FOOD SAFETY CULTURE WEBINAR SERIES WHITEPAPERS

Series 1 | Webinars 1-11

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2021 to 2024, The Alliance to Stop Foodborne Illness and the U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) co-hosted a webinar collaboration attracting over 23,000 individual registrants. The goal of this eleven-episode collection was to provide a free, interactive and in-depth exploration of key aspects of food safety culture. The series included thirty guest speakers from across the food industry, whose expertise was captured in eight virtual and three hybrid events. These webinars covered a wide range of topics from rewards and recognition to leadership, storytelling, and team building. Following each event, white papers describing key learnings were published and are now compiled here.

Note: The following serves as a reflection on the previous discussions in "Series One". For a more in-depth exploration of the topics discussed, we encourage you to reference the earlier whitepapers in the series. These are hyperlinked below for your convenience.

Each webinar sought to provide clear, actionable tools to engage employees and leaders at every level in the ongoing endeavor to provide safer food for consumers everywhere. Key takeaways are identified as follows:

Make Leaders Risk Aware
Gaining buy-in from leadership is essential to build and sustain a strong, mature food safety culture. To be successful, food safety culture must be integrated into the existing organizational culture. Data-driven insights can be used to help both leaders and staff better understand the connections between food safety, brand reputation, organizational values, and customer safety to drive meaningful change.

Build a Coalition of Food Safety Culture Champions
Food safety culture champions serve as informal leaders who amplify a company's food safety values through everyday action. Identifying champions from diverse functions, facilities, levels, and shifts can enhance a personal connection to the "why" of food safety. Meanwhile, more formal "coalitions" of individuals in formally identified leadership roles should focus on establishing clear objectives and conducting ongoing evaluations to strengthen the organization's food safety culture. Coalitions build on the momentum of champions across their team, and are willing to engage in honest, constructive conflict to execute necessary changes.

Create Rewards and Recognition Programs That Drive Positive Food Safety Culture
Rewards and recognition programs play a crucial role in reinforcing positive food safety behaviors. These programs can be formal or informal and should include daily recognition, which has the most significant impact on encouraging desired behaviors.

Provide Your Team with Training and Education

Effective food safety culture learning programs encompass both training and education, each serving a distinct purpose: training imparts specific skills and behaviors, while education teaches theory and concepts to foster critical judgment. Programs should address the specific demographics of the workforce, including cultural backgrounds and learning styles. There may also be opportunities for engagement beyond the classroom to create lasting connections between training and daily tasks, ultimately strengthening your food safety culture.

Assessment is Key to Improvement

Assessing food safety culture is essential for continuous improvement. Assessment involves evaluating systems, behaviors, and attitudes, and should use diverse data collection methods tailored to the organization's maturity level in food safety culture. By engaging a wide range of team members in the assessment and action planning, organizations can foster a stronger food safety culture, ultimately leading to improved outcomes like fewer recalls.

Connect Personal Narratives with Food Safety Outcomes

Storytelling is a powerful tool for humanizing complex issues through personal narratives. Stories that are genuine, factual, and tailored to the audience can educate listeners on the importance of food safety actions and ultimately influence their behaviors and mindsets. By making the consequences of poor food safety practices more relatable, storytelling helps prevent worker complacency and ensure that key concepts endure.

Integrate Food Safety Management Systems with Food Safety Culture

Food safety management systems alone are insufficient for a comprehensive commitment to food safety, as they primarily address actions that organizations should take through compliance-driven benchmarks. In contrast, food safety culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and social norms that provide the "why" behind safety practices, empowering employees to engage actively in maintaining standards.

Collaboration is Key

In our increasingly globalized world, fostering a mature food safety culture is essential for protecting public health and maintaining consumer trust. A successful approach to food safety requires cross-industry collaboration, as no one-size-fits-all solution exists. Companies must learn from each other's successes and mistakes, engage in ongoing analysis of their practices, and involve all supply chain partners to uphold high standards, as collaboration is crucial to advancing the shared goal of producing safer food for everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Disclaimer: This document summarizes discussions by participants in a webinar series, as well as best practices identified by participants related to organizational and food safety culture. This document reflects the views of the authors and should not be construed to represent FDA's views or policies.

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

MAKING LEADERS RISK AWARE

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In Brief

As you develop your organization's food safety culture, you should be mindful of the existing organizational culture. You should talk about food safety in a language and using messaging that is understandable to the people in your organization and will motivate them with stories that resonate in a meaningful and actionable way. Reflect on how your organization's mission and values support your food safety goals and performance. Leaders will be more engaged in discussions about food safety when they can see the importance of food safety for advancing the organization's mission and supporting its values. Storytelling can be an effective method for communicating those messages to your leadership team. Storytelling can also help reinforce positive aspects of an organization's culture to foster awareness of risks. The leaders of your organization make decisions based on data. So, support your storytelling with data demonstrating the potential (or real) impact on the organization's bottom line, reputation, or effectiveness. Quantify the benefits of having a strong food safety culture, and the risks of not.

Key Learnings

Building food safety culture takes place within existing organizational culture and requires time and conscious effort to reach employees at all levels.

Storytelling can personalize the impacts of food safety risks and reinforce actions employees can take to minimize risk.

Communicating regularly and providing senior leaders insights from data can help inform sound decisions in support of food safety programs.

Helping employees and senior leaders recognize links between food safety, brand reputation, organization values, and customer safety is necessary for change.

Why is risk awareness relevant for food safety?

Safe food is a positive consequence of a company having successfully managed all risks to the safety of that food. When the risks have been eliminated or minimized, then the assurance of the safety of that food for human (or pet) consumption goes up exponentially. Identifying risks and managing risks therefore are especially important—for everyone in the company, regardless of job title or function.

As a food safety leader, your understanding of the risks to the safety of your food provides the very foundation upon which you can drive change in the organization to reduce those risks. You need to lead the identification and management of risks and ensure that all the organization's leaders are fully cognizant of these risks. When leaders are aware of the food safety risks, they can lead by example (an incredibly important trait to driving the company's culture). Hence, top-down leadership is just as important as bottom-up buy-in. And "top leadership" is not just the CEO, but the multitude of leaders throughout plants and on individual teams.

Understanding this dynamic is useful to you as you engage with staff throughout your organization, particularly your leaders.

How should you engage with leaders about food safety risks?

As a food safety leader (i.e., part of the FSQA function or department), you need to be able to communicate food safety risks to executive and senior leaders in other functions. These people are likely not familiar with the terms, acronyms, and subtleties that are part of the food safety vernacular. Hence, you are advised to use language, analogies, and metaphors people can relate to and respond best to.

STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE LEADERS

Storytelling
make messages personally relatable through compelling stories

Language
frame messages in terms well understood by leaders (mission, values)

Data
give leaders the relevant quantitative data to help inform decision-making

What's your organizational culture?

It is important that you recognize that your organization has a culture, and that you (and other leaders) can change and improve this culture. The existing culture has values, beliefs, and norms that are well accepted (by your employees and by your customers), that may not even be obvious. Keeping within that culture to begin with is a smart way to drive change. For example, there may be better or different food safety-related values that make sense to the company – driving toward those is a worthy goal and doing so in a language that senior leaders will best respond to is a must. An important aspiration in this regard is always taking steps to keep consumers from getting sick; that is a key principle.

Ways to move a culture forward include reinforcing established social norms in the company through storytelling and connection to values, operationalization of values, being open to feedback and suggestions from front-line employees, and building loyalty amongst your customers and your employees. For example, highly-tenured employees likely have keen risk awareness—for them, you can move beyond simple training and take advantage of their historical knowledge.

Your organization has a culture with values, beliefs, and norms which are well accepted even if they are not obvious. You can more effectively drive change by working within the existing culture.

How can you make food safety relatable and engaging?

One very effective way to manage the message in the communication of food safety risks is to use personalized storytelling. This technique has proven its worthiness across the globe. For example, the CEO of Maple Leaf Foods (a Canadian consumer packaged proteins company) used this approach in the aftermath of a *Listeria* outbreak that took the lives of 23 Canadians. Upper management hasn't changed since the outbreak, so they could easily relate to impactful stories of what it was like to live through this catastrophe. They used storytelling to partner with leaders across the business to help other, newer employees, understand risks, and get everyone aligned on decision-making.

Effective storytelling also shares the justification for taking action to "do things right" and to "do the right things." This drives support across the company and helps fight complacency. Hence, employees start to find new and better ways to enhance food safety.

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How do you get leaders to care about food safety?

Another very effective way to manage messaging is to provide data which are meaningful to the people who use it to guide their actions. For example, Wawa, Inc. (an American chain of convenience stores and gas stations) has seen its food safety and risk profile change significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is more complexity with their food offerings due to more drive-throughs, more catering, and changes in meal options. Data are being used to keep leaders in the loop on new decisions that need to be made for food safety—this is especially important for those who tend to focus more on the "business" side of operations.

These data still need to speak to business impact. That impact needs to be quantifiable to the extent possible. Doing so helps risks become very tangible, and even more so when real metrics are associated with the risks. In addition, statistical modeling can be used to estimate risk to the company from a food safety incident—sometimes the numbers are so extraordinary that the right next steps are obvious. The other useful data are those within the budget. Leadership approves operational and capital spending. How can technical and food safety risk data be used to get necessary funds and personnel to make food safety improvements?

How can you best engage employees and communicate food safety culture work?

Before engaging in change efforts, it is very important to plan what the structure will be for engagement and communication within the organization. This will pay dividends as the actions supporting change are executed. Such planning should address how to make food safety communications part of regular conversations and transparent within the organization and ensure engagement occurs in a myriad of venues open to diverse segments of the organization so that messaging penetrates throughout. For example, a meeting cadence should be defined for updating leaders on food safety risks and issues.

