

# Innovation in Aerospace

## The Digital Age

### Feature Story

## Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement at ATS

Aviation Technical Services (ATS) provides a broad and growing portfolio of technical services in MRO, Engineering, Component Services and Parts Development worldwide. Since its founding in 1970, ATS has become one of the largest independent MROs in North America serving over 100 airline and OEM customers globally. The company's growth is largely due to its culture of continuous improvement, its ability to anticipate customer needs, and its capacity to empower innovation in a very competitive market.

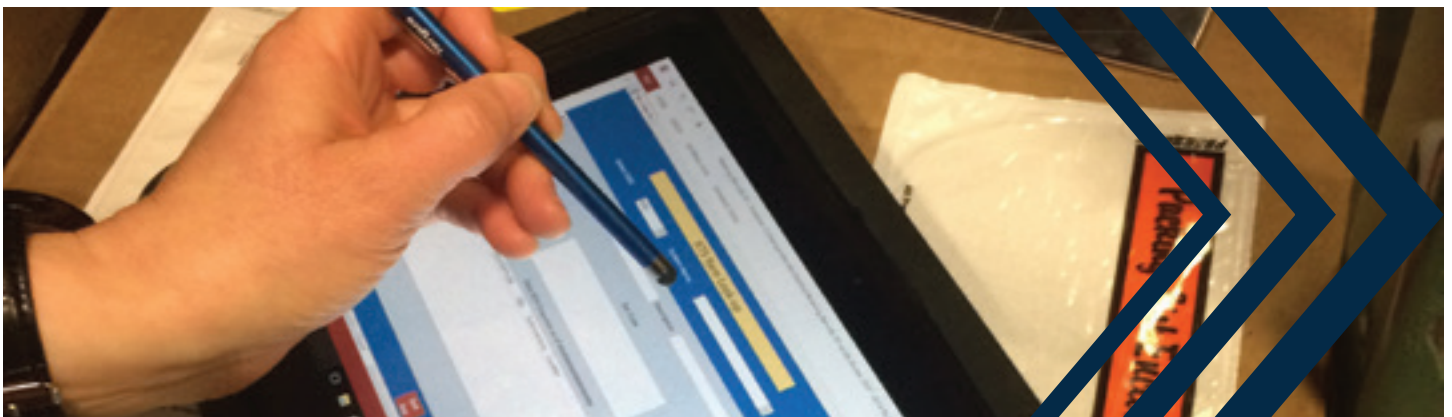
The MRO industry is faced with cost pressures such as rising wages, offshoring, and decreasing turnaround time requirements from OEMs and commercial customers. In the face of these pressures, ATS has consistently made process improvements and used technology applications to deliver higher efficiency and industry-leading turnaround times. This commitment to continuous improvement is driven throughout the organization.

In fact, ATS was recognized for its achievements in this area in 2016. ATS received Aviation Week's MRO of the Year Award (Leading Independent Organization) for a span time reduction program called Velocity. A turnkey technical fleet integration service, Velocity uses technology and standard work improvements that enable our customers to accelerate capacity growth through introduction of mid-life aircraft to their fleet more quickly. Through efficiency and innovation, ATS decreased turnaround times for our customer Southwest Airlines by 65 percent, and they now benchmark their other MROs off of our span times.

Velocity was so successful for customers in reducing waste and increasing efficiency that an investment was made to take this program to the next level, expand it across the organization and embed it in the company culture. ATS decided to expand this program to other aircraft types, including Airbus, and across the four business units by creating an Operational Excellence team. Operational Excellence means that improvements are being made throughout the entire value stream in order to standardize the process improvements, make them predictable so that we can commit to the span time reductions, allowing our customers to capture the benefit of aircraft returning to revenue production faster.

I lead the Operational Excellence team, which is a little different than a lean office because we deal with the people aspect more directly and purposefully than simple lean conversion. Its goal is that each and every employee possesses the ability to seek value in what they do every day to create value to the customer. Where the value chain breaks down, we want employees enabled to initiate and take action to fix it. By putting people first, ATS is empowering innovation on every level.

Operational Excellence requires that all employees look at this from the same mindset, so everything is measured, tracked and shared. ATS currently uses digital tools such as tablets for inventory management, electronic work orders and quality control sheets which gives employees the information they need at their fingertips versus having to walk back and forth to a stationary computer. Visual tools, such as large LED screens, give ATS the capacity to view all of the work that's going on





*“Our ability to execute operational excellence across the company will allow for future growth as we become a one-stop shop for customers.”*

*“ATS currently uses digital tools such as tablets for inventory management, electronic work orders and quality control sheets which gives employees the information they need at their fingertips...”*




and displays the work flow metrics in real time. Barcode scanners are also being used to increase efficiency. Using these tools ensures that ATS is embracing the efficiencies enabled by the digital age so that we are always delivering a quality product in the most efficient manner.

As we look to the future, we will use technology and innovation to do the things that don't require that brainpower of human intelligence so that we can keep our people focused entirely on value-added activities. A simple example might be how we get kits up in the airplane to the mechanic. ATS may use robots to move product around versus a person – which frees up employees to add value in another way. And just as importantly, this maximizes employee safety by minimizing twisting, turning and lifting. This efficiency is passed on to our customers and helps them create revenue by returning their assets to service faster.

Our ability to execute operational excellence across the company will allow for future growth as we become a one-stop shop for customers. ATS is known for our expertise and ability to meet any challenge on the B737 aircraft because we've been working on them for years, but our success comes from taking that knowledge, turning it into best practices, and using innovation and automation to expand it across the company. Being a one-stop shop not only allows us to offer a breadth of capabilities, but also it offers control so that we know what we are committing to so that we can meet those commitments. Additionally, our goal would be to provide those services in a way that it is cost-competitive and of the highest quality.

Last year, CEO Matt Yerbic was recognized as AFA's Executive of the Year because of his leadership within the aerospace industry and at ATS. Under Matt's leadership, ATS has experienced rapid growth and plans to continue

on the same path by embracing the operational excellence program. We are taking what works well, continuing to improve it, and expanding it across the company. It's a cycle of continuous improvement. All employees feel a part of the momentum to deliver increased efficiency, higher quality, and better customer service – for both internal and external customers. Technology will continue to evolve, but we will be right there with a new process to introduce it, and then pass those efficiencies on to our customer. We are playing to win, not playing to not lose. The whole plan and transformational steps are outlined on the walls in my office. But that's not the secret. The secret sauce is in the people and how we do it. 



**Carla Bowman, Senior Director - Operational Excellence**

With ATS since 2017, Carla has worked in Aerospace for 40 years and has an extensive background in OEM, fabrication, MRO operations and supply chain. Carla has held positions from the shop floor to executive leadership, driving continuous improvement throughout all levels of the organization in order to improve competitiveness and set new benchmarks for efficiency. Above all else, Carla believes in work/life balance and making each day count.