

Dear Food Safety Expert

For my New Year's resolution, I want to do something to improve food safety in my facility. What can I do that will make an impression with my staff, but won't impact the bottom line?

BEST INTENTIONS, NO CASH

DEAR BEST,

One of the most effective things that you can do as a manager or supervisor will cost you no money. Yes, you read that correctly. No money. Your New Year's resolution suggests that you have what it takes to make an impact on your food safety performance – management commitment. And not just the quality manager's commitment, but yours and the rest of your management team at the plant.

The commitment of top management establishes the importance of food safety and guarantees support for individual elements of the safety program. To achieve the best results throughout the entire organization, top management must believe that safety is as important as cost, productivity, quality, etc. Now the important thing is how do you show this commitment?

Start today by walking out onto the plant floor and talk to a person who is at work on a task. Ask them three simple questions (and the beauty of this audit is that you do not have to know the answers!). Say: "Tell me about the work you are doing right now." Follow that with, "What are the food safety hazards that could potentially be associated with this task?" and finish with, "How do we protect our customers from those hazards?"

If the person does not know the answers or could have better ones, ask them to go talk to a supervisor or quality expert or whoever could help him or her and make sure he or she gets back to you. Ideally right then and there. Go with the person and show that it is important to get the right answers to those questions right away. If the person is unsure, see if the others who perform the same task can help with the

answers – and are the answers the same? In pursuing the best practices with respect to jobs that are performed you will turn an audit opportunity into a valuable, memorable training opportunity.

People who consistently follow good procedures can prevent most food safety problems in a plant. Studies that look into the root causes of outbreaks consistently identify factors that are within the control of the people in the plant as the source of the problem – ensuring proper temperature control, personal hygiene, adequate cooking and equipment is not contaminated. Making sure good procedures are consistently followed is the most effective tool available to management in ensuring food safety remains a top priority in your plant. This will not only improve your food safety system but will also affect quality.

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Employees judge management by their actions more than their words. Auditing people in this way sends a message of commitment about food safety from management. And since the people that you stop will tell everyone "You won't believe what the plant manager did today!" the message spreads.

Do one of these audits every day and have your whole management team do the same. Take them seriously and follow up and you'll find there is no single thing you can do that will have a greater impact on your New Year's resolution.

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