

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white lab coat and a light blue hairnet, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She has her hands clasped in front of her. The background is a blurred industrial setting, likely a food processing plant, with green and metallic equipment visible.

The Culture of Food Safety

BY KELLERMAN CONSULTING

**A PRACTICAL OVERVIEW AND
IMPLEMENTATION FOR YOUR COMPANY**



**KELLERMAN
CONSULTING**



Introduction

As food businesses regroup, reassess, and look for growth opportunities in the coming post-COVID-19 landscape, an emphasis on creating and empowering a lasting culture of food safety is key. We have written this Ebook for those businesses investigating the renewed emphasis of a culture of food safety as part of the increased focus for SQF, GFSI, and the FDA.

Within your organization, this Ebook is for any Owner, Senior Management, Plant Manager/Supervisor and/or Quality Assurance leader looking for guidance in developing or improving a culture of food safety. We will cover how to properly establish and maintain a high level, facility-wide food safety culture with committed engagement supported by metrics and measurements to achieve sustainable and lasting gains.

If you reach the end of this Ebook and would like more information, please contact Kellerman Consulting by phone at (800)-535-1376, email at info@kellermanconsulting.com, or by visiting our website at kellermanconsulting.com.

Table of Contents

Part 1: What is the Culture pg. 4
of Food Safety?

Defining A Culture pg. 4
of Food Safety

Comparison to GMPs pg. 8

Part 2: Why Should You Care pg. 10
About the Culture of Food Safety?

The Positive Consequences pg. 10
of Implementing a
Culture of Food Safety

Who Should Care About the pg. 13
Culture of Food Safety?

Part 3: How Do You Start to pg. 15
Implement a Culture of Food Safety?

Upper Management Support pg. 15

Gap Assessment pg. 17

Write the Program pg. 20

Implement the Program pg. 23



1


What is the Culture of Food Safety?

Defining A Culture of Food Safety

GFSI defines food safety culture as “shared values, beliefs and norms that affect mindset and behavior toward food safety in, across and throughout an organization”. Simply put, a culture of food safety is the application of values and intent to drive the daily operations of a food facility. If the leaders of the organization have not put in the time and effort to determine what these values are, the culture will not have a chance to take hold, and the chances of sustainably implementing a strong food safety culture are low.

A Company’s Culture Begins with its Core Values

Core values are the fundamental beliefs in which an organization operates and is guided towards their desired path. They are the unwavering principles of an organization that makes their product or service unique from competitors. With strong core values, an organization can stand out in a competitive market and ensure all internal and external aspects of the organization are working towards the same goal.



// Core values should be separate from circumstance, and once set, they should be visible in the actions leadership takes every day. //

In many cases, the driving forces in a company boil down to profit, and the remaining values are developed as part of external marketing. As a result, values in a food facility become focus-tested words presented to potential customers, while employees in the facility are shown an entirely different set of values. In the worst situations, employees are shown no values at all.

For a food facility engaged in creating and strengthening a food safety culture, their values must promote a safe and effective environment, and must be applicable to the layout, equipment, products and employees within the organization.

Another reason that the determination and reassessment of core values is so important for leadership in a food business is because of the complication and confusion when making high level decisions for your organization, especially in an industry prone to constant change.

How do you know what the right choice is, especially when circumstances change all the time? What feels right this morning, may feel wrong by afternoon. Plans set on Monday can be delayed by Wednesday. What looked so important in spring may get forgotten entirely by autumn. With clearly defined core values, organizations can rely on these principles to guide them in times of uncertainty, difficult decisions or market changes.

Core values should be separate from circumstance, and once set, they should be visible in the actions leadership takes every day. Any employee that interacts with leadership should be able to clearly identify what those values are even if they've never been directly told them.



Leadership: The Tone Setter for Your Organization

Once an organization's core values have been defined, it is the responsibility of the leadership to set the stage for how those values show up in the day-to-day operations of the business. One of the most common problems that organizations experience is the disconnect between customer facing employees and employees involved with the operations of the business.

To best understand the disconnect between the manufacturing, handling and delivery of products and the experience that customers have when they purchase products, you must remember that in many companies, the operational employee does not regularly think of the customer.