Planning for Change	Structural Integration	Reaching Everyone
What is your plan for engagement and communication?	How is food safety integrated into regular conversations?	What venues and messaging will engage diverse segments?

How should you move forward?

The best advice, from those who have traveled this path before, is not to try to do everything at once—change takes time, change takes patience, and change requires routine assessment to ensure results are as desired. This requires that you have persistence, yet a speedy progress.

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

BUILDING A COALITION OF FOOD SAFETY CHAMPIONS

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In Brief

When navigating changes to food safety policies and culture, developing personal connections between employees and food safety is of great value. Identifying food safety champions and building food safety coalitions within your organization can strengthen these connections and support change. When developing champions and coalitions, seek volunteers from different functions, facilities, levels, and shifts to build a diverse team with varied perspectives on food safety culture in the organization. Food safety champions are individuals with a desire to learn and grow, who have a personal connection with food safety. Food safety coalitions are comprised of champions. They are teams of individuals with credibility and leadership capability who can constructively discuss current food safety culture and recognize opportunities to strengthen that culture. Create a safe space for discussion and clear objectives serving the coalition's goal. Recognize the need for ongoing evaluation of the coalition, identifying successes and opportunities to better connect people personally with the food safety culture mission.

Key Learnings

Food safety champions and coalitions connect personally with food safety.

Food safety champions and coalitions can increase the likelihood of positive changes to food safety culture.

Champions and coalitions should be diverse and include members from across functions and levels to represent different perspectives.

Evaluation and conversation must be ongoing alongside training and reinforcement to maintain or improve food safety culture.

Why do champions and coalitions matter in the context of food safety culture?

Current statistics show only 30% of changes implemented to improve food safety are likely to succeed. To navigate changes more effectively, while working towards strong food safety culture, people need personal input and a sense of impact. By investing personally in the process of improving food safety culture, members of an organization are more likely to support changes and ensure they are implemented, thus helping organizations better achieve their desired results. The establishment of key food safety champions and coalitions is one way in which organizations can strengthen these personal bonds.

Food safety champions act as informal, but impactful, leaders who value learning, growth, and food safety at a deep personal level. They can recognize the need for change and wish to be an active part of implementing and promoting it.

A food safety coalition is a group of individuals with leadership capacity who are willing to engage in honest, constructive conflict to facilitate necessary changes. A coalition open to constructive conflict can harness the likely—and necessary—professional disagreements which arise to push for creative solutions. The coalition should have credibility within the organization; their actions and decisions stemming from a shared desire to strengthen food safety operations and culture.

Champions

- **bond with food safety at personal level**
- **informal but impactful leaders**
- **growth mindset**
- **love of learning**

INDIVIDUALS DEDICATED TO FOOD SAFETY

Coalitions

- **willing to have honest conflict**
- **leadership capacity**
- **organizational credibility**
- **cross-functional, cross-level**

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How can we create food safety champions?

To begin fostering food safety champions within an organization, positive food safety culture must be part of the identity of the organization. All employees, from the moment they first connect with the company, need to see how important food safety is and this must continue to be a core element throughout their tenure.

Beginning with the hiring process, food safety culture should be included in job descriptions, defining the role for each individual in meeting the organization's food safety culture goals. Both hiring and onboarding should cater to the individual responsibilities of the employee and provide examples of how they will support food safety policies and culture. For example, at Blue Apron (a fresh ingredient and recipe home delivery service), new team members receive hands-on and scenario-based training, as well as the "why" of food safety. Training modules include learnings which connect new employees and their work to consumers and from day one instill the importance of assuring food safety at each step in the meal kit assembly process. The creation of food safety champions requires all new employees to embrace a service focus, where the deeply personal nature of making and shipping food that is safe to consumers is at the heart of their daily behaviors.

To foster food safety champions, positive food safety culture must be part of the identity of your organization.

To support existing food safety champions and encourage new champions to engage, employees must continue to encounter institutional support throughout their tenure. This support can and should go beyond training. Facilitating personal connections and meaningful conversations, developing approachable and compassionate team leaders, and even examining physical spaces will all contribute to fostering food safety champions.

Again drawing an example from Blue Apron, in the area where employees don gloves and hairnets, the space is structured to be highly visible and easy to maneuver from one step to the next. The design allows frontline employees to easily identify potential issues or opportunities for improvement. By creating workspaces in which issues are easily noticed and by reinforcing incentives for speaking up through recognition and support from team leaders, food safety champions are better equipped to find and communicate concerns. When all aspects of an employee's daily activities include food safety at their core, food safety champions can excel.

How can we create a food safety coalition?

When building a food safety coalition, solicit volunteers from across levels and diverse functions. Coalitions will be most successful during difficult conversations when they include different perspectives from throughout the organization. Individuals in different functions and at different levels will also have unique knowledge of organizational risks and realities. When the time comes for implementation of changes, the inclusion of diverse functions will aid in the messaging and further encourage all departments to have deeper engagement with food safety.

Selection of food safety coalition members should also account for the commitment necessary for such an undertaking. For example, when McKee Foods Corporation (best known for its Little Debbie brand baked goods) created their food safety coalition, they specifically identified individuals who would provide energy, leadership, and longevity to support initiatives the coalition proposed. Participation was also voluntary, not an obligation. By doing so, employees' willingness to participate was much greater and attitudes towards the coalition generally more positive than if coalition members had been forced onto the team.

The best individuals for a coalition are those who: 1) want to take an active role in improving food safety culture; 2) have the bandwidth to devote to discussions and action items; and 3) are already credible leaders within their teams.

FOOD SAFETY COALITION MEMBERS
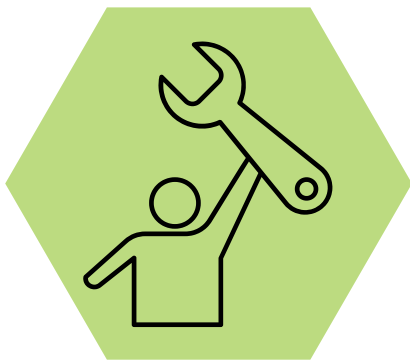
Active Improvers   **Available Bandwidth**   **Credible Leaders**

As with any new team, a newly-formed coalition must establish trust in order to be effective. Create a safe space within the coalition for individuals to express concerns, ask questions, and propose solutions. McKee's coalition spent several early meetings establishing an environment of psychological safety and creating opportunities to discuss the "undiscussables" around culture and behavior. The team identified ground rules for communication and agreed to hold one another accountable for following those rules. Development of such trust and ground rules will allow for the full engagement of participants and for the conversations needed to affect real change.

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With the food safety coalition well-established, it can begin developing goals and objectives aligned to the needs of the organization. For McKee, their coalition recognized over time a need to reevaluate their goals, which had been too results oriented. The coalition refocused instead on looking deeper into the company's existing food safety culture by assessing current behaviors and identifying ways to improve upon them. Using a food safety maturity model, the coalition met with employees throughout the organization and facilitated conversations. After these conversations, the coalition observed better communication between frontline employees and team leaders, and employees were better able to identify ways their behaviors could help or hurt food safety within the organization. This ongoing cycle of feedback, re-evaluation, and renewed goal setting is essential to the success of any food safety coalition.

BUILDING EFFECTIVE
FOOD SAFETY COALITIONS

Establish a Safe Space

How can you protect psychological safety during difficult discussions?

Set Clear and Realistic Goals

What is the existing culture? What behaviors do you wish to improve?

Communicate with Employees

How can you share your goals and facilitate conversations?

