



FOOD
SAFETY
FOCUS



Developing a Culture of Food Safety

Restaurants Are Big Business, With Bigger Responsibility



The last few years have been turbulent times for the restaurant industry. When the COVID-19 pandemic touched down on US soil in early 2020, restaurants and bars were some of the first establishments forced to turn away customers and shut their doors.

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forecast for the year

During the peak of government mandated lockdown orders, more than 8 million eating and drinking place employees were laid off or furloughed and more than 110,000 dining establishments closed for the long term or for good. By the end of 2020, total restaurant sales were \$240 billion below the National Restaurant Association's pre-pandemic forecast for the year.



Despite the circumstances, the industry did experience an upswing in 2021. As mandates began to lift and COVID numbers began to fall, restaurants opened their doors once again—this time armed with streamlined online ordering systems and contactless payment methods. Restaurant industry sales were \$799 billion in 2021, and although this was down \$65 billion from 2019's pre-pandemic levels, **the industry has been making a slow but steady recovery since.**



One of the more positive effects the pandemic has had on restaurants is increased cleaning and sanitation measures to help combat the spread of pathogens.

Although the industry has been championing food safety and cleanliness for decades, the pandemic has kicked cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting measures into high gear. And restaurant cleanliness is something more and more restaurant goers are taking note of.

Reports show that consumers are placing a much greater value on restaurant cleanliness and sanitation as a visit criterion, often more so than menu item prices.¹



However, among other concerns, foodborne illnesses are still a serious issue for the restaurant industry. The CDC estimates that each year, [48 million people get sick from a foodborne illness](#).² The food industry has undertaken scores of safety measures to combat the spread of foodborne illnesses and pathogens in recent years. In particular, the restaurant sector has turned to employee training and education as a critical conduit to deliver safer, quality meals to consumers.

In annual industry surveys, restaurant operators voice a commitment to creating food safety cultures in their workplaces.

¹Klein. (2021, March 9). Guests Will Spend Twice as Much with Clean Restaurants.

²CDC. (2020, March 18). Foodborne Germs and Illnesses.



When food safety procedures are diligently followed and rooted in the workplace, reduced error rates, increased customer satisfaction, heightened employee engagement, and other measures of success are achieved.



Fostering a winning food safety culture, however, is no small task. A set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that constitute an entire organization doesn't fall into place overnight. Reflection, planning, and investment must occur, and senior leadership must lead and reinforce the cultural shift.

Reflection

Planning

Investment

Leadership

Food safety goes far beyond passing health inspections and meeting regulatory requirements. In the following pages, we'll explore the importance of creating a comprehensive food safety culture that is embraced throughout your organization. Through your diligence, the industry as a whole becomes an even stronger force.

Find Your System

There is no one size fits all paradigm for instituting an effective and sustainable food safety culture.



While individual organizations may trek different paths toward fulfilling this mission, they share one uniform goal: keeping consumers safe.

To accomplish this, company leadership should implement a food safety management system consisting of programs and procedures that effectively control risks and hazards through the flow of food.

One food safety management system that has gained significant traction across the restaurant sector is active managerial control (AMC). Often linked and commonly compared to hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) principles, **AMC is a proactive approach to food safety that includes:**



Recognizing potential foodborne illness hazards in day-to-day operations



Training employees to prevent hazards by following specific control procedures



Having certified food protection managers on staff



Defining standard operating procedures for critical steps



Monitoring the effectiveness of actions utilized to control hazards



Food Safety Culture in Action

With more than 2,650 operations primarily in the U.S., Chick-fil-A, a family-owned and privately held restaurant company, has successfully woven AMC principles into its corporate culture.



For example, all Chick-fil-A food handlers wear color-specific gloves for various kitchen tasks to avoid cross-contamination.

In respect to cleaning and sanitation, staff members can use disposable sanitizing wipes, rather than reusable cloth towels, to clean dining tables. Customers in eating areas are also provided with pre-moistened sanitizing hand wipes.

As a ServSafe certification training partner, Chick-fil-A is a staunch believer that exemplary food safety procedures result in higher quality food and enhanced profit margin through prevention. Accordingly, the College Park, GA-based company actively networks with regulators, academia, associations, and other industry stakeholders to continuously strengthen its food safety system.

Chick-fil-A and other high-performing companies continually evaluate their food safety procedures to stay ahead of potential foodborne illness crises. To this end, BJ's Restaurants, a California-based, 212-unit chain, audits its restaurants at least 12 times a year to not only gain a clearer understanding of operations but also to reinforce the importance of proper food safety behaviors.