An operations employee's job is to follow an operating procedure, power equipment in the precise required order and to look out for the signposts that their tasks are functioning as intended. Hoppers are loaded, hoses are connected, contact surfaces are sanitized, bread is baked, bottles are filled, etc.

The customer is not part of this process and therefore, is not a part of their consideration. However, in order to drive a culture of food safety, all employees - no matter their role within the organization - should understand and be able to articulate how their role delivers on a company's commitment to produce safe, quality products.

The operations employee batching ingredients must understand that following the recipe as designed delivers a consistent, high quality product that customers depend on. The sanitation team member cleaning contact surfaces must know that using the correct concentration and temperature of water and chemicals ensures that the contact surfaces are free of hazards that could make a customer sick.

Regardless of their role, it is imperative that employees understand how the day-to-day tasks of their job can positively (or negatively) impact a customer's experience with their products. Only leadership can bridge this divide. And only well planned and well thought through management can coordinate and correlate activities so that the operational actions of the employees manning the equipment merge with the feedback of logistical employees responsible for understanding how food is interacted with or sought after in the marketplace.

Articulate Commitment and Support to Customers

When leadership is able to bridge the gap between the external actions (sales, marketing & logistics) and the internal actions (R&D and operations), the strengths and weaknesses of a product and production can be better understood and more effectively conveyed to clients and customers.

An example of this is introducing highly technical and highly customized operational equipment to your production floor. It is very common in food manufacturing or distribution facilities to have decision makers that green light the purchasing of fancy, new equipment, and entrust others to actually manage it. New equipment can be used to convey many things to customers: increased safety, capacity, sustainability, consistency and more.

But when decision makers envision the capabilities of equipment and set expectations with customers about how it will support or expand offerings, they must take extra care to also convey this to the team that will operate said machinery.

When the additions of improved equipment, technology, or resources, and the purpose or expectations of those advancements are not properly communicated to front-line employees, this oversight can lead to frustration or misunderstanding at the employee level. Employees that are not engaged and supportive of the change may not meet the expectations of the organization's leadership, which ultimately results in unmet expectations of a customer.

Comparison to GMPs

The Similarities Between GMPs and a Food Safety Culture

Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) are also referred to as prerequisite programs, or food safety and quality fundamentals. These are the site and company specific rules and daily activities put into place to keep products safe. GMPs may be written down or communicated verbally and are generally enforced through Quality Assurance or management personnel.


Management personnel are required to know a site's GMPs in order to oversee the actions of those who report to them. More importantly, when in areas requiring GMPs, management must exhibit the behaviors and actions that are consistent with the requirements of the GMPs.

The most obvious GMPs include proper employee hygiene practices, pest control, and sanitation activities. They are also practiced through pallet care, storage activities, and in the actual manufacturing or processing of food. If we were to imagine a facility without any GMPs, we could picture a facility with items carelessly arranged on the floor, rodents scurrying by, or roof leaks splashing water on employees' heads. To describe this scenario as a lack of a food safety culture is true, but without GMPs, a facility could not function on a day-to-day level. That is why it is uncommon to find very many successful food businesses that operate without GMPs.

A company with a culture of food safety is most linked to basic GMPs in that they promote employees working towards a common purpose of producing safe, high quality products. A company with strong GMPs has clear objectives, operating schedules that are easy to anticipate and clear for employees to follow, and everything has a labelled place and time for use.

The Differences Between GMPs and a Food Safety Culture

If GMPs are so closely linked to a culture of food safety, how are they different? In the food manufacturing and distribution landscape as we



currently find it, most companies adhere to government mandated GMPs. While GMPs are required to be enforced, there is no government requirement for continuous improvement of GMPs within an organization, and there are few, if any, measurements.

GMPs are required only in areas where products or packaging materials are stored, handled, or assembled. As such, GMP requirements typically only impact the employees working in those areas. In a GMP-only culture, departments operate independently of one another, and systems are not put in place to ensure adequate resources that promote continuous improvement of food safety.

An example of this can be described through inventory management of disposable gloves used in a food manufacturing facility. Operations employees are frequently tasked with monitoring the inventory levels of disposable gloves and notifying management when stocks are running low. Management waits to be notified by operations before ordering more gloves, do so when informed to. This process can be effective, but does not promote a strong, collaborative culture.

