way. At the end of the day, all four compare notes. If you were too casual with the person who said they “just want to meet you,” that person can speak up and say no, and then everyone else can change their minds. We have seen it happen.

03

David Castellano[LinkedIn ↗](#)

SVP & Chief Financial Officer · the hiring manager · makes the decision

YOUR INTERVIEW 9:00 · 60 minutes · first of the day**CONFIRMED FACTS**

Joined Meridian about 12 months ago from a larger multi-state health system, where he was a regional CFO. CPA and MBA.

Leadership Team: [David Castellano ↗](#) **Healthcare Finance News** [↗](#)

State Board of Accountancy [↗](#)

WHO HE IS TO YOU

The hiring manager. If you are hired, you report to him. He is building his team, and the VP Finance is the first big hire in that team.

WHAT HE IS DECIDING

“Can this person run day-to-day finance so I can focus on the board, strategy, and capital?”

WHERE HE WILL PRESS

The margin recovery at the new campus, revenue cycle and denials, and how you would work as his #2.

YOUR ANGLE

You have run revenue cycle end to end and cut a denial rate in half. Tell it as cleaner bills and fewer surprises for patients, not as a cost win. You have also been a regional CFO, so you know what he needs from his #2.

WHAT WE FOUND ON DAVID**INTERVIEWS & PODCASTS**

Guest on a healthcare finance podcast this spring. He spent most of the episode on growth and patient experience, not cost cutting. His key line is below. **Healthcare finance podcast** [↗](#)

SPEECHES & CONFERENCES

Spoke at a regional healthcare finance conference on the revenue cycle as part of the patient experience: clear bills, fewer surprise balances, faster answers for patients. **Regional healthcare finance chapter conference** [↗](#)

ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRESS

Trade press on his hire: his first priority is “stabilizing the new campus and building a finance team that operators trust.” **Healthcare Finance News** [↗](#)

LINKEDIN POSTS	Posts about the new campus, patient satisfaction scores and wins by his team. He rarely posts about savings. LinkedIn ↗
BOARDS & COMMUNITY	Finance committee of a regional food bank board. Regional food bank ↗
WHAT MATTERS TO HIM AT WORK	Growing the value of every bed, the patient experience, and a finance team the operators trust.

THE QUOTE THAT CHANGES YOUR APPROACH

“We are not going to cut our way to a healthy margin. Our job is to grow the value of every bed: a better experience, better outcomes, and patients who choose us.”

David Castellano, healthcare finance podcast, this spring [Healthcare finance podcast ↗](#)

WHAT MOST CANDIDATES WOULD DO	Walk in leading with cost cutting and savings. That is the usual pitch from a CFO-track finance leader.
WHAT IT TELLS YOU	He has said in public that cost cutting is not his plan. A savings-first pitch tells him you did not do your homework.
WALK IN DIFFERENTLY	Lead with growth and value: a revenue cycle patients notice, service lines that bring patients in, and margin from doing more of what works. Talk about cost only as removing waste that gets in the way of care.
<p>Real life example. A CFO candidate we prepared planned to lead with cost cutting and savings. A recent interview showed the CEO believed in growing experience and value per bed instead. The candidate changed how he walked in, and he got the offer.</p>	

ASK HIM

“What would you most like off your desk in the first six months?”

WHY YOU ARE ASKING

It shows you understand the job is to free him up for the board and strategy.

WHAT THE ANSWER TELLS YOU

His real priority list, in his own words.

WHAT TO DO WITH IT

Build your 90-day answer around it, and say so in your thank-you note.

04

Paul Ferraro [LinkedIn ↗](#)

Chief Operating Officer · strong input

YOUR INTERVIEW 10:15 · 45 minutes

CONFIRMED FACTS

COO at Meridian for six years. Led the opening of the new flagship campus and the Behavioral Health Unit. **Leadership Team: Paul Ferraro ↗**
Gulf Coast Business Journal ↗

WHO HE IS TO YOU

Your closest partner outside Finance. Supply Chain and Case Management report to the VP Finance, and his operators depend on both every day.

WHAT HE IS DECIDING

“Will finance help my operators, or slow them down?”

WHERE HE WILL PRESS

Supply chain during the new campus ramp-up, staffing costs, and how you explain numbers to clinical leaders.