Honest Feedback and Re-evaluation
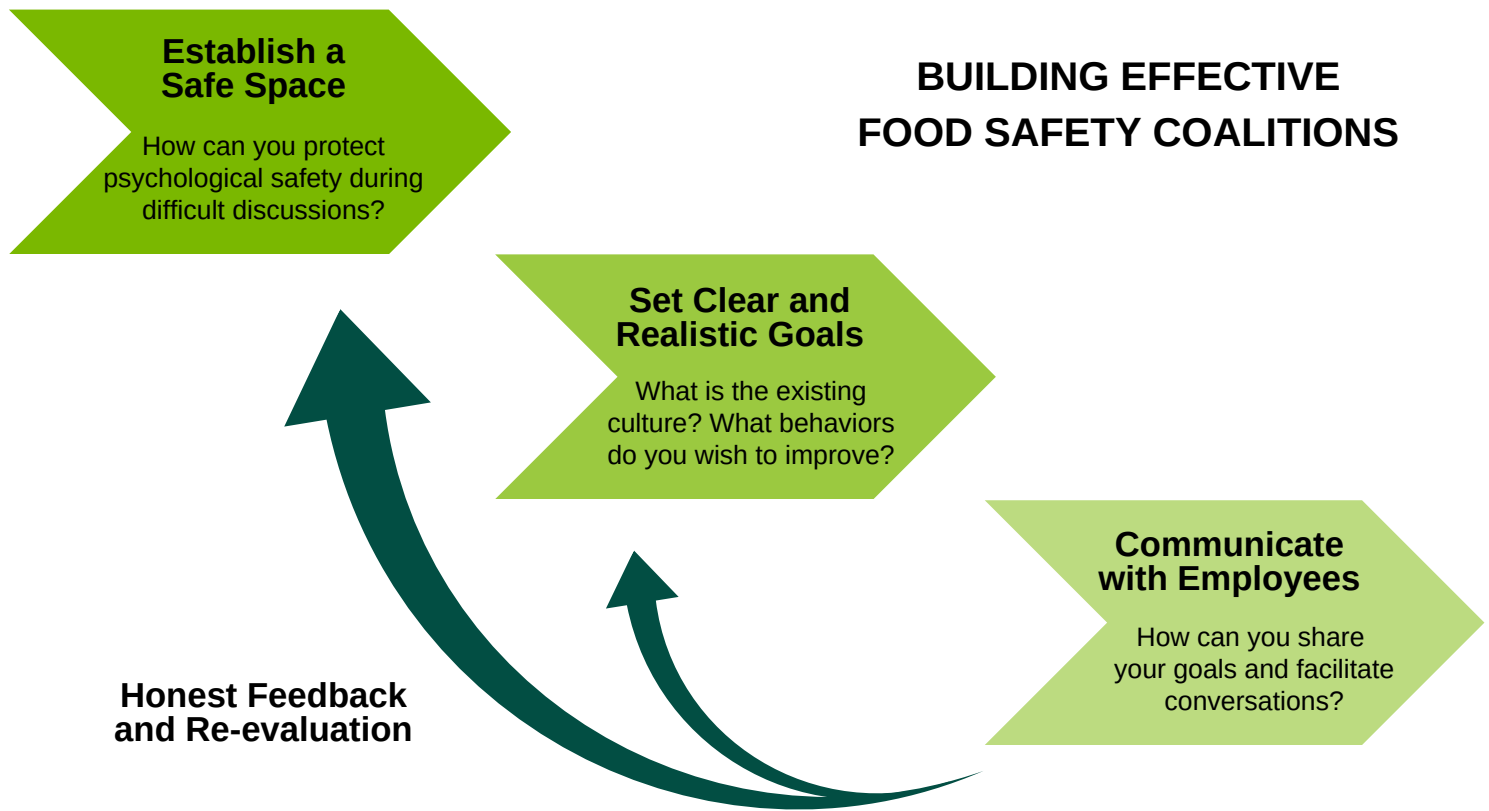
How do we support champions and coalitions?

Food safety champions and coalitions are only as strong as the organizational support for their efforts. The inclusion of food safety as a core value for all employees from hiring and beyond; organizational systems which allow, encourage, and reward speaking up; and safe spaces which reinforce trust across all levels and functions are critical to developing and engaging strong champions and building effective coalitions.

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FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

REWARDS AND RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

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In Brief

Rewards and recognition programs yield great results for reinforcing positive food safety behaviors and are beneficial to building a strong, mature food safety culture. Rewarding and recognizing positive behaviors can be formal or informal and at regular cadences (e.g., monthly, annually) or every day. Recognition every day has the greatest impact on the relationship between gratitude and the adoption of desired behaviors. Tailoring the program to the targeted teams and individuals will also increase the impact of these activities. When creating a rewards and recognition program, identify the desired behaviors and goals, connect with internal and external resources to build ideas, and include the targeted individuals and teams in the planning and implementation to maximize engagement and impact. Rewards and recognition programs should be ongoing, building on successes and feedback from participants to best serve the ultimate food safety purpose.

Key Learnings

Rewards and recognition programs are beneficial to cultivating a positive and mature workplace and food safety culture.
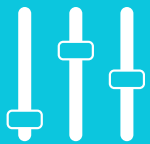
Using different types and frequencies of rewards and recognition can help reinforce behaviors.

Involving input from external and internal resources, including target employees can increase the effectiveness of reward and recognition programs.

Rewards and recognition programs should be regularly evaluated for modification and improvement.

Why do we reward and recognize individuals?

Robust rewards and recognition programs are beneficial in building and reinforcing strong food safety culture and related behaviors. Broadly, rewards and recognition programs reinforce the connection between performance and trust within a workplace, increasing trust among workers and between workers and senior leadership. This foundation of trust drives overall work culture and can contribute to lower employee turnover and fewer food safety incidents.

For individuals, rewards and recognition contribute to high-level needs related to the social environment and esteem. Individuals motivated by these needs seek a sense of belonging, respect, and trust from their workplace. Providing a rewards and recognition program addressing such elements can motivate conscious—and eventually unconscious—actions towards food safety.

Further, social appreciation through recognition promotes the release of oxytocin in the brain, generating a happy, positive feeling. Oxytocin triggers most frequently in response to social interactions with another person, so the interactive nature of rewards and recognition programs can further increase the hormone in both the individual being recognized and the individual who gave the reward or recognition. Gratitude spreads, amplifying happiness throughout a workplace through the engagement of team members in triggering one another's oxytocin response.

Providing a rewards and recognition program addressing employees' social needs—a sense of belonging, respect, and trust—can motivate conscious and unconscious actions towards food safety.

What and how do we reward and recognize?

In the intentional construction of positive food safety culture, a workplace must first identify the purpose behind its focus on food safety. Next, define observable and timebound behaviors which align with that purpose and the positive and negative consequences which both result from and influence these behaviors. Rewards and recognition create positive consequences to formalize and reinforce the desired employee behaviors which serve to better food safety.

Purpose

What are your organization's statements regarding the "why" behind food safety?

Behaviors
- observable
- timebound
- purpose-driven

Consequences
- rewards
- recognition
- escalation
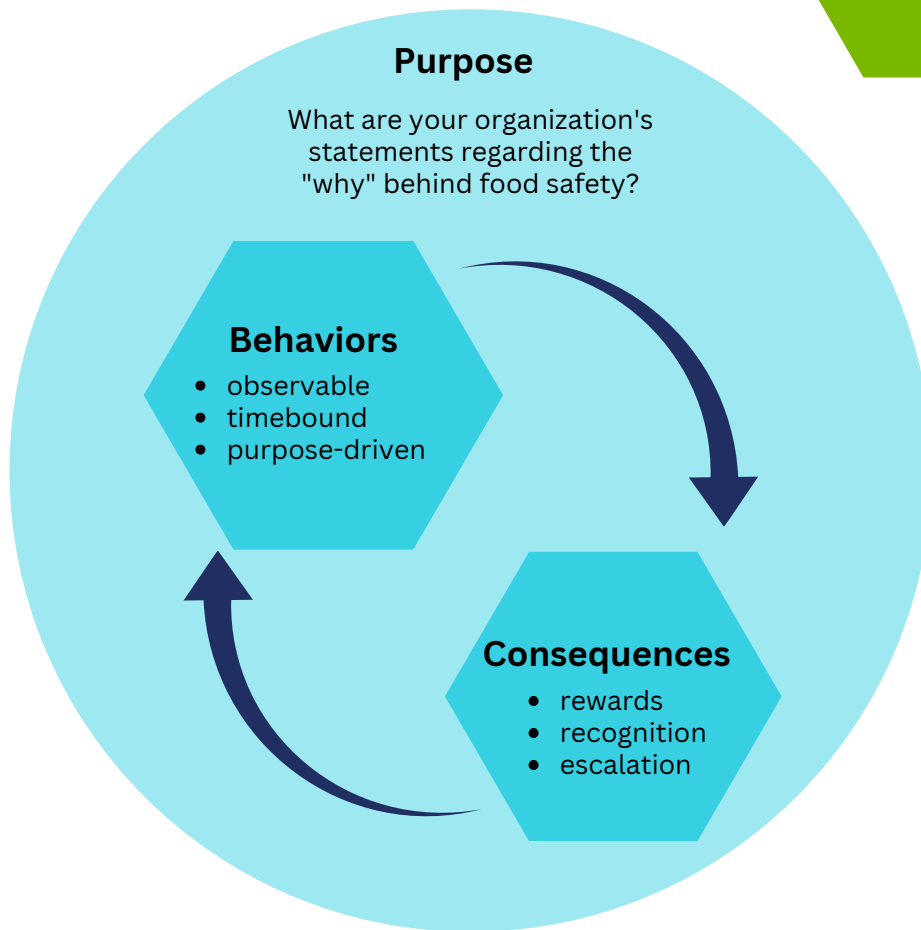
INTENTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF REWARDS & RECOGNITION

Rewarding and recognizing employees for exhibiting these behaviors can be formal (e.g., an annual banquet), informal (e.g., a monthly newsletter callout), or everyday (e.g., impromptu appreciation). The impact of recognition on behavior is greatest when done every day, reinforcing the feedback loop between gratitude and the adoption and reiteration of desired behaviors. Tailoring the program to the targeted teams and individuals will also increase the impact of the rewards and recognition. For example, employees may respond best to paid time off as a reward. In other cases, T-shirts identifying employees as food safety leaders, posted pictures in shared spaces, or cafeteria vouchers might be best.

How do we know what rewards and recognition will work for us?

Before developing a rewards and recognition program, a combination of external and internal research can provide benchmarks and inform what behaviors would be best to target, what rewards would be well-received, and what additional elements of the organization may require changes to support the program (i.e., communication, cross-function or cross-level interaction).

For external research, utilize existing written materials such as white papers. In addition, identify and connect with peer groups at similar organizations about their food safety culture journey. For example, before Conagra Brands, Inc. (an American consumer packaged goods holding company) examined the possibility of developing and implementing a rewards and recognition program, they conducted interviews with similar-sized companies. The sharing of ideas and information on rewards and recognition programs which have or have not worked well allows organizations to avoid reinventing the proverbial wheel.

For internal research, a pre-existing food safety coalition can provide thoughts on organizational food safety culture and areas which a rewards and recognition program could target. In the absence of this type of coalition, or in conjunction with a coalition's observations, feedback from employees across all levels and functions is also invaluable. Conagra, for example, conducted a survey with their employees which received a high rate of response (85%), due in large part to Conagra providing paid time for employees to participate. The paid time designated for the survey demonstrated to all employees that their feedback was valued and their time respected. This resulted in thoughtful responses which informed Conagra's decisions as they moved forward with establishing a new rewards and recognition program.