However, in companies with a culture of food safety, management establishes a system to understand when the disposable gloves are ordered, who orders them, how much they cost, and what the standard order quantity is. Budgets and trending may be set to determine if the system is efficient and cost effective. Employee feedback is gathered to ensure whether employees are satisfied with the disposable gloves provided, or how they could be improved. Leadership is applied to the seemingly mundane, and feedback is sought out and welcomed from all employees.

By going above and beyond simply following GMPs, we are striving to connect each employee to the larger needs and goals of the organization. We empower them to seek out the rhythms and patterns of normal operational activities to anticipate needs. We also encourage them to help avoid or prevent problems from occurring rather than waiting for them to occur and dealing with their fallout. A food safety culture keeps high morale by allowing employees to feel valuable and cared. Think of a Food Safety Culture as Great Manufacturing practices.

2

Why Should You Care About the Culture of Food Safety?

The Positive Consequences of Implementing a Culture of Food Safety

On a personal level, you may be able to quickly identify products or services you purchased that did not meet expectations or were flat out dishonest in their claims. But if you think back to those items, it is actually quite difficult to determine the exact reason why the product or service was such a disappointment. Sure, it may have stopped working quickly, failed to improve on cheaper alternatives, or failed to operate as described, but why? Was it a good product made poorly? A bad lot? A single item defect? Fraud? Whatever the reason, these distinctions are neither obvious

nor important. All that matters is the negative experience.

Preventing those perceptions, and conversely meeting or exceeding customer expectations is the ultimate goal of a well-established culture of food safety. The empirical evidence gained through customer feedback and the resulting improvements in revenue, operational excellence and facility morale are the results when a culture is properly implemented.

Improved Company Morale

There are few work experiences more upsetting and defeating than being informed by management that your products were rejected by the target

market for failures to meet expectations. Customer complaints are certainly an unavoidable part of operations, but it is particularly difficult when it is unclear why the failure occurred, or when the upper levels of the organization appear indifferent to the circumstances that lead to the failure.

For front line workers, the awareness and knowledge that management and quality assurance personnel are capable of detecting issues through communication and investigation and can address those issues to prevent them from happening again, can be reassuring and uplifting to employee morale. Likewise, instances where management is sufficiently aware of what is occurring in operations to single out problematic practices or employees and correct those unwanted circumstances is also incredibly helpful in maintaining a positive and productive operation.

Management Engagement is Key

Through ongoing, scheduled meetings, management should conduct an assessment and review of the activities associated with the food safety culture. They will also identify training opportunities based on observed deviations from procedures as well as problematic employee practices.

Here we should note that one of the most crucial aspects of a properly instituted food safety culture is the daily walkthrough by management. Too often, we find that at the management level of the organization, walkthroughs occur only when tours happen - if they happen at all.

Walking through production areas is one of the most important tools for implementation of a culture of food safety. Front line employees that observe operational engagement via walkthroughs by management are much more likely to be personally engaged in their work. If a senior manager, director or C-level employee performs a walk through on a regular basis, the chances of a streamlined and high-quality operation is far more likely.

More Teamwork = Safer & Higher Quality Items = Engaged & Empowered Employees

A common source of setback and quality failure within a food operation is disgruntled or disengaged employees. Although the production crew for a facility may have more than one excellent employee, when poor performing employees are present, they can



can slowly create a toxic environment that brings down the effort of all employees. Hands-off management or lax supervision may seem like a way to avoid conflict with employees, but this is often a false set up.

A culture can be negatively defined by the worst behavior tolerated. Tolerating, ignoring or being unaware of poor behavior or poor performance lets every employee know that it is okay to have low standards. The best employees inevitably see that their efforts aren't noticed, or that lower standards are accepted, and the reduced effort that comes with low quality is regarded as the easier path.

No matter what it is, management always sends a message to employees in a facility. With strong communication, clear expectations and follow through on observations, that message is one of shared responsibility and accountability - the core of teamwork. Where there is no consistent communication to employees, where expectations are not clear and no observations are performed, a message is still sent to the employees, but it is the wrong message.

