

# SMALLTALK

about big ideas

## Change for Better

**By Jennifer Boykin**  
President, Newport News Shipbuilding

The United States Navy is counting on us.

It's a fact I was reminded of last week while standing with Navy leadership on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. We were gathered for the island landing celebration, and, Rear Admiral Roy Kelley, commander of Naval Air Force Atlantic, said something that made me stop and think about how tremendous our responsibility truly is.

He said, "We need our carriers. We need them because no other weapons system in existence or on the drawing board today can deploy and redeploy with the responsiveness, multidimensional might and the inherent battle space awareness of a full-size, nuclear-powered aircraft carrier with its embarked air wing. Crisis after crisis, president after president, they've asked, 'Where are my carriers?'"

Whether engaged in a humanitarian effort or protecting our borders, our Navy cannot perform its mission without the aircraft carriers and submarines we build at Newport News Shipbuilding.

Our nation faces great challenges, and it is on all of us to ensure our Navy is equipped with an operational fleet. Our country is in a race with our peer competitors and we play a vital role in ensuring that America maintains the lead. We are no longer in a position to be comfortable with the status quo. As shipbuilders, we must continually seek opportunities for improvement.

Our nation needs us.

So, how can we build ships faster and more economically without compromising capability, safety and our company values?

It's a question we ask ourselves every single day.

*John F. Kennedy* (CVN 79), the aircraft carrier on which I stood with Rear Adm. Kelley and other Navy leaders last week, is a great example. The carrier new construction team is working in every possible way to optimize lessons learned from the building of *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN 78) to construct the second ship of the class. As of two weeks ago, the ship was about three months ahead of schedule using 18 percent less man hours to get the job done.

CVN 79's improvements are significant, but improvements don't have to be the size of an aircraft carrier to make a big difference.

Just ask the Structural Fabrication and Assembly and Industrial Engineering teams. The shipbuilders, who represent all levels of the company and multiple departments, are seeking ways to reduce construction time on *Virginia*-class submarine modules so that they can do their vital part. They are using the Kaizen approach, a Lean philosophy focused on continuously improving processes by identifying and eliminating waste.

Kaizen, a Japanese word that means "change for better," is about bringing together a diverse group of people, giving them a problem and getting out of their way. It's about turning up the volume on our shipbuilders' voices and removing their frustrations.

This approach is also leading to positive results. In the Ring Module Shop, the teams have come up with a solution to reduce a 10-month build cycle on a submarine module to less than eight months. Another Kaizen meeting resulted in identifying 33 non-value-added welding steps that were reduced to two.

Regardless of the approach we take to improvement, the learning that is taking place along the way is making us smarter, better shipbuilders.

And that's exactly what our Navy—and our country—deserves. I challenge each of you to continue asking questions—to constantly challenge the status quo. Because if we give it everything we've got, we will succeed in helping our company not only lead the race, but "change for better."

