



Texas aerospace plant sees flow benefits from Boeing instruction

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Photo Etch, a leading aerospace manufacturing company, is one of only three Dallas/Fort Worth-area companies selected to date this year to go through the Boeing Company's Accelerated Improvement Workshop (AIW). After the AIW, Photo Etch saw an amazing 61 percent reduction in its people travel on the plant floor and a 74 percent reduction in its part travel.

Under the program, 10 key Boeing staffers, which included the company's entire Dallas/Fort Worth and Texas IDS Supplier Quality team, met for one week with 18 Photo Etch employees to implement a work cell within Photo Etch's machine shop. Before the workshop, Photo Etch mapped and measured its people flow and product flow from the receipt of raw material to the anneal process. Photo Etch was so committed to the workshop's success that it shut down the machine shop for an entire week and assigned almost 25 percent of the company's 75 person staff to this project.

The purpose of AIW was to improve product flow, as well as place the responsibility for quality with the operators and eliminate a non-value-added inspection step, and streamline the flow of machined parts to material control.

The improvements were indeed impressive: Part travel was reduced from 672.89 miles to 173.38 miles per year, while people travel decreased from 1,840.18 miles to 709.67 miles per year.

According to Randy Fry, president and CEO of Photo Etch, "It was an honor to be selected by Boeing to participate in this program. The efficiencies we have achieved in our machine shop will bring tremendous savings to Boeing and, indeed, all our valued customers. We plan to use the techniques learned during this workshop to implement our own improvement workshops in the coming years."

Robert Smith, procurement quality specialist and co-leader for the AIW event for Boeing, said Photo Etch was selected both because it is a strategically important supplier to Boeing and because of its past performance and value to the company. In addition, Photo Etch enthusiastically embraced the goals of the program and was willing to make the changes needed to become one of Boeing's High Performing Suppliers, he said.

"Boeing recognizes the need to develop a high-performing supply chain in order to meet the challenges of a globalized market," Smith said. "We cannot hope to achieve a competitive edge in this industry, military or commercial, without having a supply chain that is lean, efficient and affordable. Photo Etch will be a valuable partner in our efforts to maintain that edge."

Photo Etch designs and manufactures displays and control panels used for military and commercial airborne and ground communications, as well as navigation systems. The company also manufactures flight simulation and training components. One of Photo Etch's specialties is night vision technology for airborne military operations. Photo Etch's client base includes major defense contractors like Boeing, Lockheed-Martin and Grumman Aerospace, as well as U.S. Department of Defense agencies like the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy. Founded in 1960, the company follows ISO 9001 and SAE AS9100 quality standards, as well as a company-wide lean manufacturing initiative. The firm operates from a 50,000-square-foot facility in Fort Worth, Texas.