



ASK THE EXPERT

C.J. Reynolds

The Business of Employee Training

As an employee trainer, how can I get my company management team to better recognize the value of employee training?

Food companies are faced with an unparalleled learning imperative to keep frontline employees constantly aware of food safety risks and the role they play in protecting consumers.

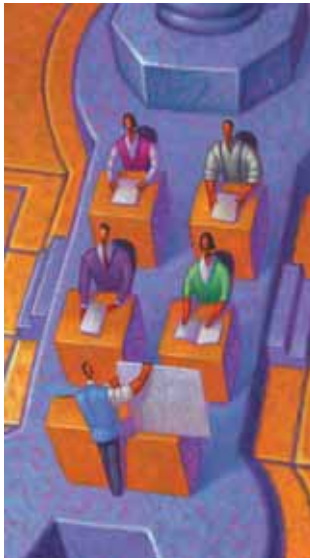
As food safety regulations grow stricter and the drive for HACCP accreditation becomes more critical, employees need more training than ever before. Yet, many training programs lack the guidance and structure necessary to provide consistent and reliable learning outcomes.

Far too often, employee training is not given its due as a critical part of the business process. Some companies view training as a necessary cost centre but they encounter much difficulty in gauging its worth because no one is exactly sure how to measure its impact. This attitude, combined with a shifting vision of what constitutes appropriate food safety training, causes management to hedge at allocating the necessary funds to build a comprehensive training program.

Training isn't valued when it is not directly linked into the business goals of the company. When trainers are able to link learning to defined business objectives and attach ROI strategies to those initiatives up front, the impact of training can be measured, its credibility is enhanced and the support of company management can be garnered more easily.

Before a food company can create an effective safety training program, it must first take a long look in the mirror and frankly assess where its business is today, where it is headed in the future, and how training can help it get there.

This self-introspection process begins with a thorough



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review of corporate goals. Do you want to reduce cycle time? Reduce employee turnover? Increase your client base? Reduce costs and improve productivity? Only after answering these and other relevant questions can you define your food safety training objectives, develop learning strategies to realize them and gain the support of upper management.

The unflinching and unfailing support of company management is essential in the success of any training program. Not only does it guarantee financial backing, it also sends a message company-wide that training is to be taken seriously by all employees. Studies have shown when company management makes a concerted effort to demonstrate support and actively participate in actual training, learning outcomes - especially among floor and operations employees - are significantly improved.

Like any substantial investment, food safety training programs must be conceived, developed and faithfully executed under a solid business plan. Without strategic goals and planning, even the best-intentioned programs will fail to yield positive dividends. At a time when many companies are dealing with the enormous challenge of providing effective and documented training to geographically dispersed workers, this is extremely unfortunate.

Companies facing this dilemma should seek the assistance of experienced consultants who can help them develop training programs that strategically align with their business goals.

C.J. Reynolds is director of education for Silliker, Inc. For more information on the company training programs, contact the Silliker Markham laboratory at (905) 479-5255 or corporate headquarters at (708) 957-7878.