The goal of a rewards and recognition program is not only to instill pride in the workforce but also to engage employees, and by including their feedback, buy-in for your program will be far higher.

Implementation is not the end of a successful program. Understanding what will work best in each organization is an ongoing process. Conagra's rewards and recognition program, for instance, is not the same today as it was initially. The program is now in its second iteration, after continued evaluation identified the need to adjust. Both versions of the program provided frontline employees a platform for submitting suggestions to drive food safety in their facilities, but version 2.0 includes more supervisor and manager involvement to aid floor-level employees in the vetting, submission, and presentation of their ideas. As a result, monthly suggestion submissions have increased by over 50%.

In addition to the functional structure of a rewards and recognition program, feedback and regular interaction and communication with employees can also inform the aesthetics of a program. As Conagra continued to adapt their program, they created an additional element: their "Be a Food Safety Hero All Year" initiative. The campaign incorporated materials sent to plant managers and messaging in corporate offices to encourage positive food safety culture across all levels. Materials had a comic book superhero appearance to increase engagement, and individual plant employees were recognized as "Food Safety Heroes."

The goal of a rewards and recognition programs is not only to instill pride in those we recognize but also to engage all employees with food safety culture. By incorporating mechanisms for employee feedback throughout the development, implementation, and evaluation process, engagement and buy-in will be far higher than if a program is developed without employee input, interests, and needs in mind.

How do we move forward with rewards and recognition?

When implementing a new rewards and recognition program or evaluating an existing program, ensure leaders at all levels identify recognition as a priority before proceeding. Analysis should follow, pinpointing gaps in current rewards and recognition or opportunities to shift implementation strategies. Connect with internal and external resources to build out ideas for the program. Discuss with counterparts in other companies or colleagues in other functions what methods of rewards and recognition they use and ways to link food safety to existing programs. Research and reuse effective program ideas where possible but be willing to invent new tactics. Include teams and individuals who will participate and receive rewards and recognition through the program in the planning, implementation, and evaluation process to maximize employee engagement and impact.

Prioritize Recognition

Research Program Ideas

Identify Gaps

Gather and Heed Feedback

IMPLEMENTING REWARDS & RECOGNITION
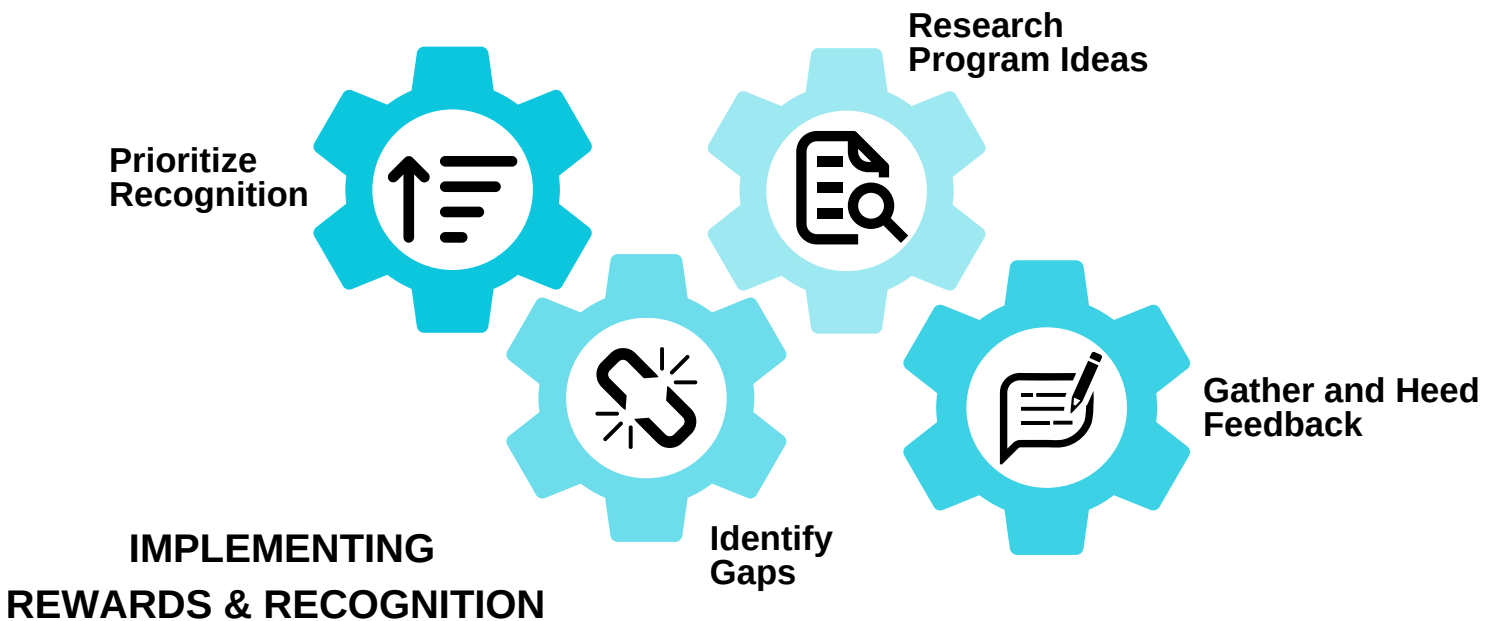
The process of designing and implementing a rewards and recognition program is ongoing. Evaluating the success of the program can include food safety metrics and analysis of employee engagement and feedback. Continuous examination of the program and willingness to identify opportunities for changes or updates will help ensure the program is serving the underlying food safety purpose.

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

LEARNING: IT'S MORE THAN CHECKING THE BOXES

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In Brief

Effective food safety culture learning programs, whether for training or education, require clear objectives for desired behaviors. Including leaders and workers in the development of learning programs increases buy-in and ensures content is relevant and applicable to learners. In addition, involving employees in the planning process will help identify the needs of different cultures, education levels, languages, and learning styles within the workforce. Learning programs should be adapted to address these needs. Engagement with concepts should extend beyond the classroom setting. Flyers, micro lessons, and other organizational communications can act as reminders and increase overall learning retention. The use of icons and images in these touchpoints builds visual connections between training and daily tasks. Learning programs are one piece of a comprehensive organization-wide approach to food safety and food safety culture. In conjunction with goal and expectation setting, communication, and evaluation, education can contribute to stronger, more positive food safety culture.

Key Learnings

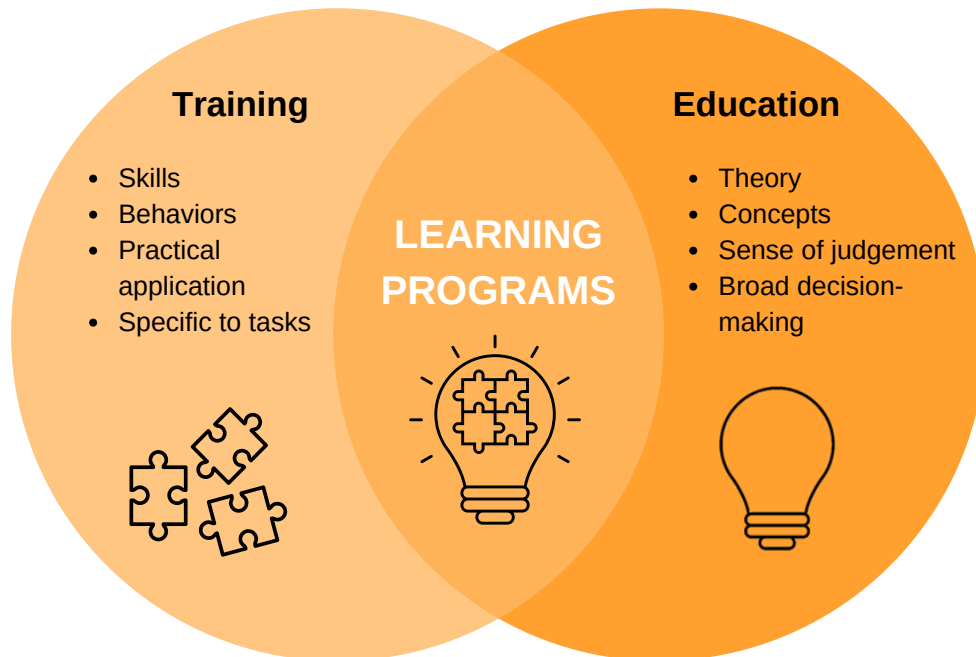|	
	Learning programs need to have clear, role-specific objectives.
	Involving learners in the planning and execution of programs can increase buy-in and ensure that their needs are addressed.
	Learning plans should be adaptable to the cultural norms, literacy levels, languages, and learning styles of workers.
	Personal connections and stories can help learners understand the "why" behind food safety concepts.
	Engaging with concepts beyond the classroom is important for increasing retention and reinforcing learning.

Learning Programs: Education vs. Training

Learning programs encompass multiple categories including *training* and *education*. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different. *Training* is the imparting of skills or specific behaviors, usually at a practical level, while *education* is the teaching of theory and concepts to help learners develop a sense of judgment. Employees need both to perform food safety tasks correctly and understand the purpose and importance of those tasks. The recommendations below apply to any learning program, both training and education.

