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The World Is Changing and So Must Your Food Safety Expectations

In today's manufacturing environment, there are significant challenges that face professionals in instituting a food safety culture. Environmental factors such as socioeconomic issues and demographic shifts are transforming the food manufacturing landscape. A robust merger and acquisition atmosphere, given the economic situation today, has a dynamic impact on business today. In addition, the zero-based budget (ZBB) focus brought on by the arrival of 3G Capital's food industry acquisitions has changed how many companies view their expenditures and their business. Simultaneously, changing demographics have impacted the industry, with the shift in the labor market that has changed who the typical manufacturing worker is, for example, multiple generations including millennials and immigrant workers, and what the perspective is on the relationship between the employer and the employed. These challenges should be examined to understand how they will mandate a change to the way you lead your company to adjust and evaluate its approach to changing and sustaining a food safety culture. We will examine each of these challenges and how they impact a food company's food safety expectations (Figure 2.1) and bring forward activities with examples for how to adapt your company's food safety expectations in this changing world.

Mergers and Acquisitions

When we study the socioeconomic forces, the food industry is undergoing a transformational change, with the intense amount of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) that have taken place over the last several years. Stout Advisory, a leading valuation advisory and management consulting firm, reports that M&A activity in the food and beverage industry has seen about 300 transactions annually over the last few years, with "strong food & beverage industry M&A activity continued in the third quarter of 2017."[1] This type of vigorous movement has shaken up the food industry and continues to influence actions within the industry. As these events occur, professionals within food companies must decipher the needs of a changing business and integrate differing company cultures to ensure a food safety culture suitable for the combined corporation. Frequently, the various components of a
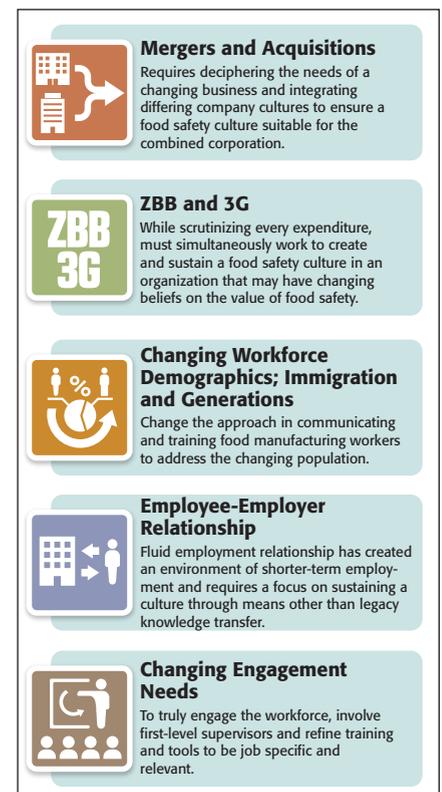

Mergers and Acquisitions
Requires deciphering the needs of a changing business and integrating differing company cultures to ensure a food safety culture suitable for the combined corporation.

ZBB and 3G
While scrutinizing every expenditure, must simultaneously work to create and sustain a food safety culture in an organization that may have changing beliefs on the value of food safety.

Changing Workforce Demographics; Immigration and Generations
Change the approach in communicating and training food manufacturing workers to address the changing population.

Employee-Employer Relationship
Fluid employment relationship has created an environment of shorter-term employment and requires a focus on sustaining a culture through means other than legacy knowledge transfer.

Changing Engagement Needs
To truly engage the workforce, involve first-level supervisors and refine training and tools to be job specific and relevant.

Figure 2.1. Challenges for Your Food Company and Their Impact on Food Safety Expectations*

THREE TAKE AWAYS
- ☐ Keep it simple.
- ☐ Make it specific.
- ☐ Communicate, communicate, communicate.

newly formed corporation have vastly different views of roles, responsibilities, and, most importantly, norms of behavior. This requires a professional to determine what the corporation's new standards will be and to initiate change management processes to institute the new norms—very often alienating those who were closely tied to the old set of values. This requires a professional to recognize the need for creating a strong, harmonized food safety culture while tactfully navigating through a set of disparate norms, behaviors, and values.