Setting the Standard

People are typically creatures of habit, often making it difficult for employees to modify or change their on-the-job behaviors. In forging a food safety culture, operations should leverage available tools and methods to attain desired training outcomes.

The ABC Model, a cognitive management tool, states that an individual or group needs a set of antecedents (A) to consistently achieve desired behaviors (B), which then bring consequences (C).



The section below illustrates how a quick service restaurant manager and food server trainee might use ABC:

A

Manager explains the importance of handwashing and provides a first-hand demonstration using proper techniques

B

Following the manager's example, the food server washes their hands, independently applying the handwashing techniques as shown

C

Manager praises the trainee for successfully accomplishing the task, reinforces when handwashing is needed, and explains how clean hands prevent the spread of microorganisms that can sicken guests



Training professionals stress that **consistent consequences** are crucial to starting and stopping behaviors in the workplace. In food safety, mixed signals can lead to confusion and costly errors.

To fortify training messaging, trainers should use consistent terminology, and when possible, **teach employees in their native languages.**

Years ago, researchers found it can be difficult to teach proper food handling techniques to workers when their native language is not used, such as for Spanish-speaking employees in a predominately English-speaking environment.

Visual aids and participatory exercises can positively impact the learning process. When you encourage employees to ask questions on a concept or procedure they do not fully understand, you open communication lines and start a dialogue.

Regardless of the size of your organization, the importance of **following written standard operating procedures** (SOPs) should be an ongoing part of such training dialogues. SOPs provide workers with step-by-step instructions to complete tasks consistently while promoting accountability—a coveted food safety culture attribute—through documented guidelines. Written materials can be valuable reference tools for new trainees and seasoned employees alike. Accordingly, SOPs should be readily accessible to workers and revised as needed to reflect changes in workplace procedures.



When Spanish-speaking individuals are taught in their native language, their food safety examination scores rise markedly.



“The right training helps employees feel empowered,” said Patrick Guzzle, Vice President of Food Science and Industry, National Restaurant Association. “They feel like a part of a team, all working together toward a common goal. And the restaurant benefits greatly.”



Empower Your Team

By nature, people are resistant to change. Employees might become content with the knowledge they have gained, satisfied with the skills they have acquired, and comfortable in the daily nuances of their jobs. Change can provoke doubt, prodding employees to question their competency.

In creating a food safety culture, organizations must invest the necessary resources to address this unease while providing training that will allow personnel to perform all designated tasks correctly and completely.

Effective and ongoing training involves expense, but it steers off much larger, reactive costs stemming from foodborne illness outbreaks. Depending on the severity, a foodborne illness outbreak can cost an operation millions of dollars and can even result in permanent closure.



Food safety pays for itself in several different ways.

In a culture where employees are more likely to comply with procedures, operations with negligible code violations can usually secure lower insurance premiums and minimize losses incurred by discarding unsafe food.

Evaluating Your Culture

In a winning food safety culture, each and every employee is dedicated to ensuring the food they make or serve is safe. Company leadership bears the duty of implementing a culture that emphasizes cleanliness, accountability, teamwork, and the importance of following recognized food safety systems and protocols.

Have you prioritized food safety by incorporating it into your restaurant's culture? Preventing foodborne illness is no short order.



When implementing or analyzing your restaurant's food safety standards, complete this exercise.



SETTING THE STANDARD

- Are you and other senior leadership imparting best practices and leading by example?
- Does your training messaging use consistent terminology?
- Do employees know senior leadership was involved in the training development process?



FINDING YOUR SYSTEM

- Is my current food safety management system effective? If not, why?
- What training certification program is the best fit for my restaurant?
- Would incorporating company-specific training benefit my staff and customers?



EMPOWERING YOUR TEAM

- Do you emphasize the value and purpose of food safety training to your staff?
- Are you highlighting the importance of food safety on individual and team levels?
- Do team members, in turn, feel confident in their food safety knowledge?



FOOD SAFETY FOCUS

About ServSafe

ServSafe provides food and alcohol safety training and certification to help protect businesses, employees and customers.

ServSafe leads the way in providing current and comprehensive educational materials to the restaurant industry. Our complete suite of products helps prepare foodservice employees for front-of-house and back-of-house situations.

About ServSafe Ops

ServSafe Ops is a restaurant operations management platform that drives operational efficiency through task verification, access to information, ongoing training, issue identification, employee engagement, and more.

With customizable checklists and reporting, ServSafe Ops provides verification of tasks completed and acts as both a measure of employee performance and a method for engagement with your brand. To learn more, please visit www.ServSafeOps.com.

Get in touch with our ServSafe team to start building out your culture of food safety.