Employees that see high quality work rewarded will often start to police themselves in addition to communicating issues to supervisors. This in turn raises the level of safety and quality, and further strengthens the desired culture of food safety.

Who Should Care About the Culture of Food Safety?

The Importance of Top Management Buy-In

As we shared in the above section, top management buy-in is essential. A quick way to determine how close your organization is to achieving a fully functioning culture of food safety is to determine who the highest-ranking employee is that regularly walks through operations.

Once you have that person in mind, determine roughly how often they perform a walk through, and under what circumstances. In any company where the owner or senior leadership regularly works with production associates, a very strong culture of food safety is often found, even without significant capital expenditures or complex quality programs.

If the boss is on the production floor, shoulder to shoulder with the employees, we can expect safety and quality to follow. Even where ownership participation in production is not feasible, a 20-30 minute walkthrough of GMP areas can have a significant impact on a food safety culture. The simple act of letting production level employees see management engaged in the operation has profound impacts on teamwork, morale and quality standards.

Better still is when a manager brings a notebook and a flashlight. This \$25 solution can have an incredible effect on culture. During the walkthrough, the owner/senior manager should write some observations down, shine a light on dark or hidden areas and speak directly with associates. Encouraging this communication between senior management and frontline employees is a simple way to boost employee engagement and elevate expectations of a culture of food safety.

Where something is out of conformance, an owner or senior manager pointing out the issue, watching the correction and following up on the issue days later is the surest way to ensure that issues are resolved to the highest standards. Where problems exist, they will be fixed.

Full Participation from Initial Conversations to Full Implementation

As we will examine in Part 3, implementation of a Culture of Food Safety is a thorough process. It requires consistent actions from management and follow through from all supporting departments. Each individual or department that resists participation in either strategic components (meetings, assessments and communication) or

actions within the facility to assure that a culture is implemented can quickly derail the desired culture.

The best way to prevent one person or department from slowing or derailing the implementation of the culture is for senior management to participate and guide the process starting from the initial communication. While the site leader or quality assurance personnel may lead certain activities required to carry out the culture of food safety, senior leadership and/or ownership must be closely associated with the project from inception. This is best performed both through the walkthroughs detailed in the previous section, but just as importantly, with participation starting from the beginning.

Senior leadership may elect to not participate in each aspect of implementation. However, this should be intentional, preplanned, and accounted for in the schedule and process of implementation. When leadership does not actively participate, the implementation of a food safety culture is likely to fail.

So much of the success of the implementation of a food safety culture depends on accountability across the organization. Accountability is a precarious and intangible force binding the culture of food safety together. Accountability undergirds the integrity of the culture as it is developed and is the driving force behind the sustained efforts of the facility to maintain the culture once implemented.

That accountability is most quickly lost or damaged when senior leadership finds reasons or excuses to remove themselves from participation. Nothing is more deflating to taking on cultural improvements than seeing the ultimately responsible individuals in the organization exempt themselves. This is even more true when those exemptions occur without prior communication and without proper explanation.

3

How Do You Start Implementing the Culture of Food Safety?

This section is intended to provide a step-by-step approach to the implementation of the culture of food safety within your organization. We are aware that each food business is different and some of these steps may be of greater or lesser importance for your facility or organization. However, following through on the determination of actions for each step should be completed to create the greatest likelihood of success.

Upper Management Support

Timeframe & Funding Agreement

The beginning of the process occurs when senior leadership:

1. Establishes the timeline for completion
2. Dedicates budget for implementation of the culture of food safety

3. Defines clear targets for success

The more care that is taken to detail expectations, target objectives, and measure outcomes, the more likely the implementation efforts will be performed completely and sustainably. Supervisors and management will have a better opportunity to tie their departments into action to the larger initiative.

Where facility improvements (i.e., construction or equipment), additional personnel, or new materials are required

these should be budgeted for both capital cost and time with as much certainty as possible. This budget and calendar will form the early targets for success, and let the entire organization know if the implementation of culture is proceeding correctly.

Implementation meetings should ideally be scheduled on a fixed frequency (weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.). As mentioned previously, the more participation in those meetings by senior leadership, the more likely a successful outcome of the project will ultimately have.

