

ACHIEVING SUCCESS AMID CHALLENGES: MEET SPECIAL MISSIONS PROGRAM MANAGER POLINA BALL



After months of research, engineering and assembly, a one-of-a-kind Cessna Turbo Stationair HD piston aircraft built by Textron Aviation was finally ready for service at its home base in the Middle East.

The aircraft, also known as a Cessna 206, was set to operate as a special missions' aircraft, outfitted with custom technology and equipment. Program manager Polina Ball led the development of the aircraft, which had to be flown and delivered to the customer in their home country.

But when COVID-19 brought the world to a halt in early 2020, Polina and her team were also at a standstill.

For a single-engine piston aircraft like the Turbo Stationair HD to make the nearly 8,000-mile-trek from Kansas, it would have to complete multiple re-fuel stops across different countries. Routine paperwork and flight plans now had to be evaluated through the uncertainty of the pandemic and the delays it was triggering.

“Every country had different COVID restrictions at the time, and it was a challenge navigating through all of that,” she said. “I also had to deal with a closed down world and figure out how to deliver airplanes when customers couldn’t physically be here [in Wichita].”

With only pilots allowed to travel, Polina and the Wichita team overseeing the sale and delivery stayed behind to brainstorm a new plan to help the customer receive the Cessna 206. They called on a Middle East based former regional service partner to support the customer upon the arrival of the aircraft.

The mission was a success and the Turbo Stationair HD was delivered on schedule. Despite the unprecedented challenges, Polina recalls the project as one of her most rewarding.

“I had a lot of support, but for this delivery I was the lead, and it was up to me to make the decisions during a confusing time for everyone,” she said. “We persevered and got through it, and it was a big win.”



From Eastern Europe to the Air Capital

Polina is no stranger to the hurdles of logistics and regulations. A native of Ukraine, she arrived in Kansas as a recipient of a Department of State scholarship that invites international students to attend high school in the U.S.

She attended college as an international student, simultaneously navigating job searching with the complex world of student visas and residency status requirements.

“It was hard to apply for jobs in the U.S. with a student visa because I didn’t have a green card yet,” Polina said.

She was ultimately inspired to consider Textron Aviation careers by her husband, who was an employee.

“He has an aviation background, and I saw him really enjoy his job,” Polina said. “I knew I wanted to do great things just like him.”

She began her Textron Aviation journey as a contracts coordinator, and in her first role she set out to absorb the company's culture of trust, collaboration and innovation by honing in on several skills, among them:

- Learning the building blocks of project management
- Engaging with colleagues familiar with the work she was doing
- Establishing partnerships to grow her network

They were essential skills needed to eventually transfer into a proposal account manager role with Textron Aviation Special Missions, the company's division focused on building aircraft for non-commercial operations like air ambulance, search and rescue and flight inspection.

“They're not planes you order from a website,” Polina said. “Every proposal is unique because you're creating an aircraft from scratch for a specific mission.”

Today, Polina is a program manager, and it's her job to oversee an aircraft's build process through its different milestones — from installing FAA-approved equipment to painting and ultimately handing the keys to the customer — all while keeping the program on schedule.

Sometimes, it can take years for a custom-built special missions' aircraft to go from concept to reality. It makes the result worth celebrating, she said.

“You get to share the excitement with the customer and when they finally get to see an aircraft, not just a concept on paper. It's one of the best parts of my job.”

— Polina Ball, Program Manager, Textron Aviation Special Missions

The Best of Both Worlds

To thrive even amid hardships — whether it's a global pandemic or a delayed aircraft part — Polina advises new professionals to remain organized, calling it one of her job's most important requirements.

“When you’re organized, it’s easier to make decisions quickly and thoughtfully,” says Polina.

With an MBA, psychology major and a minor in business, Polina views her education and career path as accessible to others, especially those with curious minds.

“I always say I got the best of both worlds; I deal with people and business every day,” she said. “And I’m always asking questions and tapping into decades of experience to learn from people who’ve seen so much more than I have.”

Polina also credits Textron Aviation for nurturing her professional growth and allowing her to take on new opportunities within the company. She’s currently on track to earn her Project Management Professional (PMP) certification and earning her pilot’s license is now on her radar.

“Through this job and my husband, I also learned to love aviation,” she said. “It changed my whole life path.”

To join Polina and learn more about Textron Aviation jobs, [explore the latest job openings](#).

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