

# Basic training

A better understanding of the business helps employee teams work smarter, safer and more productively

By Marcy Woodhull and  
photo by Alan Marts



Spencer McDonald, a facilitator for Employee Involvement teams at Boeing Commercial Airplanes, is helping aircraft mechanics learn the basics of the business. In this *Frontiers* series that profiles employees talking about their jobs and the way their work fits into Boeing's goals, McDonald explains how he helps these teams tap into the best that employees have to offer.

**F**ive years ago I was working as a 737 mechanic and decided to begin taking Lean classes, attending Accelerated Improvement Workshops and learning all I could about the broader Lean+ principles. It was a choice I made to do something different, to do something at Boeing benefiting both the shop-floor mechanics and the company.

Since then, I've seen the advantages and positive results that one Lean+ concept—Employee Involvement teams—can bring to the workplace.

As a facilitator for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)/Boeing Joint Programs on Boeing's 777 program, I'm working with mechanics to help them gain a better understanding of business basics, establishing and posting metrics, and assisting teams with Employee Involvement tools.

At a kickoff meeting in June, Doug Kight, then Boeing Commercial Airplanes vice president of Human Resources, and Tom Wroblewski, president of IAM District 751, together gave a powerful message about management's and labor's commitment to the new Business Basics program. It grew out of contract negotiations in 2008 between Boeing and IAM District 751.

With the program, we aim to tap into the heart and soul of the best mechanics in the world to help them continue to improve productivity. I believe the Boeing IAM members are the rock stars of airplane builders. The 20-week Business Basics program teaches employees about their internal and external

customers, business risks and mitigations, competitors, and how they all fit in the Boeing system, from the sale to delivery of an airplane to the customer. The final modules are related to quality, cost, delivery, morale and safety. Teams also learn how to create metrics that matter for them. The goal is to enable teams to manage their piece of the daily business by using the metrics.

Before joining this program, I was the Employee Involvement lead for the Boeing Fabrication Interiors Responsibility Center in Everett, Wash., for two years. We had a number of successes at the center, and I learned that success with employee involvement, culture change or improvements begins and ends with leadership at all levels. ■

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