Training

- Skills
- Behaviors
- Practical application
- Specific to tasks

LEARNING PROGRAMS

Education

- Theory
- Concepts
- Sense of judgement
- Broad decision-making

Link Learning Objectives to Behaviors

An effective learning program first requires clear, organized objectives. Identify what potential problems in your organization require solutions and prioritize which problem should be addressed in your next learning program. Addressing one need at a time will help maintain clarity and prevent overwhelming learners. Define the behaviors necessary for each role in the organization to prevent or solve your prioritized problem. Desired behaviors will differ by role.

To identify the needs of different roles, consider tools like Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy provides a framework for sorting learning objectives into categories. The most basic learning level is "Knowledge," or the ability to recall information, methods, or processes. The most complex learning levels are "Synthesis" and "Evaluation," which involve putting elements of learning together to make judgments.

For example, a senior leader's learning objective may include behaviors which only require knowledge, while a maintenance manager may be expected to synthesize or evaluate to correct potential issues. Building specific and thoughtful objectives will ensure all members of your organization are appropriately prepared to contribute to preventing or solving problems and will clarify next steps in developing your learning program.

Involve Your Learners

Development of a learning program cannot happen in a vacuum. Including learners in the process and collecting feedback regularly will increase buy-in and create more personal programs. For example, Wegmans Food Markets developed a "Hub-and-Spoke" model for training development. They identified a food safety champion in each division who acted as the hub for all stores in that division—the spokes. The champion would then filter feedback between frontline workers at each store and leadership. This resulted in the development of a training "Playbook" with content entirely developed by frontline workers, addressing issues they faced and providing guidance for daily tasks.

In another example of learner involvement, Birchwood Foods, a ground beef manufacturer with a diverse workforce, began their program development by speaking with frontline supervisors weekly to discuss the needs of their workers and how best to meet those needs. Birchwood Foods' workforce includes people with many different cultural backgrounds who speak up to eleven different languages and have varying levels of education and reading comprehension. Frontline supervisors were able to give guidance on what learning systems could best meet the needs of their workers. Using this feedback, Birchwood Foods' learner-driven program was more successful than previous models which had missed these nuances.

In addition to collecting feedback, engage learners on a personal level. Adult learners need a deeper understanding of why they need to learn certain tasks or techniques than young people. Personal stories connecting to the organization's core food safety values can address that need and show the importance of learning about food safety. Global snack producer The Hershey Company approaches the personal side of food safety in their trainings with a combination of techniques. For instance, they begin every allergy training session with the question, "How many of you know someone with a food allergy?" to create immediate connections between the learners and the purpose behind what they are learning. They also employ stories of a Hershey Company employee whose son has a peanut allergy as a representative of why preventing allergen contamination is so important. Incorporating stories, videos, and images of peers in learning materials creates bonds between your learners, the organization's values, and the information you are conveying.

Adapt to Your Learners

Learning programs are not "one size fits all." Your target learners will have specific needs, from the content to the method of delivery. As seen in the Birchwood Foods example, workforces can be extremely diverse. Make no assumptions about learners' literacy, languages, cultural norms, educational background, or learning type. Ask questions, obtain regular feedback, and adapt. Even if the path to your ultimate learning objective seems simple to you, others will require more guidance or touchpoints to reach the goal.

> **Learning programs are not "one size fits all." Your target learners will have specific needs, from the content to the method of delivery.**
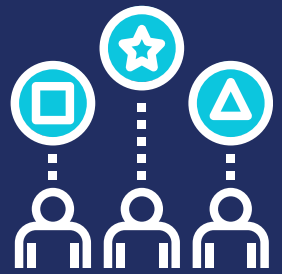
Keep content simple and focused on the application to daily work. Ask yourself, "How will this knowledge translate to specific tasks?" and make the answer clear to your learners. To address their multicultural workforce, Birchwood Foods tailored their program to each specific role at each specific facility. Employees encountered lessons showing the exact tasks they perform, and every lesson connected those behaviors and choices to the food safety values of the organization. This personalized approach made learning simpler to follow and the connections between content and behaviors clear.

Icons, images, and videos also help visual learners and those with different linguistic needs have more immediate visual connections to behaviors. The Hershey Company utilizes icons for allergens and good manufacturing practices (GMPs) to build simple, recognizable reminders of learnings. Birchwood Foods includes images and videos throughout their training modules to better connect with individuals who may have low reading comprehension. Thoughtful visual language can substantially bolster learning programs and diverse learners will benefit from the simplicity and universality.

Carry Learning Beyond the Classroom

Learning does not end at the conclusion of a training or education session. Learners need to encounter the information beyond the classroom, and more touchpoints will translate to more knowledge retention. After one day, people forget between 50-70% of what they learned, resulting in a "forgetting curve," but each additional interaction with the content decreases that loss markedly. Incorporating a lesson's content into your organization's existing communication plan and small nudges, such as posting visual aids like flyers or table tents in break rooms, will provide regular reminders of learnings and reinforce desired behaviors.

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THE FORGETTING CURVE
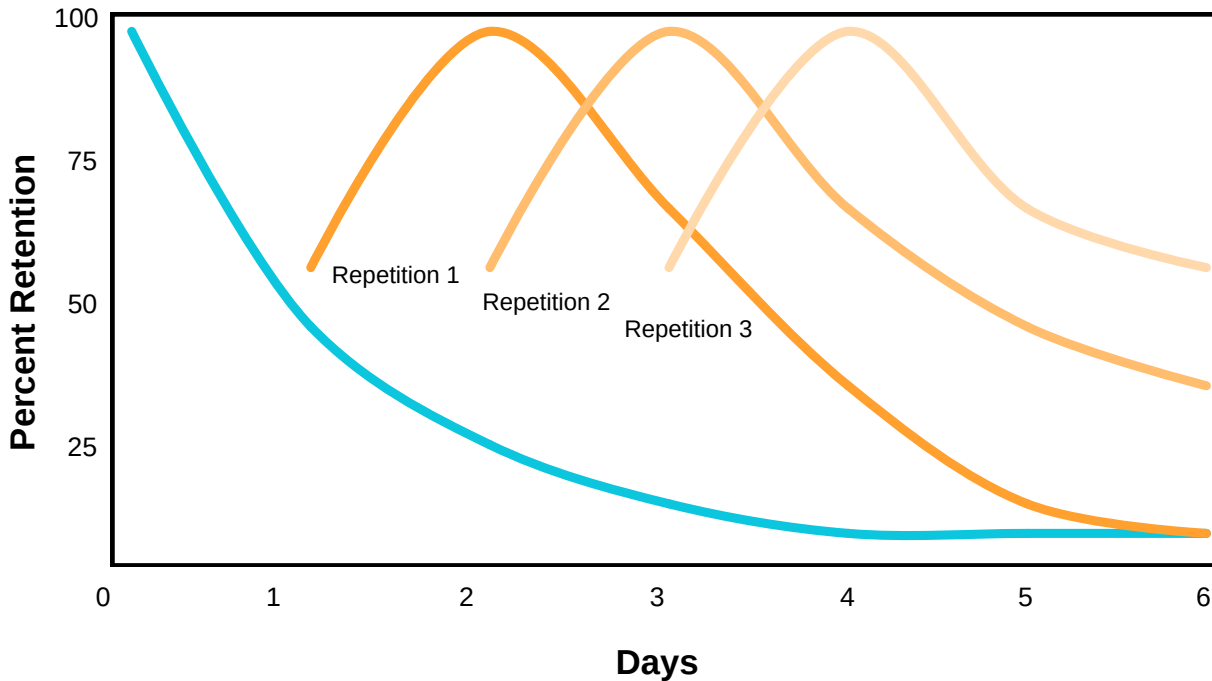
Returning to The Hershey Company's use of icons in their learning programs, the GMP icons appear in multiple high-visibility places to reiterate the information from trainings. Employees encounter a mirror before entering the facility floor, which asks, "Are you ready?" with the GMP icons for personal protective equipment. The quick visual nudge is another touchpoint for learnings while also serving as a reminder and safety checkpoint for workers.

Birchwood Foods increased their learning plan touchpoints by using micro-lessons rather than a single long training session. Employees encountered these "bite-size" lessons multiple times to help with information retention and keep the learning fresh. The Wegmans "Playbook" creates similar opportunities for workers to encounter information numerous times, helping when questions arise, while also reinforcing the answers.

Part of a Greater Whole

Learning programs are a critical step in creating food-safety-conscious employees and a more positive food safety culture in an organization. However, education and training are only part of the continuous cycle of identifying priorities, setting expectations, regular communication, and evaluation. By including learners, adapting to their needs, and carrying lessons into each step of the journey, organizations can address learning objectives, accomplish goals, and work towards a more positive, mature food safety culture.

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

MEASURE WHAT YOU TREASURE: ASSESSING FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

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In Brief

Assessing food safety culture is a crucial and ongoing process for organizations to strive for continuous improvement in food safety practices. Assessments help evaluate current systems, behaviors, and attitudes around food safety and can drive decision-making for the future. Assessments should incorporate a holistic approach by including both system and behavioral data. Organizations may require different metrics and assessment approaches depending on their stage of food safety culture maturity. Data collection methods can vary, from integrating measurements into existing systems to conducting employee surveys and gathering stakeholder feedback. The frequency of assessments can also vary. Assessments must be followed by action to address opportunities for improvement and maintain strengths. Involving team members from different levels and functions of an organization in discussions about assessment results and improvement plans can increase buy-in and encourage informed decisions. Ultimately, the goal is to gain a better understanding of the current food safety culture in an organization to develop and maintain a stronger, more positive, and more mature culture in the future.

Key Learnings

Regular assessment of food safety culture can evaluate current systems, behaviors, and attitudes and drive future decision making.

