



FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

GREAT FOOD SAFETY
IS GREAT BUSINESS

BY KATIE SABATINI, RD, LDN

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE SPENT OUR CAREER in the foodservice industry know that the old adage of Murphy's Law is inevitable—anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. Kitchens are chaotic environments moving at a fast pace with many tasks needing completion simultaneously. Sometimes our employees take it upon themselves to make decisions regarding shortcuts or skipped steps that they do not even realize could jeopardize the safety of the food we are serving, but that could have dire consequences resulting in foodborne illness or harm, injury, or death to our guests.

While advancements have been made in food safety over the past decade, rates of foodborne illness have not seen a significant change. Foodborne illness is a huge concern for the foodservice industry with numerous incidents tied to commercially-prepared items. By doing our part to reduce these incidents, we are helping to bend the curve of foodborne illness.

One way we can do this is by developing and fostering a robust *Food Safety Culture (FSC)* within our department and organization as a whole. You may have heard the term before, as it has become quite an industry buzzword lately. It was brought to the forefront by Frank Yiannas, former Disney and Walmart food safety executive, currently FDA Deputy Commissioner of Food Policy and Response. Do you know what FSC is or how to build it into your operation? Maybe you are already doing it and don't even realize it, because while the nomenclature is new and trendy, the practices and philosophies behind it are not.

Culture is defined by Coreil, Bryant and Henderson (2001) as 'patterned ways of thought and behavior that characterize a social group, which can be learned through socialization processes and persist through time.' The focus on FSC is fairly recent, but food safety has been a longstanding industry top priority.

FSC in its most basic form is everyone in the organization working together towards a common goal of food safety. This includes the practice of continuously improving employee and organizational behaviors to deliver a safe and quality product to the consumer. The attitudes, behaviors, and choices of people are some of the most influential factors affecting food safety outcomes, which all involve a human element. Food science is the core behind food safety, but understanding behavioral science is key to building a successful FSC. The people side of FSC is something that many food safety experts and foodservice managers struggle with.

The Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) *Blueprint for a New Era of Smarter Food Safety* states, "We will not make dramatic improvements in reducing the burden of foodborne disease without doing more to influence and change human behavior, addressing how employees think about food safety and how they demonstrate a commitment to this goal in how they do their job."

One of the biggest challenges to organizations is figuring out how to get people excited about food safety and how to get active participation from every employee. In order

to change behavior you must speak to the person's emotions as well as capture their attention with valid scientific information that requires critical thinking. The overall message embodied by FSC is this: we are *all* responsible for food safety.

Employees need to understand how they play an integral part in food safety and risks, specific to their job function. Once they are aware that their actions can impact food safety directly, it increases ownership and accountability. By providing the "why" behind the training, we are better able to motivate employees to take action and apply what they learn on the job. Utilizing the theories of cognitive psychology in training taps into intrinsic motivators to drive more proactive and preemptive behaviors. It assists you in getting the results you want earlier in the process, rather than having to fix issues that arise later through consequences or punishment—as is often seen with behavioral psychology that uses extrinsic motivators to drive behavior.

FSC starts at the top, with buy-in from leadership. Leaders look for opportunities to offset risk and FSC is an investment, from the time and capital involved in development to technology to training employees to the rewards and recognition program, so they want to know that they will receive a return on that investment.

As a foodservice professional, we often have the tendency to view the world through our myopic glasses. But it's important to remember that leadership views the business very differently and comes from different backgrounds with multiple initiatives vying for their attention, so it is key to

position your problem and solution in their terms. You are the food safety subject matter expert and leaders are looking at you to deliver the necessary information in a format that they can easily digest, allowing them to weigh the pros and cons relevant to the overall business, and aid them in making an informed decision. Shifting your paradigm to sell your idea of FSC can prove very positive



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once leadership sees the benefits to the overall business model.

For an FSC strategy to truly affect large-scale change, company leadership must not only endorse the program, but be active participants in it. Culture is behavior, not just talk – it is the messaging the organization demonstrates through its actions. Ensuring owners, company leaders, and managers are setting good examples by emphasizing their commitment to food safety is just as important as the policies and procedures when building your FSC.

When it comes to food safety, the status quo is unacceptable because if allowed to stagnate, something will go

wrong. Change should be encouraged in an effort to drive continuous improvement, learning from mistakes at every turn. Foster open and collaborative communication at all organizational levels—up, down and horizontally—in which every employee is encouraged to share their ideas for improvement and change. Food safety is everyone's business, and employees should be recognized and rewarded for their contributions and participation.

STEPS TO BUILDING YOUR FSC

Start at the Top—Create urgency to solicit C-suite buy-in and demonstrate a strong commitment to food safety in everything the company does – “walk the talk.”

Build a Fundamental Foundation—Develop preventive policies, procedures, and processes around food safety. Document, implement, maintain, and modify these standards to meet your goals.

Provide Training for All—Deliver food safety training upon hire and continue that educational investment throughout employment. Appeal to the hearts and minds of employees.

Explain the “WHY”—Employees need to fully comprehend their role in food safety. Put employees “in the story” to explain how everything they do in their role ultimately affects food safety of the final product to your guests, and how they are a key part of the safety equation.

Use Transparent Communication & Employee Empowerment—Communication is a two-way street and it needs to flow from the top down and the bottom up. Food safety



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is everyone's business – employees should be encouraged to share their views, suggestions, and ideas for improvement. Invite employees to surface problems early, often, and constructively.

Promote Adaptability—Stagnation results in problems, and change should be encouraged. You must constantly evaluate, reevaluate, and evolve when necessary. It's very important to learn from your mistakes and move forward stronger than ever.

Reinforce and Reward—Consolidate your gains and recognize successes and input. Reinforce positive

**“YOU CAN HAVE THE
BEST POLICIES,
written procedures, rules
and laws on the books
but if they're not put into
practice by people, they are
absolutely useless.”**

—Frank Yiannas, Food and Drug
Administration (FDA) Deputy Commissioner,
Food Policy and Response

behaviors and apply consequences only when necessary.

SUMMING IT UP

Great food safety is great business! And, prevention is always less costly than reaction. By building and fostering your own Food Safety Culture, you can sleep better at night knowing your employees are doing the right thing and that they understand why they're doing it—even when no one is watching. **E**



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CE QUESTIONS | FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION



This **Level II** article assumes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to facilitate application of knowledge into practice by drawing connections among ideas and using information in new situations.

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- Over the past decade, great strides have been made in food safety science, leading to dramatic decreases in foodborne illness rates.
 - True
 - False
- Getting employees to understand the _____, allows them to see how their role affects food safety.
 - How
 - Why
 - Who
- Different theories of training tap into different motivators. Cognitive psychology uses _____, while behavioral psychology uses _____ motivators.
 - Intrinsic/extrinsic
 - Extrinsic/intrinsic
 - Intrinsic/cultural
- _____ is the core behind food safety, while _____ is the key to a successful Food Safety Culture (FSC).
 - Food science/Murphy's Law
 - Food science/behavioral science
 - Behavioral science/food science
- FSC is an investment and leaders want to know that they will receive a return on their investment. Therefore, as the subject matter expert, you must show how investing in FSC will _____.
 - Benefit the overall business model
 - Offset risk
 - Both A and B
- Reactionary management is always less expensive than prevention, so building an FSC is an unnecessary investment.
 - True
 - False
- For a successful FSC, open communication across all levels of your organization should be _____ and _____.
 - Encouraged/rewarded
 - Stifled/recognized
 - Encouraged/punished



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