

Boeing CEO Stabilizes Company but Faces New Growth Challenges

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One year after stepping into the role amid Boeing's deepest crisis in decades, CEO Kelly Ortberg stabilizes the aerospace giant and now confronts critical challenges ahead. He takes charge following a mid-air panel blowout on a 737 MAX aircraft, reputational damage, and a nationwide strike, and he must now guide Boeing toward sustained profitability, production increases, and competitive recovery.

Ortberg meets Boeing at a fragile moment. His predecessor steps down after a mid-air panel incident on the new 737 MAX in early 2024 and past MAX crashes haunt the company's reputation. Amid these setbacks, Ortberg brings a renewed focus on safety, quality, and transparency from the factory floor upward.

Since taking command, the company has achieved notable milestones. Boeing improves efficiency and quality on the 737 line, resolves its legal disputes, including a settlement with the Department of Justice, and secures major aircraft contracts. It also wins the U.S. Air Force's first sixth-generation fighter contract, the F-47. The company's stock has jumped 39 percent over the past year, reflecting rising confidence as 737 output recovers.

Yet obstacles remain. Boeing continues to lose money and trails Airbus in single-aisle aircraft market share. The company carries significant debt, integrates its largest supplier Spirit AeroSystems, and lags on certification for its newest jets including the 777-9 and the MAX7 and MAX10 variants. Its defense and space divisions face ongoing operational struggles.

Ortberg aims to ramp up 737 MAX production to pre-crisis levels and eventually introduce a purpose-built successor. Industry analysts caution that the challenge is steep, one asks whether Boeing will reclaim its status as a top-tier manufacturer or settle for mediocrity.

Ortberg also faces a workforce divided by strikes. Last year's seven-week walkout by 33,000 union employees deepens internal tensions. More recently, a separate strike by 3,200 jet builders adds to the operational burden.

Ortberg brings deep aerospace experience and a decisive leadership style to his role. Known for candid problem-solving, he introduces values like “Give a damn!” to foster accountability. His presence on the factory floor earns praise from Alaskan Airlines’ leadership for boosting morale and oversight.

He also navigates complex political terrain, balancing criticism from President Donald Trump over Air Force One delays alongside joint appearances celebrating major orders. Ortberg handles volatile trade policies effectively while lobbying for support from the FAA and lawmakers to certify new aircraft and develop the F-47.

Ortberg remains measured and steady under pressure. As he puts it: “It is just one day at a time. Improve performance, address our challenges, restore trust, and build confidence with our customers.”