Types of data and methods of collecting and organizing data will vary based on an organization's needs and current food safety culture maturity.
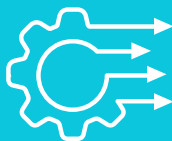
Assessments should be followed by action informed by the results of data collection and analysis.

Clear communication with employees about data collection, results, and next steps can increase buy-in and engagement in continuous improvement efforts.

Measure What You Treasure

A food safety culture journey is an ongoing process of striving for continuous improvement and against the entropic forces of complacency, crisis, and change. Creating and maintaining a strong, positive food safety culture requires intentional planning, evaluation, and action. Assessment, the collection and analysis of data, can help evaluate current systems, behaviors, and attitudes and drive future decision making. In addition, while we may intuitively believe a mature food safety culture positively correlates with food safety outcomes, data and analysis on that relationship is scant. Regular, comprehensive assessment and data collection can help build a framework of solid evidence to show that strong, positive cultures do, in fact, tie to desired outcomes (e.g., fewer recalls, fewer near misses). A better understanding of this relationship can help inform how we approach food safety and food safety culture both within individual organizations and across the industry.

What do we assess?

Measuring food safety culture can seem daunting. Culture is grounded in people's underlying beliefs; gathering quantifiable information about those beliefs, however, can be difficult. Assessment of food safety culture can, and should, be holistic, incorporating systems and behavior data and analyses which can help put people's beliefs into the larger context. System performance data can include key performance indicators such as the results of audits and environmental monitoring programs or the number of customer complaints received. Behavioral data can include observations, focus groups, and Gemba walks. Data can also be from both internal and external sources. For example, TreeHouse Foods, a producer of private label foods and beverages, and McDonald's, a multinational fast-food chain, both utilize data from external sources such as quality metrics (e.g., customer complaints and inquiries), third party reviews, and social media impressions. Combining different metrics creates a fuller picture of an organization's food safety culture.

Systems   **Behaviors**   **Beliefs**

The specific metrics used in a food safety culture assessment will not be one-size-fits-all, and the assessment tools will also vary. Depending on an organization's stage of food safety culture maturity, different data and assessment tools will be more useful or less useful in driving improvements. For example, an organization in reactive stages of food safety culture will benefit from the use of audit findings, completion and verification metrics, and training and compliance data.

Alternatively, an organization in the predictive stages of food safety culture will benefit more from risk analysis reviews, external horizon scanning, and cost of poor quality metrics. While all of the aforementioned data and more may be available to an organization regardless of its stage of food safety maturity, adapting an assessment to suit the organization will help you understand your landscape and consciously inform ways to encourage desired changes or behaviors.

How do we assess?

Because a company's food safety culture assessment can incorporate a variety of metrics, the methods of collecting and compiling that information will also differ.

One method of collecting and organizing data is to integrate food safety culture metrics into pre-existing organizational systems. For example, TreeHouse Foods has made food safety and quality culture part of the company's operational continuous improvement activities. Similarly, McDonald's structures food safety culture assessment within their existing "three-legged stool" model of corporate, owner-operator, and supplier goals and metrics. The use of these large, organization-wide systems provides insights into food safety culture while also reinforcing food safety as a core value across the company.

Adapting assessments to suit the organization will help you understand your landscape and consciously encourage desired changes or behaviors.

Another common method of collecting data is to conduct employee surveys to solicit feedback. TreeHouse Foods uses surveys to feel the pulse of employees across the company regarding food safety culture. To ensure honest participation in surveys and feedback opportunities, TreeHouse Foods emphasizes anonymity. Surveys are kept wholly anonymous, and messaging around them clarifies and supports that anonymity, so all employees feel safe to answer truthfully.

Assessment without action is fruitless. If an organization has invested time and effort to collect and analyze data, the next step is to take action.

The frequency of assessment will also vary depending on organizational needs and structure. McDonald's performs a full food safety culture assessment every three years, but in the interim they collect yearly data on suppliers', distributors', and franchisees' culture, resource allocation, and training at all legs and levels. The triennial assessment provides a comprehensive understanding of strengths and areas for improvement, while the yearly assessments provide opportunities for best practice sharing and creative innovation.

By blending diverse data sources and data collection and analysis methods, organizations can build an approach to assessment which works best for them to understand the current state of their food safety culture and evaluate possibilities for the future.

Treasure What You Measure

Assessment without action is fruitless. If an organization has invested time and effort to collect and analyze data, the next step is to take action. Based on an evaluation of the data, consider where food safety culture is strong and where there are opportunities for improvement. Action is then necessary to maintain or grow identified strengths and to address assessed opportunities for improvement.

Assessments which highlight opportunities for improvement—or even failures—can be invaluable resources if action follows. At TreeHouse Foods, if an assessment finds an issue with the adoption of strong, positive food safety culture behaviors or mindsets, they use root cause analysis to identify where the process may have broken down. By parsing the issues found in assessment and identifying the pitfalls which led to those issues, the company can make changes to better approach the identified challenges in the future. Likewise, McDonald's organizes areas for improvement within and across the three legs of their organization, using a Venn diagram to highlight where opportunities overlap and where changes will be most influential.

Including team members from across levels and functions in the discussion of assessment results can enhance organizational support for improvement efforts. If an organization has a coalition of food safety culture champions (see our whitepaper "Building a Coalition of Food Safety Champions"), they can provide insights towards next steps. Sharing the results of assessments and plans for improvement with the employees who helped provide the data allows them to see how their input is used to improve the organization. Seeing steps taken based on collective feedback can increase buy-in from employees for future surveys because they see a return on their efforts. In addition, knowing the results of an assessment can help team members make conscious, informed decisions to advance food safety. For example, when McDonald's introduced food safety culture questions to their yearly audit of a supplier, they did not score those specific questions of audit but instead used it as a basis for discussion around measuring and modeling strong, positive food safety culture. In the same way a practice test helps a student prepare a study schedule, this approach allowed suppliers to use the assessment data as they work to enhance their food safety culture.

THE CYCLE OF ASSESSMENT

Evaluate Next Steps

What clear, defined actions will you take based on your assessment?

Collect and Analyze Data

What metrics are you assessing? How will you obtain data for those metrics?

Communicate Results

How will you share the results and next steps with all members of the organization?

Act

How will you implement your next steps? How can each member of your organization contribute?

Regardless of where an organization is in their food safety culture journey, assessment is a critical part of planning, evaluating, and acting towards continuous improvement. Metrics and methods will vary for every organization, but the ultimate goal is the same for all: a better understanding of food safety culture in the present to develop and maintain stronger, more positive, and more mature food safety culture in the future.

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

STORYTELLING TO INFORM, EDUCATE AND INFLUENCE.

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In Brief

Storytelling is an integral tool to create positive change in the food safety system. By sharing personal stories, the audience has the ability to connect with the storyteller as complex issues faced by food workers are humanized. Storytelling can inform or educate the listener, and at its best, it should influence an individual's behavior and/or mindset. Stories that are genuine, factual, and action-oriented are the most effective, and should be carefully tailored to their target audience. Storytellers should take the time to prepare and practice. Sharing stories with brevity, impact, and emotional resonance will become more natural with time.

Key Learnings

	Storytelling helps your audience build personal connections to the food safety actions they take
	Stories have the power to inform, educate, and influence
	Stories and approaches to storytelling may differ depending on the audience and desired outcome
	Effective storytelling requires a focus on action-oriented outcomes and a feedback loop for measuring effectiveness

The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling can be a powerful means of engaging people with the real consequences, both positive and negative, of policies, procedures, and behaviors surrounding food safety. Personal stories build connections. These connections help concepts endure and prevent the complacency that can occur when daily actions and choices become detached from their impact on people.

Stories can be used to inform, educate, and influence. As a tool to inform, stories can present food safety facts in a larger, more engaging context. As a tool to educate, stories can instruct people not only in the appropriate actions for food safety but also connect them to why those actions matter. And finally, as a tool to influence, stories have the capacity to create changes in attitudes and behaviors which persist beyond the workplace. For example, Jorge Hernandez, Vice President of Quality Assurance for the international fast food chain Wendy's, has received phone calls years after sharing food safety stories in which people jokingly accuse him of "ruining" family gatherings. Stories of foodborne illness and the consequences of food safety choices had resonated so deeply with these listeners that they could no longer look at a holiday potluck without taking extra safety measures and encouraging loved ones to do the same.

These enduring personal connections, combined with the knowledge and understanding of food safety concepts shared in the stories, are essential to helping people make the right choices every day.

Inform ➤ Educate ➤ Influence

Shaping A Story

A story does not have to fit a uniform length, style, or tone to impact food safety behaviors. In fact, selecting or adapting stories for different audiences and outcomes can be more effective than the same story told the same way.

For Jeff Almer, a constituent advocate for Stop Foodborne Illness whose mother died in 2008 of *Salmonella* in an outbreak linked to the now infamous Peanut Corporation of America (PCA), his story evolved and adapted as his goals and audiences changed. For example, when speaking to the media, Almer would craft short, memorable elements of his story into sound bites, but when speaking to an individual, such as an attorney working on the case against PCA, he would share a more complete picture of his family's experience.

The goal for the media was to create snappy moments that would elevate and widen the distribution of his story, while the goal for individuals was to influence them towards specific actions.

For instance, Jeff might share how his mother was a fighter and struggled with a years-long battle against brain cancer. This made her eventual death from foodborne illness – a sudden and completely unanticipated event that resulted from something as simple and essential as eating – that much more devastating to the family. By including details like these, Jeff was able to use specificity of information to his advantage.