YOUR ANGLE

You ran the finances of an inpatient behavioral health unit. You know what it takes to keep care going when the math is hard.

WHAT WE FOUND ON PAUL

INTERVIEWS & PODCASTS

Searched — nothing found.

SPEECHES & CONFERENCES	Panel at the state hospital association annual meeting on keeping care close to home in rural counties, and on staffing. State hospital association annual meeting ↗
ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRESS	Quoted at the campus opening about keeping care close to home, including behavioral health. Gulf Coast Business Journal ↗
LINKEDIN POSTS	Shares unit openings and frontline recognition. He often thanks support teams by name: supply chain, environmental services, facilities. LinkedIn ↗
BOARDS & COMMUNITY	Board member of a regional mental health nonprofit. Regional mental health nonprofit ↗
WHAT MATTERS TO HIM AT WORK	Care close to home, behavioral health, and the support teams that keep units running. Supply Chain is one of those teams, and it would report to you.

ASK HIM	<i>“Where does Supply Chain help your teams most today, and where does it slow them down?”</i>
WHY YOU ARE ASKING	Supply Chain would report to you. Asking him first shows you see him as a partner.
WHAT THE ANSWER TELLS YOU	Where the friction is between operations and finance right now.
WHAT TO DO WITH IT	Name one thing you would do about it in your first 90 days.

Karen Mills, MS, CHHR [LinkedIn ↗](#)

05

Executive Director, Human Resources · recommends · This is an HR / culture-and-values screen — prepare for fit, not finance

YOUR INTERVIEW 11:15 · 45 minutes

TITLE

Executive Director, Human Resources (promoted within the system after leading Team Member Relations — note the deliberate language: "Team Member Relations," not "Employee Relations").

[Leadership Team: Karen Mills ↗](#)

CREDENTIALS

MS from a major Southeastern university · CHHR (Certified Healthcare Human Resources) · certified in physician/provider recruitment.

[Certification directory ↗](#)

REPORTS TO

The VP & Chief Human Resources Officer. Her screen feeds a recommendation up to the CHRO and the hiring leader — in this case, the SVP/CFO. [Leadership Team: Karen Mills ↗](#)

CAREER BACKGROUND

Deep healthcare HR generalist across five health systems in four states — HR operations, employee relations, HRIS & compensation, physician recruitment, and HR business partnership. [LinkedIn ↗](#)

WHAT'S NOTABLE

She has served as a hospital COO earlier in her career — so she understands operations, the executive team, and what a finance leader does day-to-day, not just HR process. She will appreciate a leader who connects people and culture to operational results. [Community hospital press release ↗](#)

HER LENS

Team-member relations, employer branding, compensation, compliance, Lean healthcare. She thinks about culture, engagement, retention, and authentic fit — the people side of a senior hire.

WHAT WE FOUND ON KAREN

INTERVIEWS & PODCASTS

Searched — nothing found.

SPEECHES & CONFERENCES

Searched — nothing found.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRESS	A press release from her years as a hospital COO. Community hospital press release ↗
LINKEDIN POSTS	Shares team member recognition, hiring events and service anniversaries. She says “team members” every time, never “employees.” LinkedIn ↗
BOARDS & COMMUNITY	<i>Searched — nothing found.</i>
WHAT MATTERS TO HER AT WORK	How people are treated, whether they stay, and real fit. This is our read from her background and posts, since she does not speak publicly.

ASK HER	<i>“You moved from running a hospital to leading HR. What do you look for in a finance leader that someone who has only worked in finance might miss?”</i>
WHY YOU ARE ASKING	It respects her COO background and invites her to tell you her real checklist.
WHAT THE ANSWER TELLS YOU	Whether she cares most about how you treat people, how you explain numbers to clinicians, or how you work with operations.
WHAT TO DO WITH IT	Come back to it in your closing: “You mentioned [X]. Here is how I have done that.”

06	Thomas Reid LinkedIn ↗ VP Finance · retiring · asked for his view
YOUR INTERVIEW	12:15 · lunch
CONFIRMED FACTS	VP Finance at Meridian for 14 years; retiring this year. CPA. Built most of the current Finance leadership team. Leadership Team: Thomas Reid ↗ State Board of Accountancy ↗ VP Finance executive recruiting brochure ↗
WHO HE IS TO YOU	Not your future boss — the person you would replace. The CFO will ask what he thought of you.