Kellerman Consulting highly recommends tracking the follow-through on planned meetings early in the process. The greater the number of cancelled or moved meetings, the more likely implementation initiatives will stall or fail. We also recommend suspending or starting the process over in any instance where repeated delays or cancellations in early meetings occur until a more consistent schedule can be followed. Only if and when implementation meetings or budgets are drafted and adhered to, then your team can take the next steps.



Gap Assessment

Internal or External

Using the targets, objectives, and calendar established at the beginning of the implementation process, a thorough assessment of existing behaviors compared to the intended outcome should be performed.

These assessments fall into two categories: internal and external. While all of these assessment activities are time consuming and difficult to complete, the internal gap assessments are easier to control. As such, they are the most likely to be performed to completion.

Internal Assessment

An internal assessment typically takes the form of an internal audit or management review. An important aspect of the assessment should include whether documentation or records are readily available or in use. If there is no written documentation to assess, we can conclude that development of documentation and structure is required. A formal internal audit or review of a program that clearly isn't in place is frustrating and fruitless.

Another form of internal assessment of gaps can be performed separate from an internal audit through a leadership review. The distinction here may be confusing since internal audit and management review frequently overlap. However, the

easy rule of thumb for the difference between internal audit and management review is that internal audits should be conducted by members of the organization (or a qualified third party) that reports the findings to leadership.

Since this process and report is presented to leadership, it reasons that it should be a separate project from leadership reviewing the program in full. In fact, the internal audit results should be part of management review, and where possible, leadership review should occur after the internal gap assessment.

External Assessment

For an external assessment, logistical considerations can become more challenging for scheduling and budgeting actions. The easiest and most direct actions that can be taken as part of external assessments are onsite inspections of third parties involved in operations, such as warehouses, laboratories, co-manufacturers, key stakeholders, etc.

While external assessment activities may be unclear or vague at the onset, by simply showing up and observing these external entities, it will quickly become apparent if major gaps are identifiable. We cannot stress how simply looking at a location, or meeting with an external team, reveals problems.

Identify Where You Are Currently and Where You Want to Be

Following the internal and external assessments of the facility and stakeholders involved in food operations, clear measurable targets must be set as a part of the implementation of the food safety culture. While these measurable targets need not be the end goals in and of themselves, proper implementation of the culture cannot happen without these targets.

An example of a measurable target might include a reduction in rework materials. Rework materials, such as work-in-process products, are often generated from products in which quality targets were not met. Rework due to unmet quality standards can cost an organization in labor, materials, or production line time. It is important to note that management's desire to reduce these costs by reducing rework materials as a target is not the beginning or end of a culture of food safety. However, successfully reducing rework materials and measuring the efforts to do so does provide confirmation of a coordinated effort when it is part of the implementation of a culture of food safety.

Set Clear Objectives

When setting targets for where you aspire to be in your culture of food safety, follow the criteria outlined in a SMART goal format. SMART goals are those which are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Based. Each of these criteria are essential to achieving and sustaining lasting changes within an organization's culture. Goals that are too vague are likely to be misunderstood or unclear to stakeholders. While goals that are not time-bound (i.e., have clear deadlines) may fail to be driven forward.

Maintaining clear, measurable goals and expected timelines to accompany those goals sets the guard rails of the project. Leadership can then focus on those objectives and timelines to determine how the implementation is proceeding.

Documented Timelines & Deadlines

Oftentimes, leadership is predisposed to ignore documented timelines or deadlines not imposed by financial constraints, customers or regulators.



The reason for this is that timelines and deadlines are forms of accountability, and at the leadership level it is always safer to set non-specific goals or deadlines so that these cannot be assessed against leadership. We consider this one of the greatest risks to all food operations, regardless of whether aspiring to implement a culture of food safety.

We previously discussed how accountability for leadership and project deadlines, especially early in the implementation phase, are crucial to setting the appropriate tone for the desired culture. The beneficial aspect of self-imposed deadlines is that they can be extended if they aren't met. In the context of regularly scheduled meetings and assessments, even a missed deadline can be the beginning of helpful discussions for developing the culture.