In a similar way, Hernandez adapts his stories to different contexts. When working as a health inspector, he would draw comparisons for managers between publicized food safety incidents and similar issues within their own establishments, highlighting the potential consequences to their business. Working for Wendy's, when sharing a story with frontline employees, he would use stories which demonstrated the effect of foodborne illness on families, highlighting how their actions could help protect people like themselves or their loved ones. These different contexts benefited from different stories and different storytelling approaches to connect with the listeners.

In addition, stories surrounding food safety need not always be about negative consequences. Using storytelling to elevate positive examples, instances of employees taking action for food safety and demonstrating the desired behaviors and attitudes, can also be important tools in influencing others. Tying storytelling to rewards and recognition programs, telling stories of peers making good choices, and presenting the positives alongside the potential negatives creates even more opportunities for people to connect with the message.

Planning and Implementing Storytelling

Implementing effective storytelling in an organization to promote desired food safety behaviors requires an understanding of the target audience, clear and action-oriented stories, and a system for feedback.

Know the Audience

Conducting research about the target audience is essential to crafting a narrative which will build connections and influence behaviors. The right emotional connection coming from the right person in an organization is essential. For instance, some individuals may connect best with a story told directly by a person impacted by foodborne illness, like Almer, while others may benefit from hearing the story from a peer or a mentor.

Particularly in a very diverse workforce (with employees who speak multiple languages or come from different cultures), stories should be crafted with these differences in mind. Identifying and understanding who the target audience is will help determine which stories and methods of delivery will be most impactful.

Keep Stories Clear, Simple, and Action-Oriented

Regardless of audience, stories should be clear and have a simple, action-oriented message. If a story meanders or contains more information than is necessary, listeners may disengage or even take away the wrong parts of the story. Determine the action outcomes of the story: what behavior do you want people to adopt or change after hearing it? The story can then follow a path to those outcomes. For example, when Hernandez, working as a health inspector, shared a story with a restaurant manager, he specifically cited the temperature "danger zone" and a few key methods the manager could use to avoid it when cooling a sauce. Hernandez even provided a thermometer for the manager to use as he tested those methods. The clear, action-oriented message of Hernandez's story provided the manager with next-steps he could easily follow to help prevent foodborne illness.

Action-Oriented Storytelling

What do you want your audience to walk away with? How do you hope to impact their behavior?

Create a Feedback Loop

Storytelling, as with food safety culture itself, benefits from a system of continuous feedback and improvement. Building on the example in the previous paragraph, when Hernandez gave the restaurant manager directions for cooling sauce without letting it sit in the "danger zone," he not only provided feedback, but also opened the door to an ongoing conversation about different cooling methods.The manager called and explained what did and did not work, and Hernandez then knew his story had been effective and the connection between the manager and food safety established.

1. Gather Feedback
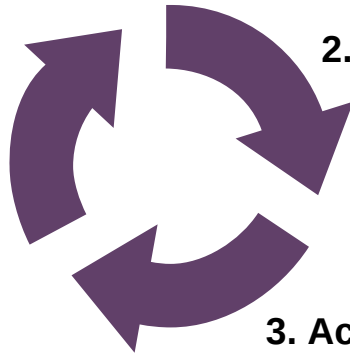
2. Analyze Feedback

3. Act on Insights

Creating a **system for feedback** and measuring the **effectiveness** of a story can help inform future storytelling and help determine if additional follow-ups such as training or education programs are needed.

Food safety culture is rooted in people's personal beliefs and connections with food safety. Storytelling, as a means to inform, educate, and influence behaviors by building personal connections is a natural method of shaping and reinforcing food safety culture in an organization. By adapting stories for the target audience and identifying desired action outcomes, and by sharing honest stories from the heart, people can develop a deeper understanding of why their actions and choices around food safety truly matter.

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

ARE FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ENOUGH?

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In Brief

On their own, food safety management systems are not sufficient to maintain a comprehensive commitment to food safety. Management systems focus on "what" an organization should do and are usually driven by a compliance mindset. Audits, regulations, and programs are all examples of the concrete, quantitative benchmarks used to measure success. However, these systems must go hand-in-hand with a mature food safety culture. Culture is driven by social norms that are modeled but not always explicitly stated or written down. Behaviors, attitudes and expectations drive culture, which in turn creates the "why" of an organization. By fostering food safety management systems and food safety culture in tandem, businesses stand a greater chance of minimizing risk, and maximizing overall transparency, communication and respect across their team.

Key Learnings

Although related, food safety management systems and food safety culture are two distinct, yet complimentary facets of a mature food safety infrastructure

Food safety management systems encompass compliance driven behaviors which ensure that programs, data, and technology follow regulation, while food safety culture consists of shared values, beliefs, and norms

In order to be most effective, food safety management systems should be bolstered by food safety culture

A mature food safety culture necessitates transparency and trust, so workers at all levels can feel comfortable sharing potentially difficult feedback

Systems and culture can overlap, but are two <u>unique</u> concepts

Food safety management systems are often conflated with food safety culture, but the two are in fact distinctly different.

Food safety management systems are the programs, data, and technology used by food companies to ensure food is safe. They may include a set of written procedures which define the range of actions taken by the food business operator to ensure that the food produced is of the required quality and legally compliant. An example of a food safety management system is HACCP.

By contrast, food safety culture is an organization's shared values, beliefs, and norms. It also takes into account psychosocial risks, such as an employee's perceived job control, role clarity, relationships, and managerial support. Unlike a HACCP plan, which asks if food is safe to consume, psychosocial risks ask: Is there the ability to complete work tasks within normal hours? Do employees feel able to speak up when they see a food safety problem? Do employees understand why certain tasks must be properly completed? If management systems focus on the "what," culture emphasizes the "why." Although both are important, it's the "why" of culture that has the ability to empower workers to see themselves as active players in the organization. Without a mature culture, workers may lack the context to fully understand why certain standards or protocols are in place, which in turn may cause them to become less invested in maintaining those standards.

Food Safety Management Systems

-The "What" of food safety
-Driven by compliance and regulation
-Programs, data and technology used to ensure food is safe.

Food Safety Culture

-The "Why" of food safety

-Driven by social norms, beliefs, values

### How to integrate psychosocial factors into hazard analysis

Traditionally, food safety risk is assessed on the intersection of two metrics: severity and likelihood. **Severity** measures the negative impact of a hazard, while **likelihood** measures the probability of that hazard occurring.

However, it is imperative to also consider the impact of psychosocial factors. Psychosocial refers to factors impacting the individual's perception of manager and peer support and control over food safety tasks (to name a few). In practice, Psychosocial hazards can be related to retention of critical staff, how the frontline leader supports individuals by listening and encouraging everyone to speak up if they need support, and how individuals are included in problem solving when there is a food safety problem in their area.

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For example: let's imagine that the contamination of a product with cleaning chemical residue has a **moderate** severity (would result in a product recall), and the company has determined there is **low** likelihood of contamination occurring. Under a traditional hazard assessment, the overall grade of risk would be deemed "moderate." However, psychosocial factors could influence the actual likelihood of a negative outcome. If cleaning protocols are communicated merely as orders (e.g., "You have to keep this product away from food contact surfaces"), workers may lack the context to see why this practice matters, which could inadvertently heighten the possibility of contamination. However, if the same protocol is framed through the lens of values (e.g., "You and your team play an essential role in shaping our cleaning culture and this product can make children sick if it ends up in our food"), workers can be motivated towards better performance, and in doing so, reduce the risk of a contamination event.

Psychosocial refers to factors that impact the individuals **perception** of:
- Manager and peer support
- Personal impact and control over food safety tasks
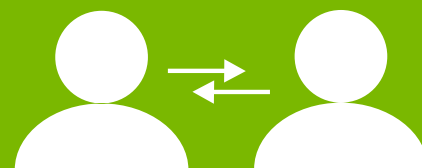
These factors can impact the retention of critical staff, how frontline leadership supports individuals by listening and encouraging everyone to speak up if they need support, and how individuals are included in problem solving when there is a food safety issue in their area

## It takes a comprehensive approach

Large or small, all organizations can benefit from integrating food safety management systems with food safety culture. When they are used to complement one another, that's when big shifts can occur. An example of this is shared by General Mills Director of Global Food Safety, Dr. Kelly Stevens. General Mills' food safety management system consists of a high level commitment to global food safety policies. These policies include food safety execution, verification, and metrics. Moreover, their culture is built upon active listening to differing perspectives, transparency, and an open recognition of both wins and challenges faced by their team. Leaders recognize the importance of flexibility and are able to pivot when one approach is not yielding the desired results.

One example of this comprehensive approach is their culture of handwashing. After analyzing handwashing metrics at a plant and noticing a decline in compliance, the General Mills management team investigated why. It turned out that there were many handwashing stations throughout the floor, which should have led to increased washing. However, because there were so many stations, people rarely saw their co-workers (or managers) washing their hands, because they had usually done so at a station out of view.

Management came to the solution of asking team members to wash their hands every time they passed a station, whether or not they needed to. This leading by example created the cultural shift that was needed to improve the metrics captured by the food safety management system.