WHAT HE IS DECIDING	“Will the team I built be in good hands?” — a question about how you treat people, not about your skill.
WHERE HE WILL PRESS	How you would get to know his team, and what you would keep before you change anything.
YOUR ANGLE	Respect what he built before you talk about changing it. Ask about it first.

WHAT WE FOUND ON THOMAS	
INTERVIEWS & PODCASTS	<i>Searched — nothing found.</i>
SPEECHES & CONFERENCES	<i>Searched — nothing found.</i>
ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRESS	His retirement announcement, in his own words: “What I am proudest of is the people. This team is ready for what comes next.” "Thomas Reid to retire after 14 years" ↗
LINKEDIN POSTS	Rarely posts. LinkedIn ↗
BOARDS & COMMUNITY	Treasurer of a local housing nonprofit. Local housing nonprofit ↗
WHAT MATTERS TO HIM AT WORK	His people. He wants to hand the team to someone who will take care of it.

ASK HIM	<i>“What do you wish you had two more years to finish?”</i>
WHY YOU ARE ASKING	It treats him as someone with a legacy. People retiring are rarely asked what they are proud of.
WHAT THE ANSWER TELLS YOU	His unfinished item is a likely first-year priority, from the person who knows the department best.
WHAT TO DO WITH IT	Mention it in your conversation with the CFO the next time you speak: “Thomas mentioned [X]. Here is how I would approach it.”

TIP · LUNCH IS STILL THE INTERVIEW

Thomas is not signing off on you, but he is a decision maker. Stay as prepared and professional at lunch as you were at 9:00. If he tells David “no,” that can change the whole day.

07

What They Say They Value — And What You Have

Their five values, with your angle on each. Have a real story for at least two.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Taking personal ownership of outcomes.

YOUR ANGLE: "I owned a \$23M turnaround — I don't hand problems off, I break them down and fix them. That's how I'd partner with the CFO on the new-campus margin work."

INTEGRITY

Doing the right thing, especially in finance.

YOUR ANGLE: transparent reporting, clean audits, honest communication with the CFO and the board.

COMPASSION

Care for patients and team members.

YOUR ANGLE: your behavioral health finance work — you made the math work so people who needed care could get it.

EXCELLENCE

Disciplined, repeatable performance.

YOUR ANGLE: a 15%+ operating margin sustained throughout your time as a hospital CFO; denial rates held under 1%.

SERVICE

Servant leadership; team-member first.

YOUR ANGLE: "My job as a finance leader isn't to be the 'no' person — it's to give operators and clinicians the financial confidence to serve more patients."

The five values are published on the system's mission page. [Mission, Vision & Values ↗](#)

08

Their Own Words — Cultural Language to Mirror

Pulled directly from their own recruiting materials

"Our values are our cultural compass. We strive to deliver on them in every encounter with patients, visitors, and each other."

Why it matters: "Cultural compass" is their phrase. Use it back to them, naturally, once.

"Culture is something we do, not something we say."

Why it matters: They view culture as an active discipline — not a wall poster. A finance leader who treats culture as something for show will not do well here.

"We are from this community and for this community — and always have been."

Why it matters: For a relocating candidate, this is the line Karen will probe hardest. The right answer: "I'm relocating to be part of this community, not just to work in it."

"Every dollar of margin is reinvested directly back into the system and the communities we serve."

Why it matters: Direct relevance to a finance leader. Use it: "Every dollar of margin I help protect goes back into mission. That's the finance work I want to be doing."

Every quote above is from the VP Finance recruiting brochure. [VP Finance executive recruiting brochure ↗](#)

09

What They Will Screen For

The people risks they are weighing — and who will weigh each one most

1

Relocation *Karen*

Will you truly relocate and commit, or is this a backup option? Address it head-on and positively — make it about the community.

2

Why a #2 Role? *Karen and David*

You have been a Regional CFO. This is VP Finance reporting to the SVP/CFO. You need a clear, confident answer that does not apologize (fully written out in Report 3).