For any leaders reluctant to set deadlines for projects, we would ask them to carefully think through what the source of the reluctance is, as it is likely part of the root problem where poor cultural performance is present in a company. This may be a nepotistic relationship with an underperforming manager, fear of retaliation by leadership, lack of accountability or control below the level of leadership, or ineffective allocation of capital (e.g., leadership taking too much money out of the business).

An unwillingness to set measurable goals with deadlines for assessment and improvement is a red flag for the business' long-term success. If there is nothing stopping leadership from setting these targets, then they should be done at the earliest possible opportunity and the facility should be held to those targets.

WRITE THE PROGRAM

At this stage, we will describe as specifically as possible how to write a program that includes a culture of food safety. For facilities subscribing to a GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative) compliant scheme (FSSC 22000, BRC, SQF, PrimusGFS), developing this culture is required as part of the larger program development. However, for this document, we are approaching a culture of food safety program that is usable for any food facility. The hope is that based on the instructions included within, a successful set of documents can be written and implemented in the food facility.

How to Write a Document

We recommend following the typical format for standard operating procedures in quality systems, which has the following sections presented with an explanation of each. Remember that you are writing for the next employee you hire, not for yourself or for long-term employees that know the system backwards and forwards:

1. Purpose/Introduction - This section is intended to provide context for the document. Are there rules that are being followed? Is this for food safety? Quality? Total length should be 1-5 sentences.
2. Scope - The scope refers to which part of the facility, equipment, employees or food applies to the document. The important thing here is that the tighter you make the scope, the easier it is for the reader to understand where it applies and where it doesn't. General scope statements such as "this procedure applies to all employees in GMP areas" are often too vague and as such can be confusing.
3. Responsibilities - Which employees are in charge of seeing the procedure through? For a culture of food safety, this is an extremely important part of the program. As we have stated previously, if senior leadership does not have a role to play, the program will most likely fail. Other key employees to consider for responsibilities are the Quality Assurance (QA) Manager, Plant Manager, Shift Supervisors, and Production Associates. A key aspect to keep track of is that enough responsibilities are detailed so that the reader can follow the chain of command for the procedure.

Note: We do not recommend writing employees names in the document but describing them by their stated position instead. That way, as normally expected turnover occurs in the facility, you won't have to change names.

4. Procedure (numbered Steps) - This is the step-by-step recipe of how to complete the procedure.
 - For example -
 1. Move the grinder into the room.
 2. Clean the blades, bowls and all other contact parts of the equipment.
 3. Sign off that cleaning is complete.
 4. Turn on grinder.
 5. Place no more than 25 lbs. of meat into the grinder at a time and grind for 90 seconds.
 6. Turn off Grinder.
 7. Remove bowl from base, place meat and bowl in walk-in freezer with label.
 8. Check blades for signs of damage.
5. Corrective Action Statement (optional) - This is a statement of what would happen if an error were discovered during the process and may include segregating product, reworking product, or other fixes.

At this point, we would like to provide insights into two additional sections that Kellerman Consulting adds to documents for ease of use by our clients.

1. Validation - This is a statement of what the process is if it is working. A validation statement for a cleaning process is that the equipment is cleaned and sanitized as intended, with no signs of visible contamination remaining.
2. Verification: While the validation statement is an explanation of what the process looks like when working as intended, the verification statement describes the associated forms and monitoring actions taken to check that the program is working properly.

Additional Inclusions

This document is working off the premise that GMP programs and food safety programs are already completed for the facility. This includes programs such as pest control, supply chain management, recall, allergen control, sanitation, maintenance, etc. The following are add-on documents to address the writing of culture of food safety documentation:

1. Facility Scorecard
2. Internal Communication Procedure
3. Continuous Improvement Program
4. Change Control Procedures
5. Management Review Procedure
6. Internal Audit Procedure
7. GMP Inspection Program
8. Culture Training/Proficiency Assessment
9. New Equipment/New Product Introduction Procedure
10. Quality Inspection and Testing



IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM

We have discussed the determination of measurable targets, the need for vigilant observations by leadership, and the manner in which the programs can and should be written. Beyond those tasks, full implementation of the food safety culture will need to be performed and maintained. To ensure this is completed in a timely and sustainable manner, we strongly recommend the following actions:

Appoint a Team Leader

Assigning this role is crucial to the success of the implementation of the food safety culture and is second only to senior leadership involvement in assuring that the culture is sustained in the facility.

