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Inspiring Food Safety Culture: Cultivating Consistency

Making claims to emphasis on food safety and quality is simple, yet following through to ensure that your organization's internal culture is consistent with that message is anything but. Building a strategy to translate public-facing messages of priority and commitment can be a challenge. How can you turn “Safety and Quality are our biggest priorities!” into productive attitudes, behaviors, and internal culture?

Finding the answer that works best for each individual organization is just as tough as putting such a strategy into practice. A look at top industry players in the safety and quality game may provide some inspiration, but even the best, most streamlined strategies has had intensive amounts of behind-the-scenes work. One common theme throughout, however, that can be emulated by companies of any size or scope, is the importance of modeling goal behaviors and strategies by leadership.

Ensuring that management at every level leads by example, clearly demonstrating the structure put into place, is key to creating employee buy-in throughout every department. Leadership that isn't commonly seen engaging in the very behaviors they expect their team members to subscribe to cannot properly inspire or reaffirm the importance of such attitudes and beliefs. Rather than focusing solely on how food safety culture appears to outside players, turning the lens inward (and toward the top of the management ladder) can make all the difference in the success or failure of a food safety and quality strategy.

Not sure where to start when it comes to improving the leadership dynamics in your organization? Consider the following:

- **Make leadership more participatory** – by being approachable and taking part in everyday goings-on, team members are more likely to bring concerns or new ideas forward.
- **Build a support system based on ownership and trust** – by encouraging employees to take ownership of and pride in their effort, further developing safety and quality systems becomes that much easier. Developing a foundation of trust between management and team members likewise opens the door for mistakes to become learning opportunities and for successes to be moments of victory for the entire team.
- **Empower team members** – encourage collaboration and critical thought/action. While written policies and guidelines can be great tools to get everyone on the same page, there will always be gaps. Giving employees the agency to find their own solutions and improvements not only helps them take ownership of the process, but helps avoid a feeling of micromanagement.