ZBB/3G

Another perilous minefield to traverse is the "3G impact" on the food industry. 3G Capital is a well-known global investment firm that has purchased several large food and beverage companies such as Heinz, Kraft, Anheuser-Busch, Burger King, and Tim Hortons. It has impacted the food industry through its focus on relentless cost cutting and the introduction of zero-based budgeting.[2] When a company has been acquired by 3G, as Daniel Roberts at Fortune magazine described it, the 3G impact includes "widespread layoffs, lower budgets, new levels of austerity, and a shift in the corporate culture." This "3G impact" includes zero-based budgeting, a process for creating those lower budgets, "wherein every expense must be newly justified every year, not just new ones, and the goal is to bring it lower than the year prior."[3] The influence that 3G has had on the food industry has significantly impacted views on food safety, particularly as it concerns roles and responsibilities, as well as budget for head count and training. While adhering to new requirements to scrutinize every expenditure, professionals must simultaneously work to create and sustain a food safety culture in an organization that has changing beliefs on the value of food safety. This creates a dilemma when attempting to transform an organization's norms while needing to influence new senior leaders' views on food safety. Presuming success in gaining alignment with senior leaders, the professional must then undertake the process of change management, now under stricter budgeting constraints. Previously used tools for creating a food safety culture (training, development, roles and responsibilities, outside monitoring, advisory and auditing services) are now under additional scrutiny, making the task even more difficult, as greater justification is required.

Clearly, the current economic situation, with increased M&A activity and strong influence from the "3G impact," has created a perfect storm for the professional trying to create a strong food safety culture. These external forces will require a level of creativity beyond what has been thought of in the past.

Changing Workforce Demographics

Changing demographics have also caused headwinds for the professional trying to institute an enviable food safety culture in his/her organization. As we look at the changes in the market today, one of the most influential forces is the changing immigrant population in the U.S. As the U.S. population grows from an immigrant population, jobs taken by these transplants tend towards low-skilled roles—often in the manufacturing industry. At the same time, native English speakers shy away from manufacturing roles, opting for less-labor-intensive roles. In fact, "immigrants are 1.2 times as likely as U.S.-born workers to be employed in the manufacturing sector."[4] This change in the proportion of immigrants in food manufacturing creates challenges for the professional working towards creating a food safety culture, as there are difficulties in training non-English speakers, as well as aligning norms and behaviors from foreign cultures with differing values. The approach the professional takes in communicating and training food manufacturing workers must be changed to address the changing population.

In addition to the changes in immigrant populations, there are also currently three major generations in the labor force today. Defined as Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials, they are almost equally represented in the workforce today. Baby Boomers are defined by having grown up in a time of relative economic prosperity. As a result, they are willing to work hard and sacrifice work-life balance for success. Oftentimes, they are described as workaholics and have a diminished view of others that do not work as hard. Gen Xers have been described as highly independent and less committed to an organization. They are more mobile in the workforce, demonstrating less commitment to a company, and they highly value work-life balance. The third major generational influence is the Millennials who tend to be more highly educated and technologically savvy, with a strong social consciousness. Millennials, having grown up with social media, are confident in sharing information and value diversity. As we view these different generations, it is clear that their differences require varying approaches to engaging them. Communication will need to be carried out using several different tactics, and training will require multiple methodologies.

Employee–Employer Relationship

While these changing demograph-

ics force a modification in approach, simultaneously, there has been a shift in the relationship between employee and employer. Over the last 20 years, the commitment that once existed between a company and its associates has changed, as the previous long-term employment "contract" no longer exists. "At-will employment" has created a new norm where employers are free to hire and fire, and employees are free to come and go. This fluid employment relationship has eliminated the long-term commitment of employees and created an environment of shorter-term employment. This, too, has created challenges for the professional tasked with creating a food safety culture. No longer can one depend on norms and traditions handed down from one generation of employees to the next. And sustaining behaviors by having long-term employees with low turnover cannot be relied on to ensure the food safety culture remains robust.

Changing Engagement Needs

With a work environment that more and more relies on employees who have a shorter-term employment commitment, it becomes more challenging to engage associates in the culture and truly embrace the values. Research shows that people's food safety behavior is most significantly influenced by their supervisor's commitment to food safety.[5] This requires a different approach from our first-level supervisors in engaging the workforce, as they are incredibly influential in terms of developing the appropriate behaviors on the plant floor or at the food-contact locations and in sustaining these behaviors.

Another approach to engaging the workforce is through the use of training, communication, and measurements. To address the entire workforce in a cost-effective and timely manner,

frequently we use a "one-size-fits-all" approach. The challenge with this is that in order to truly engage the workforce, employees need to see things very specifically, not in the generic fashion that we have historically used. Associates need to understand aspects of food safety that are particularly relevant to their role, and they need to be given tools that are useful to them. Not only must we be aware of language differences, 4–6 different generations including millennials and cultural variations, addressing those with customized training specifically using their desired language or recognizing their cultural perspectives, but we must also refine training and tools to be job specific and relevant. This approach is critical to quickly getting the shorter-term workforce up-to-speed with the appropriate norms and behaviors, without relying on legacy knowledge or systems. By making training and tools job specific, the expectations become real to the employee, and they are better able to internalize the requirements of their role.