The team leader should be given direct access to senior leadership. The team leader is often the QA Manager or Director, but an outside the box approach for selecting the team leader should be considered. Too often, we see facilities that leave the quality and safety to an individual without the necessary authority or access to leadership to fully usher in a complete culture of food safety.

Once the role is assigned and meetings are scheduled between senior leadership and the team leader, leadership is then free to work with others in management to bolster the effort. Nothing here prevents leadership

from widening the interactions to include more supervisors and managers in enforcing the food safety culture. However, internal facility politics must be managed closely as interpersonal conflict at these levels can quickly kill the momentum in establishing the culture of food safety.

Display Company Messages

A far simpler task in establishing the culture of food safety is the assessment of signage and messaging within the organization. Signage and other messages are far less important than having the right people and structure in place, but that does not mean it is not without value.

While it is commonplace to purchase inspirational posters for placement in administration areas and food safety posters in break rooms and GMP areas, the facility should make efforts to create personalized graphics with meaningful messages about the product the company makes.

Signage often sinks to the level of background information for employees, but if well-crafted and well-placed (bathrooms, break rooms, hallways, and offices), they can be a very useful tool for focusing attention to core values. As we mentioned previously, clever posters and slogans cannot be a replacement for actual organizational efforts to create, implement and maintain a culture of food safety. Company messaging should be a small percentage (5-10%) of the overall effort.

Regular Refresher Trainings

We have discussed the importance of scheduling regular meetings and assessments of activities in the facility in order to unify the internal and external actions. Because these meetings and assessments can become cumbersome for employees, there is a natural tendency to push these actions back or outright cancel them.

It is important to maintain this schedule consistently and resist the urge to move them around. One way to assure that scheduled actions are maintained at a consistent frequency is to slot in refresher training and discussions when there are gaps in the normally scheduled production activities.

An example of this would be during a downtime in production where a scheduled assessment of maintenance and cleaning practices may not be needed. Instead of cancelling the assessment, convert it into a training or discussion session to allow supervisors and workers to be heard, and to communicate timely information about strategy and planning within the organization.

A 30-minute refresher training or discussion session may not seem like much, but it can have profound effects on employee morale, and can be worth weeks of attention on crucial production issues by employees, which can lead to meeting or exceeding quality standards. When refresher training is performed, it should be concise, include pictures and graphics where possible, and it should be attended by management (and leadership when possible).

Having the boss in the room for a training session does not cost the company anything; yet the value added to employee information retention is tremendous.

Continued Conversation

When discussions about facility issues are conducted (either with, or in place of training) these conversations should have a time limit and should have understood ground rules prior to the start of the discussion. Conversations in conference rooms, offices or administrative areas are generally more conducive to free flowing exchanges of ideas as opposed to conversations conducted on the production floor.

In all discussions, established guidelines should focus on preventing personal or interoffice political conflict from dominating discussions. Where necessary, management and leadership should instruct conversations to continue in private where unnecessary conflict is seeping into the discussion. Conversation topics should include the following:

1. **Employee feedback**
2. **Management feedback**
3. **Customer feedback**

Additionally, topics specific to non-conformances, changes to personnel, equipment, and scheduling are helpful.





Conclusion

As the food industry evolves, the emphasis on a food safety management system has shifted from solely ensuring regulatory compliance to establishing expectations for continuous improvement in the area of food safety. Developing or strengthening your organization's culture of food safety is a step forward in meeting these new expectations from GFSI, FDA, customers, and consumers.

Throughout this Ebook, we have discussed the importance and value of prioritizing a food safety culture. Improving your organization's culture of food safety can have lasting positive impacts on employee engagement, company morale, customer satisfaction, and ultimately, the success of your business. Though implementing a food safety culture in your organization can seem like a daunting task, there is no doubt that it is a worthwhile investment to your business.

Taking the first step in implementing a culture of food safety can be overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone. If you have questions or would like support in the process of implementing a food safety culture in your organization, please contact Kellerman Consulting by phone at (800)-535-1376, email at info@kellermanconsulting.com, or by visiting our website at kellermanconsulting.com.