3

Culture Match *Karen and Paul*

Will a big-system CFO embrace a team-member-first, locally rooted culture — or run it like a corporate finance shop? Show warmth, mission focus, and real interest in the community.

4

Working for a New CFO *David*

The SVP/CFO is about 12 months into the job and building his team. Can you genuinely be his #2 — supportive and complementary, not looking to take his job? This matters a great deal.

5 Longevity *Karen and Thomas*

A long career with two recent moves. Are you someone who stays? This organization values long tenure. Make it clear you are looking for a place to stay.

WHAT REASSURES THEM

A leader who talks about people and mission first, says "team members," tells a real compassion story, is genuinely excited to support the CFO's vision, and clearly wants to put down roots.

10

Where We Looked

Every place we searched for each person. What we found is in their own section.

PERSON	INTERVIEWS & PODCASTS	SPEECHES	PRESS	LINKEDIN POSTS	BOARDS & COMMUNITY
David Castellano	FOUND	FOUND	FOUND	FOUND	FOUND
Paul Ferraro	NONE FOUND	FOUND	FOUND	FOUND	FOUND
Karen Mills	NONE FOUND	NONE FOUND	FOUND	FOUND	NONE FOUND
Thomas Reid	NONE FOUND	NONE FOUND	FOUND	FOUND	FOUND

HOW WE SEARCHED

News and press releases, healthcare trade press, podcasts, conference and trade show agendas, nonprofit board listings, the organization's leadership pages and newsroom, and each person's LinkedIn posts and activity.

[Regional healthcare HR conference agenda ↗](#) [Podcast and news search ↗](#)

WORK LIFE ONLY

We only report what a person has said and done in public about their work. Family, personal accounts and private life are left out on purpose.

11

Who Decides

How the four conversations turn into a decision



WHY IT MATTERS

David makes the decision, but he will ask each of the other three what they thought. One person saying no can change everyone else's mind, so treat all four as decision makers. [Leadership Team: Karen Mills ↗](#) [Leadership Team ↗](#)

12

Real Points of Connection

Shared ground that is true, never manufactured

DAVID CASTELLANO

You both came to the Gulf Coast from larger health systems, and you have both been regional CFOs. [Leadership Team: David Castellano ↗](#)

PAUL FERRARO

He opened the Behavioral Health Unit; you have run the finances of one. You both know what it takes. [Leadership Team: Paul Ferraro ↗](#)

KAREN MILLS

She has run a hospital as COO. You have spent your career making hospital finance work for operators and clinicians. [Community hospital press release ↗](#)

THOMAS REID

You have both built finance teams that stayed together for years. Ask him how he did it.

Interview Playbook — Speaking Their Language

How to show up for four different conversations

David will go deep on finance. Paul will want to know how finance helps operations. Karen will ask why this organization, why now, and tell-me-about-a-time questions. Thomas will be listening for how you treat people. Every answer should show that you understand the mission and have the financial skill — and with Karen, in that order.

OPEN WITH MISSION	"This mission is the kind I want my finance work to serve. And the fact that every dollar of margin is reinvested locally? That's the financial model I believe in."
MIRROR THE LANGUAGE	"Team members" (never staff). Mission before margin. Say the values by name. "Cultural compass." "From this community."
TELL-A-TIME (COMPASSION)	"I oversaw the finances of a 50-bed inpatient behavioral health unit with its own ER. Behavioral health rarely pays for itself — but it's mission-critical. I learned to fund care that matters even when the math is hard."
WHAT NOT TO DO	Don't lead with cost-cutting. Don't sound like someone brought in only to cut costs. Don't suggest you'd want the CFO's job. Don't treat the HR interview or the lunch as a formality — every one of these conversations carries real weight.
CLOSE WITH COMMITMENT	"I want to be part of this community and this team for the long term. The CFO is building something — I want to help him build it."

Questions to Ask, by Person

Pick two for each person — never ask two people the same question

ASK	THE QUESTION
David Castellano	What would you most like off your desk in the first six months?
David Castellano	How will you judge the new campus margin recovery a year from now?