Combined, the socioeconomic influences and the demographic changes add new complexity to the challenges faced in changing and sustaining a strong food safety culture. To sustain the culture, a level of resiliency must be created in the culture that allows for changing employee populations and business dynamics. It is no longer enough to develop a food safety policy statement and train and educate the workforce with a generic approach. Much deeper leadership commitment, support of supervisors, and engagement of employees will be needed. The battle for a resilient food safety culture, one that will stand strong in the face of socioeconomic and demographic winds of change, will be won through employees' hearts and minds. To be successful,

there are several critical steps to be taken. This includes management alignment, defining and instituting expectations, communication programs, aligned incentives and disincentives, education, and supervisor support.

Unlike strategy and leadership, culture cannot be planned like a rebranding exercise. You can't flip a switch and say "we are now a learning organization or purposeful organization." The company culture is all about employees' behaviors and beliefs—it is how they work and get work done. So changing the culture requires changing the way the company gets work done.

Tricks To Defining or Redefining Your Company's Food Safety Expectations

Faced with the changes described, today's food industry professional has to be constantly on the lookout to learn from others, be flexible to constantly incorporate new tricks, and persistent to stay the course. We want to share some activities that we have found to work effectively to adapt our company's food safety expectations and engage our colleagues. We chose to define a food safety expectation as 'a simple and easy to understand description of how a person is to act specific to food safety and the person's role.'

Creating organizational change can be a daunting task, will take a long time to achieve, and requires relentless effort. For culture change to take effect, the CEO and top management team must align with the target culture desired.[6] The food safety professional must work to create top leadership alignment around a food safety culture that may be new to the organization. Alignment requires management to communicate the new cultural elements through their actions, not just their memos, white

papers, and words. The change must consistently cascade throughout the organization from the top down to the front-line worker.

After obtaining senior leadership alignment, one of the first steps in instituting a new culture is to define expectations. It is important to set up clear expectations so that each individual understands how food safety—and even quality in its broader sense—fits with their job. Expectations are key to setting up clear accountabilities. They help get results and drive the right behaviors. Most importantly, the message needs to be credible to people at all levels in the organization.

In setting expectations, there are several challenges to overcome. First and foremost is the need to adapt to the audience. This means that you must ensure that you target everybody. It is critical to make the message specific to each person's role; in this way, they will be more engaged in the culture change, having a full grasp of the expectations specific to them. It is also important to remember that expectations should not be only about standards or tangible outputs but also about mindset and behaviors. Also important to understand is that one company's set of expectations does not fit every company. Tailoring expectations to roles and to an organization is critical to ensuring the successful implementation of them.

Make Leadership Decisions
Mission and vision statements

These guiding principles should be short, memorable, and core to all activities in your plant. Employees should not have to look at a poster or pull a card out of their wallet to read their mission statement. Simply put: This is how we work—every day, every job, everyone. Simple is always better; it helps to ensure understanding and retention.

Organizational norms: See something, say something

Create a safe environment for employees to identify and even correct unsafe situations without fear of retaliation. Too many incidents have occurred because a worker did not take action when they could have. While no one in the plant wants to see a production line stopped, everyone should want to see a zero tolerance for potential recalls and poor-quality product going out the door. Create a safe climate for fixing the problems rather than "shooting the messenger."

Organizational design

Position titles and job descriptions should include food safety expectations. Ideally, food safety responsibilities should appear in everyone's job description. These responsibilities should be clearly defined and role-specific. Identifying food safety leaders with titles such as "Food Safety and Quality Assurance Supervisor" demonstrates your commitment. Food safety committees involving line workers as well as supervisors and managers also communicate your seriousness of purpose in creating a strong food safety culture.

Changing culture requires hard work, persuasive buy-in from the organization (especially at the top), and a comprehensive approach for implementation. Determining your current culture and then defining your target culture shows you the gaps you need to fill. Using some of the tools above and others you may create, fill in the gaps to make steps toward your target culture. Use a layered approach—that is, don't try to eat the elephant all at once but take bite-sized steps to reach your goal.

