Perry Johnson Registrars Food Safety, Inc.

Food Safety Culture – Why does it Matter?

Food Safety Culture – What is It and Why does it Matter?

Easily one of the most often-questioned concepts in today's food safety industry, food safety culture is so much more than a line-item on an audit checklist. Incorporating not only rules and processes but *people*, food safety culture develops in a top-down progression through an organization. Commitment and dedication from those in management positions is key to cultivating support for the system throughout the rest of the organizational "pyramid."

Having the right policies and procedures in place is likewise vital for a solid food safety culture foundation. Throughout the entire system, from production and manufacturing to packaging, storage, and shipping, every link in the chain along the way should be invested in ensuring consumer health and safety.

The benefits of food safety culture do not extend only to end-users of the products manufactured; organizations with strong policies and culture benefit from fewer costly safety incidents, regulatory infractions, consumer complaints, and recalls. By preventing these issues in advance, the funds and other resources that would have otherwise been used to fix the damage can be invested into other productive endeavors.

Employers and management aren't the only ones within an organization's structure that can find advantages in a strong culture of food safety. With a culture of care and oversight for the product likewise comes care and safety for its employees through thoughtful management policies. The attitude of doing what's right rather than what is cheapest or easiest is a significant contributor to favorable employee outlook and buy-in.

" *Food safety culture involves everyone — quality is not only quality's job.* "

" *Building a program with a strong food safety culture and mindset with support from executive leadership is imperative to an organization's success. Quality is a mindset — not a function — and a strong food safety culture is key. If you believe that quality is of primary concern, it will be.* "

Paul Damaren
Senior Vice President for Food Safety & Supply Chain

Another large-scale benefit that might be easy to overlook is reputation. The rise of the internet and global networking means that one negative headline or poor review has far more impact than it might have in the past. Reputations of safety and quality can be broken in mere hours and take years to recover – if at all. Likewise, a positive reputation can be spread quickly and widely through the same channels; *if* the time and effort is undertaken to build the culture behind it.

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Boardroom to Production Line – Developing Good Food Safety Culture

When it comes to the development and creation of good food safety culture, it goes without saying that management must lead by example. It's one thing to profess a dedication to quality and safety, and another entirely to perpetuate that ideal through support and equitable policies. An excellent starting point for managers in an organization is ensuring a clear understanding of the day-to-day goings-on in the facility, including the challenges faced. Walkthroughs of production areas and meetings to review issues on a regular basis can be a great tool to familiarize senior management with what their employees deal with and how policy decisions are playing out in the areas where they matter.

Management teams also need to be properly qualified and trained in the right areas. Depending on the processes used in their facility, they may need training in environmental monitoring or allergen controls, others may require understanding of GMPs, HACCP, and preventive controls. Ensuring that those in charge of creating and executing the policies intended to foster healthy food safety culture are educated in a way to help - rather than hinder - their success is vital.

As previously referenced, a mindset of proactivity rather than reactivity can save not only resources, but reputation as well. Designing policies and and processes to seek out potential issues before they turn into fully-fledged crises is crucial, as is having in place plans to monitor for improvement through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Incentive plans based on the goals and KPIs set may help both increase employee buy-in and grow food safety culture.

Keeping the Ball Rolling – Identifying Stagnation

Often, food safety culture is dismissed as lacking benefits – but are those making such claims truly engaged with their systems? Food safety culture is a seed that won't grow without proper care; some signs that food safety culture is stagnating in an organization include:

- Nervousness or reluctance around audits, both internal and third-party

- Consistent low or barely-passing scores on audits

- Rules are followed but not understood

- Symptoms of deeper issues are being treated rather than the root cause of the problem

How, then, to revitalize the food safety culture of an organization that has wilted? The single largest barrier to improvement of food safety culture is a lack of leadership. When leaders focus on big-picture targets such as revenue or units sold rather than safety, employee satisfaction, or other "soft" metrics, the most important aspects of the organization's culture are neglected. Identifying and addressing oversights by upper management is often the first step to getting back on the right track.

Conclusion

For more information on how to create food safety culture or improve existing programs, reach out to Perry Johnson Registrars Food Safety, Inc. Please visit www.pjrfsi.com or call (248) 519-2523.

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