ASK	THE QUESTION
Paul Ferraro	Where does Supply Chain help your teams most today, and where does it slow them down?
Paul Ferraro	What do your operators need from Finance that they are not getting today?
Karen Mills	What do the most successful leaders who have joined Meridian from outside the region have in common?
Karen Mills	How does the organization keep the "cultural compass" alive during a year as busy as the new campus opening?
Thomas Reid	What do you wish you had two more years to finish?
Thomas Reid	Who on your team should I make sure to get to know first?

TIP

Write each person's two questions on the notepad you bring, with their name at the top. Asking a question you wrote down ahead of time shows preparation, and it keeps you calm if your mind goes blank.

15

Research Sources — Check Our Work

Every source behind this report, with a link to each one

Every claim in a VSG brief is sourced — nothing is invented. Where a person's approach is read from their background rather than their own words, we say so. Here is every source we used for this report, so you can see it for yourself.

#	SOURCE	WHAT WE USED IT FOR
COMPANY WEBSITE		
1	Meridian Health System — Leadership Team: David Castellano ↗	Title, start date, education
2	Meridian Health System — Leadership Team: Paul Ferraro ↗	Title, tenure, areas he oversees

#	SOURCE	WHAT WE USED IT FOR
3	Meridian Health System — Leadership Team: Karen Mills ↗	Title, reporting line, credentials
4	Meridian Health System — Leadership Team: Thomas Reid ↗	Title and tenure of the retiring VP Finance
5	Meridian newsroom — "Thomas Reid to retire after 14 years" ↗	His retirement announcement and his own words about his team
6	Meridian Health System — Mission, Vision & Values ↗	Mission, vision, values and the "cultural compass" language
7	Meridian Health System — Leadership Team ↗	Names, titles and backgrounds of senior leaders
COMPANY MATERIALS		
8	VP Finance executive recruiting brochure ↗	Role scope, culture language, impact data
PUBLIC RECORDS		
9	State Board of Accountancy — CPA license lookup ↗	Confirms CPA licenses for the CFO and the VP Finance
10	Regional food bank — board of directors listing ↗	His community board service (finance committee)
11	Regional mental health nonprofit — board of directors listing ↗	His board service in behavioral health
12	Certification directory — Certified Healthcare Human Resources (CHHR) ↗	Confirms her CHHR credential
13	Local housing nonprofit — board of directors listing ↗	His community board service (treasurer)
NEWS		
14	Healthcare Finance News — "Meridian names new SVP and CFO" ↗	CFO appointment and background
15	Healthcare finance podcast — episode with David Castellano ↗	His views on margin, growth and value per bed (the key quote)
16	Regional healthcare finance chapter conference — session by David Castellano ↗	His talk on the revenue cycle as part of the patient experience

#	SOURCE	WHAT WE USED IT FOR
17	Gulf Coast Business Journal — "Meridian opens \$600M flagship campus" ↗	New campus cost, opening date, Behavioral Health Unit
18	State hospital association annual meeting — panel with Paul Ferraro ↗	His remarks on rural access to care and staffing
19	Gulf Coast Business Journal — campus opening coverage quoting Paul Ferraro ↗	His public comments on the new campus
20	Community hospital press release — announces Karen Mills as COO (earlier in her career) ↗	Her earlier role as a hospital COO
21	Regional healthcare HR conference agenda — speaker list ↗	Searched for talks or panels by her
22	Podcast and news search — "Karen Mills" + Meridian ↗	Searched for published interviews or articles
PEOPLE		
23	LinkedIn — David Castellano, SVP & CFO ↗	Background and prior system
24	LinkedIn — Paul Ferraro, Chief Operating Officer ↗	Career history (profile link only; facts confirmed elsewhere)
25	LinkedIn — Karen Mills, Executive Director, Human Resources ↗	Career history and credentials (profile link only; facts confirmed elsewhere)
26	LinkedIn — Thomas Reid, VP Finance (retiring) ↗	Tenure of the person retiring
27	LinkedIn — David Castellano, posts and activity ↗	What he shares publicly about his work
28	LinkedIn — Paul Ferraro, posts and activity ↗	What he shares publicly about his work
29	LinkedIn — Karen Mills, posts and activity ↗	What she shares publicly about her work

Sample report: Meridian Health System and its web addresses are made up. In a real report every link opens the live source, and each one is checked before the report is sent.