Take inventory

To begin the process of implementing food safety expectations and making food safety an integral part of the company's day-to-day fabric, as an initial step, you must take inventory of where you are today. After assessing the current state, describe the food safety targets you would like to weave into everyone's behaviors and actions. For instance, you might set expectations of more rigorous Good Manufacturing Practices. One company decided that they would not just have good practices but great manufacturing practices. Remember that your target culture must align with your business strategy—what works for other companies might not work for yours. Finding the right targets can be critical to success.

Set targets

Ensuring that you have the right targets and overall expectations is not enough. To have a greater chance that people will truly engage in the expectations, they have to be relevant and clear for them. It is important that they give purpose and provide a clear link to the company mission. Critically important is that you clarify expectations for every function and every person across the organization. Do not provide broad-brush expectations, thinking that people will be able to link them to their own roles. Do not leave this for them to do: This leads to misunderstandings and a lack of engagement in the culture. It is incredibly beneficial to use role models to show people exactly what it looks like, to truly involve people in helping to define expectations specific to their roles. Standards and policies are not sufficient; they have to be translated into clear behavioral expectations for each employee according to their role.

Once you have identified these targets, you must broadcast the expectations of the new food safety culture. While you may begin by personally

communicating the new practices and habits, you may want to include recognition and reward systems for changing behaviors and disincentives for resisting the changes. To make this happen, take a note from Peter Drucker's playbook: "What gets measured gets improved." Personalizing the new practices and measuring them will increase participation.

As part of your rollout, determine the leaders at all levels of the organization who will most closely align with the target culture. Remember that we need to manage expectations and enthusiasm at all levels. It is very important to have appropriate leadership emphasis on the principles, but any cultural initiative cannot only be executed 'top-down.' Change agents are critical, and they won't always be your designated managers. To truly own the culture change, employees must decide for themselves that it is the right thing to do. For this, they need to hear, feel, and see the engagement and involvement of their peers who influence them. You will need these champions to live, eat, and breathe the new way of working. Managers that are not aligned can be further energized and inspired by training and development, demonstrating the value that the target culture brings to business success. Those managers who may never become comfortable with the change may choose to leave the organization. However, having negative forces in the company will ultimately sabotage your plan for success.

Broadcast Specifically and Constantly

With the appropriate champions lined up (and aligned with the new changes), it is now necessary to create a vocabulary that fully supports your target culture. Communication becomes critical, and there are numer-

ous ways to accomplish this. Remembering that only 8 percent of communications occur through words and 58 percent through body language (and actions), your activities to educate must be compatible with your target culture. It is important to keep in mind that this requires a resilient and relentless attitude toward communication.

Here are some "How-To's" to assist you in your quest:

- Integrate into company mission and vision statements
- Create a tagline or slogan that is memorable and impactful
- Product-use communications
- Reward and recognition programs to promote food safety culture
- On-boarding and continuing education
- Talking kits for supervisors
- Weekly training refreshers
- Certifications in food safety
- Social media posts – Facebook, Twitter, email
- Buddy system on-boarding
- See something, say something
- Organizational design

Taglines

While this may take some creative minds, a tagline that highlights food safety can be a "mantra" of sorts that gains mindshare of everyone in your organization. It is easy to remember "From Farm to Plate, Make Food Safe!" Frequent reminders through digital/traditional signage, food safety meetings, and even a note in the comments section of a pay stub increase awareness.

Product-use communications

Making the job real to employees makes all the difference in the world. Instead of just running a bacon slicing machine, what if they knew they were creating breakfast for families all over the world? Don't use a Hollywood

stock photo of the perfect family in their suburban California house. Instead, make the image a photo of the demographics of your workers. If you have the capability, use your employees and their families. Knowing the result of their efforts and connecting what they do with their life situations can increase their engagement and focus on food safety. Using tools such as digital or traditional signage, emails, and social media as well as developing an understanding of the end products during onboarding will change their perspective.
Talking kits for supervisors

Frequent (weekly or even daily) "scripted" meetings to cover specific topics can be very effective refreshers. The meetings could be one-point lessons or 2 minutes during the beginning of a shift. Visual aids such as Huddle Guides can create a professional learning experience for every supervisor without a lot of preparation. The point is repetition, repetition, and more repetition; take a lesson from the advertising industry that believes it takes 16 impressions or views before a consumer stores information in long-term memory.

Social media posts – Facebook, Twitter, email, and others

To the extent that your workforce uses social media, daily messaging can reinforce learning. It can also be very beneficial to provide stories of success. Judicious use of email can be a great refresher for information recently acquired but not yet in long-term memory.

