

To **train** or not to train - that is the **question?**



Neil Rush emphasises the importance of training for food handlers and talks about ways to do it effectively

Would you consider driving a car without first having some driving lessons? Would you travel on an aircraft if you didn't believe the pilot had received sufficient training? Why is it then that we allow food handling staff to prepare food with inadequate training? Examining reports following outbreaks of food poisoning often identifies failure to adequately train personnel as a major contributory factor. Brand protection for large companies and business survival for smaller are real issues when something goes wrong, especially with the current 'blame and claim' culture.

Unfortunately legislation is vague, leaving it to the food business proprietor to determine what is necessary to ensure

personnel are trained in both food safety and health & safety to enable them to do their job. A number of employers have sent them on training courses, for example the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Officer's level 2 courses (formerly foundation level). Others have developed in-house solutions. Whatever approach you adopt it is important to firstly establish the training needs of your staff.

A training needs analysis should take into account the qualifications and experience of each member of staff, their specific tasks and role in the organisation and the training required to undertake that job. Having undertaken this exercise for each member of staff it is then feasible to identify the 'best fit' training option. This should at each

stage be discussed with the member of staff so that you get them to "buy into" the proposed training. You will get a far better response to staff training if they appreciate why you are proposing such a programme and the attitude "I was sent" will be replaced with the comment "it forms part of my personal development". It is a known fact that staff who receive well balanced training within an organisation are more likely to stay rather than seek an alternative job, saving you the costs of recruitment of a replacement.

Now the next challenge is ensuring that the training is put into practice within the workplace. Why invest in staff training if you are not prepared to provide the tools to do the job right or safely. It still amazes me the number of proprietors/owner-managers who have their personnel trained on the prevention of cross contamination by use of colour-coded boards but fail to provide the boards in the workplace. For training to be effective the follow through, with input from the newly trained staff, is critical. As part of the training needs assessment it may be beneficial to undertake an in-depth audit to determine what needs to change within your organisation and the workplace to ensure the trainee can apply in practice the correct procedures to prevent that food poisoning outbreak. Otherwise within a few months the effectiveness of the training will be lost, staff will return to their old bad habits and you may be depending on your insurers to pay out to poisoned customers. Someday it may happen to you!

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