Management Systems **Mature Food Safety** **Culture**
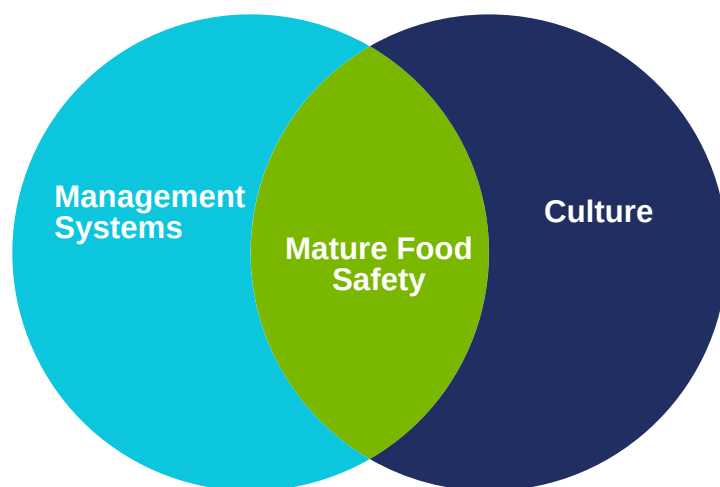
Using data to drive cultural improvements

Another example of interweaving culture and systems for big leaps forward is the use of scorecards. If a change in food safety or quality is picked up by a scorecard within a management system, sometimes the fastest and lowest cost way to find the root cause is to simply ask those on the frontline.

However, in doing so, you must be ready to receive honest feedback. General Mills Director of Global Food Safety, Dr. Kelly Stevens, recalls the impact this had on her early on in her career. Her first culture scorecard was not great; in fact, it was pretty bad.

Dr. Stevens recalls being embarrassed that her metrics were so low, but found the courage to share this data in a meeting, and thanked her teammates for honestly rating her performance. It was important for her to know where her blind spots were and how she could grow, and this growth was only possible if her team members could be candid. By respectfully receiving negative feedback, she was able to reinforce a culture of sharing not only the good things, but also the bad and the ugly. This in turn created a safe space for more junior employees to deliver potentially difficult feedback and normalized owning up to mistakes and calling out problems when you see them.

"Be ready to receive honest feedback. Mistakes are learning opportunities to grow and improve as an organization."

It's important to note that feedback isn't always solicited. If there is an outbreak or news story that involves your organization, you may be receiving data not picked up by your food safety management system. How you respond to this is crucial. You might also ask yourself, "How could we have avoided this?" or "How could my food safety management system be adapted to gather data needed to identify this failing?" At the end of the day, mistakes are learning opportunities to grow and improve as an organization. Being able to receive criticism, identify shortcomings, and address setbacks is key for any business to thrive. A mature food safety culture is contingent on leadership who can accept responsibility when necessary and focus on actionable steps to engage workers at all levels in raising the bar.

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FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

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In Brief

In the eleventh and final webinar of our webinar series "Collaborating on Culture in the New Era of Smarter Food Safety," The Alliance to Stop Foodborne Illness and FDA hosted a panel of industry leaders to reflect on the current and future trends of food safety culture. In today's globalized world, fostering a mature food safety culture is essential for protecting public health and maintaining consumer trust. However, a successful approach to food safety cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all strategy; it requires a data-driven, individualized approach and cross-industry collaboration. Ultimately, companies must learn from others' successes as well as mistakes, engage in ongoing analysis of their own practices and engage all supply chain partners to maintain high standards at every level of production. Food safety culture is a journey, and while each company's path is unique, working together is the surest way of advancing our shared goal of producing safer food for consumers everywhere.

Key Learnings

Food safety culture is a journey unique to each company

Storytelling is a powerful tool which can be used to individualize and connect with targeted food safety audiences

Food safety culture can be measured through validated tools and performance indicators and should be done to continuously to drive ongoing improvement

Companies can learn from the successes as well as mistakes of others to improve their own best practices

In an increasingly globalized food supply, collaboration and knowledge-sharing are key to creating safer food

Introduction

Twenty years ago, "food safety culture" was not part of our professional vernacular. Today, it is a topic of discussion and study, with entire organizations dedicated to helping others measure, foster and improve their company culture. While every company has a food safety culture, not every culture is positive, mature, or intentional. Through ten previous webinars, the Alliance to Stop Foodborne Illness and FDA sought to explore specific aspects of food safety culture, covering topics such as making leaders risk aware, fostering food safety champions and developing effective reward and recognition programs.

For our eleventh and final webinar of "Series One," six leaders from across the industry were invited to reflect on their unique journeys as food safety professionals. Their experiences are as diverse and wide-ranging as the food industry itself and speak to both the present and future trends in food safety.

Note: The following serves as a reflection on the previous discussions in "Series One".
For a more in-depth exploration of the topics discussed, we encourage you to reference the earlier whitepapers in the series, <u>available for free on the Alliance website</u>.

Make Food Safety Personal

Food safety culture tools must be individualized for optimum impact. There is no "one-size-fits-all" resource when it comes to promoting food safety culture, and each company will encounter its own challenges. For instance, it may be difficult for audiences who do not work directly with food, or suppliers or co-manufacturers who do not produce a final, brand name product, to fully comprehend how their actions (or inactions) can negatively affect food safety. As Karen McCarty, Senior Director of Commercial Quality Assurance for Agropur explains, there are different approaches to be taken with "B2C" audiences (who have a direct relationship with consumers) and the "B2B" ingredients space (where audiences do not directly market to or interact with prospective consumers).

Regardless of a company's size or sector, changing entrenched behaviors is difficult. The solution lies in making food safety relevant by speaking to the specific needs, strengths, and operations of a given organization.

Audience connection may be amplified by sharing personal experiences to connect with team members. Jorge Hernandez – the Vice President of Quality Assurance at The Wendy's Company – strongly advocates for industry leaders to capitalize on storytelling as a way to convey food safety values. Storytelling can be an excellent tool to connect with an audience on a more personal level and provide the "why" behind food safety practices.

Embrace a Data-Driven Approach

For some, knowing how to measure food safety culture can feel confusing or ambiguous. However, Cultivate SA Principal Lone Jespersen stressed the importance of using validated tools to assess the maturity of food safety practices. Tracking KPIs, such as GMP violations or the frequency of safety audits, can help identify gaps and drive continuous improvement.

Companies should also avoid a "checkbox" mentality. One of the biggest challenges in food safety culture is the reduction of complex efforts into compliance exercises. As Jespersen remarked, "We risk doing to food safety culture what we did to HACCP—turning it into a compliance issue instead of focusing on making safe food." Instead, the goal should be creating a system where employees at all levels are empowered to take ownership of food safety.

No single assessment tool can change a company's culture overnight. It will require more than completing a quiz or purchasing a piece of software to determine which steps are necessary to advance your company's food safety culture. Taking time to review your organization's unique successes (e.g., What do we do well?) and sticking points (e.g., Where can we improve?) will help create a blueprint for where and how changes should be implemented.

"Don't Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste"

Although a mature food safety culture is essential to manufacturing trustworthy products, consumers are most likely unaware of your company's specific food safety practices. Megan Kenjora – Senior Food Safety Manager at The Hershey Company – emphasized that consumer-facing initiatives, such as allergen management and transparency, can help signal a company's commitment to food safety, and in turn, strengthen consumer trust.

However, because consumers generally assume that the food they purchase is safe, poor practices at one company can damage the consumer's faith in that entire category of food. For instance, a recall of E. coli tainted lettuce from one producer can make customers wary of buying leafy greens at all. This highlights the inherent connectedness of the food industry, and the importance of supporting – and learning from – your partners and even competitors.

As Jorge Hernandez says: "Don't let a good crisis go to waste." There is always an opportunity to grow or reflect when something goes wrong, even if that event does not directly impact your organization. Staying abreast of current events and learning from others' mistakes is key. Just as it is important to avoid a "check-the-box" mentality, companies should also avoid seeing their food safety practices as static. New regulations, technologies, and the inevitable turnover of employees means that things are always changing and require an ongoing assessment of best practices. Because of the integrated nature of the food supply chain, companies must maintain high standards not only for themselves, but for all of their partners and suppliers.

Collaboration is Key

All panelists agreed that the number one thing they foresaw in a safer food supply was collaboration. Enhancing food safety necessitates a collaborative approach both within and between individual companies, and as food supply chains become increasingly global, ensuring food safety requires international collaboration. Collaboration sparks positive growth and mutual learning within and across companies. Resources like the Alliance and FDA Webinar series and the Alliance Food Safety Culture Toolkit are designed to promote dialogue and encourage companies to share best practices with one other.

While companies may implement specific food safety measures, food safety culture requires buy-in from suppliers, manufacturers, and even regulators. As noted by Ola Afolayan – Director of Food Safety and Regulatory at Kellanova – "Food safety is not a competitive advantage, it is a shared responsibility." By engaging partners across the supply chain and viewing food safety not as a competitive edge but as a common goal, businesses can foster an environment of trust and transparency.

Lastly, corporate leadership's role as a champion of food safety is pivotal in steering a company towards sustained success. By placing food safety at the forefront of corporate priorities, companies not only mitigate risks but also build a culture of trust and reliability.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR PARTICIPANTS.

This webinar series was made possible by the generosity of volunteer panelists who provided expertise from leading food companies to educate viewers across the world.

CONCLUSION

This webinar series underscores the vital importance of robust food safety practices and internal food safety culture. The series gathered insights from a diverse array of veteran professionals. The actionable strategies presented in these papers provide a solid foundation for companies to enhance their food safety cultures, create an open dialogue with employees, and ultimately prevent foodborne illnesses.

The Alliance and FDA's commitment to resource-sharing and collaboration aims to elevate food safety standards, ensuring the protection of public health now and in the future. This inaugural series sets the stage for continued advancements and shared progress in safeguarding our food supply.

Interested in learning more about cultivating a positive food safety culture?

Sign up for the Alliance's Food Safety Culture Toolkit:
https://stopfoodborneillness.org/food-safety-culture-toolkit/

View the joint FDA / Alliance Food Safety Culture Webinar Series:
https://www.youtube.com/@alliancetostopfoodborneillness

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