

Pride in Motion - Tony Gathogo, the Architect of Kenya Airways' Global Network

From Nairobi, at the heart of Kenya Airways' operations, one leader carries the responsibility of keeping an entire network across the globe in motion. As the Head of Domestic and International Airports, Mr Tony Gathogo does not just oversee destinations, he manages the people, systems and decisions that ensure every Kenya Airways touchpoint reflects the Pride of Africa.

His journey, however, did not begin at the top. Before his current role as head of station managers, he served on the ground starting off in Mombasa (MBA), managing stations, navigating daily operational demands and leading teams through the unpredictable and intense rhythm of aviation. Those earlier years shaped his understanding of the job beyond theory to grounding his strategic approach in lived experience. "You can't lead stations effectively if you've never stood where they stand," he reflects. "The pressure, the pace, the responsibility, it stays with you."

Today, that lived experience defines his leadership style. Managing multiple stations across diverse regions requires a lot more than just oversight. It demands alignment. Each station operates within its own unique reality, i.e, different regulations, cultures, passenger expectations, etc., yet all must deliver a consistent Kenya Airways experience. "It's about balance," he explains. "You need standardization, but you also need to respect the uniqueness of each market."

For excellence across the network, Gathogo simplifies his leadership expectations into a clear **ABC framework**. **Attitude**, emphasizing that resilience and adaptability define a leader when things go wrong; **Business Knowledge**, ensuring a non-negotiable, deep understanding of the highly regulated aviation industry; and **Customer Obsession**, where every decision from the boardroom to the boarding gate prioritizes the passenger experience. Guided by a philosophy of servant leadership, he views his primary role as enabling his teams to perform at their peak, ensuring the Pride promise is upheld even in locations where he is not physically present.

However, unpredictability remains constant across the network of stations as aviation rarely offers perfect days. From airspace disruptions in regions like the Middle East to weather events, geopolitical reasons and system outages, challenges often emerge without warning and sometimes all at once. In such moments, leadership is tested not by control, but by clarity especially in priorities.

"You prioritize what impacts safety and continuity first," he says. "Then it becomes about coordination and ensuring every station is informed, aligned and supported in real time," he adds. It is a delicate balance between speed and precision, where decisions made in Nairobi can affect passengers and operations thousands of miles away.

To stay ahead, Kenya Airways is increasingly embedding **Artificial Intelligence** into its operational DNA. For Gathogo, **AI** is a tool for disruption management and customer insight. "It improves visibility across the network and supports quicker decisions," he notes. "But at the end of the day, aviation is a people business. Technology supports us, but people make the calls."

One of the most defining aspects of his role is managing complexity without losing sight of people. Behind every delay, diversion or disruption is a team working under pressure. “Station managers are at the frontline. My role is to make sure they feel supported, especially on the hardest days,” he points out. “Because when they are empowered, the entire network performs.”

Yet, in all the complexity of operations, one principle remains constant: the human touch. “We are in a global industry, but what sets us apart is how we connect with people,” he says. “That’s something every station, no matter where it is, must carry.” Each day, as flights depart and arrive across the Kenya Airways network, his work is rarely visible to passengers. But its impact is felt in every seamless connection, every resolved disruption, every moment of care delivered on the ground.

As the industry moves toward a greener future, Gathogo views sustainability through the lens of Project Kifaru, the airline's transformation pillar, by implementing tangible steps such as introducing electric ground support equipment and increasing the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF).

“Sustainability is no longer optional; it is central to the long-term viability of the industry,” he asserts. “It’s about balance, driving operational excellence and financial discipline while advancing environmental responsibility. Without a strong, resilient business, none of our other ambitions are achievable.”

For Gathogo, this responsibility extends to the people and industry dimensions of African aviation. He believes in the deliberate transfer of tacit knowledge through mentorship and coaching to close critical skills gaps. By building this capacity, Kenya Airways strengthens not just its own stations, but the aviation ecosystem across the continent.

“Stronger aviation systems unlock trade, tourism, and economic opportunity,” Gathogo adds. “Ultimately, sustainability is about the legacy we leave—stronger institutions, empowered people, and an industry that grows responsibly to align with global standards. That is what will define the airlines that endure.”

Despite the high-stakes nature of his role, Gathogo finds his balance in simplicity, citing his passions as an avid reader and swimmer alongside cherished family time as the essential spaces where he truly *switches off* to recharge.

In aviation, it is not just aircrafts that keep the world connected. For Gathogo it is people, leadership, and the quiet contribution of those who ensure everything works, everywhere, all at once serving the continued trust of Kenya Airways customers. And from Nairobi, at the center of it all, that responsibility continues, steady, unseen, and always in motion.

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