Engage Creatively
Rewards and recognition

Incentives work, and they raise awareness. Rewards don't have to be extravagant–lunch with the president/plant manager, an extra day off, T-shirts and other wearables, a raffle

for a big prize quarterly, gift cards, preferred parking spots, and competitions can all create positive awareness of food safety.

Continuing education

Companies that invest at the front end and continue that investment will change their food safety culture quickly. Using technology such as online courses that track training can be effective in promoting food safety. The online course industry is moving to mobile and "micro learning" courses that can be accessed anywhere, anytime in short bursts. The industry also recognizes the forgetting curve, the notion that students will not remember 90 percent of the material 24 hours after consuming it.[7] This can be diminished by reviews, refreshers, and boosts. Refreshers such as emails, posters, digital signage, food safety floor meetings, and other reminders will increase retention and build the culture.

Buddy system on-boarding

Since the food industry has relatively high turnover compared to other manufacturing industries, a buddy system that provides experienced workers as mentors and teachers to new employees can be very effective. To be a "buddy," the employee must be certified by a supervisor that they can teach well and provide guidance. Buddies can be incentivized to do a great job by providing additional "buddy training pay" and a retention bonus to the teacher if the employee stays for 6 months.

Certifications in food safety

As mentioned above, measurement can create improvement. A simple system at one of SugarCreek's plants creates a scorecard called an OLPT Flex-Chart for each employee. For each skill or task, a rating of Observer (O), Learner (L), Proficient (P), or Teacher (T) is assigned by an instructor. The observer has never tried the skill and wants to learn. The learner is beginning to understand the skill by classroom or online learning, followed by a hands-on session with a teacher. The proficient employee has mastered the skill and can perform it on their own. The teacher has not only mastered the skill but also can teach others to perform it. You can incentivize employees by providing opportunities for advancement to leads or supervisors based on their OLPT Flex-Chart performance.

Conclusion

Earlier, we defined a food safety expectation as 'a simple and easy to understand description of how a person is to act specific to food safety and the person's role.' You now understand how critical it is to clearly define the desired behaviors and to make these expectations role specific. Each individual must understand what they must do in their role to live up to the food safety expectations of their position. It could be as simple as following GMPs in their preparation for work, or it may involve monitoring critical temperatures and stopping a process should there be a deviation. Regardless of the role that each person plays, they must be very cognizant of the expected actions they should take and the behaviors that they should display. There is no room for ambiguity in creating food safety expectations.

We've also defined the activities necessary to change and sustain a food safety culture: align top leadership, make leadership decisions, take inventory, set targets, broadcast specifically and constantly, and engage creatively. It is critical to ensure that the company's senior leaders all support the food safety culture. Shared documents like mission and vision statements must demonstrate this alignment too. Words are not enough; further support must be demonstrated by ensuring a safe climate exists to call out food safety issues. Job titles and job descriptions are also important ways to convey further alignment with the desired culture. All these things reinforce the transformation in behaviors and actions that is expected. To get started with any type of culture change, a baseline assessment must be conducted. This helps to set everyone on the starting point. Then it is easier to set targets for where you want to be in the future. One key aspect that is often undervalued is the need to communicate incessantly. And finally, no culture change could be successful without actively engaging the entire workforce in the transformation.

Today's business environment is more challenging than ever for anyone trying to create a strong food safety culture. With the economic forces of increased M&A activity, zero-based budgeting focuses, changing demographics, and the transformation in the traditional employer-employee contract, there are compelling influences that make it difficult to engage an organization's leadership and employees in instituting and sustaining a food safety culture. This requires different approaches in this climate to be successful. Many companies have tackled these same issues and have developed successful approaches to deal with these challenges. There are common threads among those successful organizations around leadership alignment, role-specific expectations, active communication, incentive/disincentive programs, heavily supported education, and employee engagement efforts. While there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach, we can learn from those companies that have been successful and "pick and choose" the

programs that would best be utilized in our own organizations.

Beyond the recommended activities, we reiterate three key themes that resonate with all and should be remembered:

☑ Keep it simple. Make sure the message is easy enough to be well-understood and communicated effortlessly. Ensure that you aren't trying to do too much. Limit the objectives to ensure you don't make it too complex and confusing.

☑ Make it specific. Ensure that you cascade expectations down so that they touch each individual. Make sure that they're role specific, so each person understands their part of the change and you get everyone engaged. Don't leave the expectations ambiguous.

☑ Communicate, communicate, communicate. Use every available method to communicate the message. Never underestimate how much communication a culture change requires. Overcommunicate!!

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