



An ATAC Client Success Story



AUBURN

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

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Aflac has partnered with the Auburn Technical Assistance Center (ATAC) of Auburn University's College of Business to help.

Since mid 2007, ATAC has facilitated a series of training for Aflac personnel in the continuous improvement areas of Lean and Six Sigma. The program has involved Aflac participation in ATAC's regular open enrollment courses as well as ATAC trainers conducting seminars through Aflac's internal employee professional development program at its corporate headquarters in Columbus, Ga.



## Aflac finds ATAC training practical and beneficial

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Aflac is a Fortune 500 firm that has been named for 11 consecutive years as one of the "Fortune" magazine's *100 Best Companies to Work For*. It has a AA rating from Standard & Poor's and boasts more



*ATAC Lean Specialists Terri Lawrence and Rick Battye describe the "House of Lean" to Aflac employees during the insurance giant's Lean Seminar held in February for its Claims Division. Building blocks in the "House" example are the tools and processes used in continuous improvement.*

than \$65 billion in assets and generates more than \$15.4 billion in annual revenues. It is without question, a strong and solid company -- yet -- Aflac managers say ATAC assistance has helped the company make greater gains in instilling and fostering its customer-focused business philosophy throughout the organization.

"We are customer focused, but we are not a Lean or Six Sigma organization in the typical sense," says Joe Smith, second vice president for Business Architecture at Aflac.

"ATAC has helped us to learn how to apply Lean, Six Sigma and other continuous improvement tools and techniques throughout our operations very efficiently and very effectively."

Lean and Six Sigma help a company to identify and eliminate unnecessary activities and processes that slow production and create waste. Using these continuous improvement systems, companies can increase production, process speed and agility, and reduce costs, simply by focusing more on those business aspects that matter most. Companies using these techniques in both operational and transactional industries more effectively keep costs down while maintaining a high quality standard.

ATAC has facilitated training in both basic principles and in-depth Lean Continuous Improvement; Six Sigma Green Belt and Black Belt; and has conducted special multi-day training courses through Aflac's internal employee professional development program. Those

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***-- Bob Ottman, Senior Vice President, Claims***

courses have included Value Stream Mapping, Problem Solving and Lean Office.

“It has been some of the most practical and applicable training that we have found,” said Jason Goodroe, second vice president, Aflac Benefit Services.

During February, Aflac engaged ATAC to provide continuous improvement training and application techniques to some 130 employees from its corporate offices in Columbus as well as its New York operations.

“Most of our classes are conducted in small groups of 8 to 20 participants,” said ATAC Director Henry Burdg. “The class size is small so that we can provide individual attention and hands-on exercises and simulations throughout the training to enforce the principles and lessons presented. We pride ourselves on being agile and client oriented, so when Aflac asked if we could deliver a two-day seminar to a large audience of 130, we went to work on a way to train a large group while still affording the practical, hands-on enforcement features.”

Aflac calls the event a huge success.

“It is awesome training,” said Bob Ottman, senior vice president of Aflac’s Claims Division. “The interaction and participation and keeping everyone engaged are excellent.”

Debbie Simmons, senior business analyst with Aflac’s Administration and Technical Support group added, “It is the best training I have participated in during my more than 18 years with Aflac. It is very thorough and easy to understand.”

Smith adds that the practical applications, using actual Aflac business examples in the hands-on exercises, separates ATAC’s training from other programs.

“The extra hands-on, using our own business examples, made it stick,” Smith said.

Aflac managers also are seeing benefits in quality improvement – particularly among internal customers, one department to another.

“This has made a huge increase in our overall transactional quality,” Goodroe adds. “We are finding that our internal customer service among our own departments gets consistently better as we apply these tools and techniques.”

Employee morale and job satisfaction are other noticeable improvements.

“This training is giving our employees the empowerment to question the efficiency of processes and the tools and knowledge to make improvements,” Smith said. “We now can speak a common language about waste and value-added issues. We are seeing a broad culture shift as a result. We are becoming more process centered and customer focused regarding our services and timely response. The training and our application of it are making us better stewards.”

### **Impact Summary**

**Evaluations conducted at the end of Aflac’s two-day Lean Seminar report such impact comments as:**

- “ATAC has helped us to learn how to apply Lean, Six Sigma and other continuous improvement tools and techniques throughout our operations very efficiently and very effectively.”
- “It has been some of the most practical and applicable training that we have found.”
- “It is the best training I have participated in during my more than 18 years with Aflac. It is very thorough and easy to understand.”
- “The extra hands-on, using our own business examples, made it stick.”
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*Auburn Technical Assistance Center was established in 1976 and is an affiliate of the Alabama Technology Network and an Economic Development Administration University Center. As an Outreach arm of the Auburn University College of Business, ATAC provides business and technical assistance, customized training, and consultation in implementing value-added strategies to manufacturers and other businesses, not-for-profit organizations and government agencies in Alabama and the Southeast. SOAR is an ATAC publication. Direct inquiries and questions to Mitch Emmons, Sr. Outreach Assoc., 334.844.3881, emmonmb@auburn.edu.*

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