

## Training Moves Into High Gear

**R**ecent data from the Food and Drug Administration confirms what many savvy foodservice operators have known for a long time:

Food safety training and certification are important factors in lowering the incidence of health department compliance citations, and thus the incidence of foodborne illness risk factors.

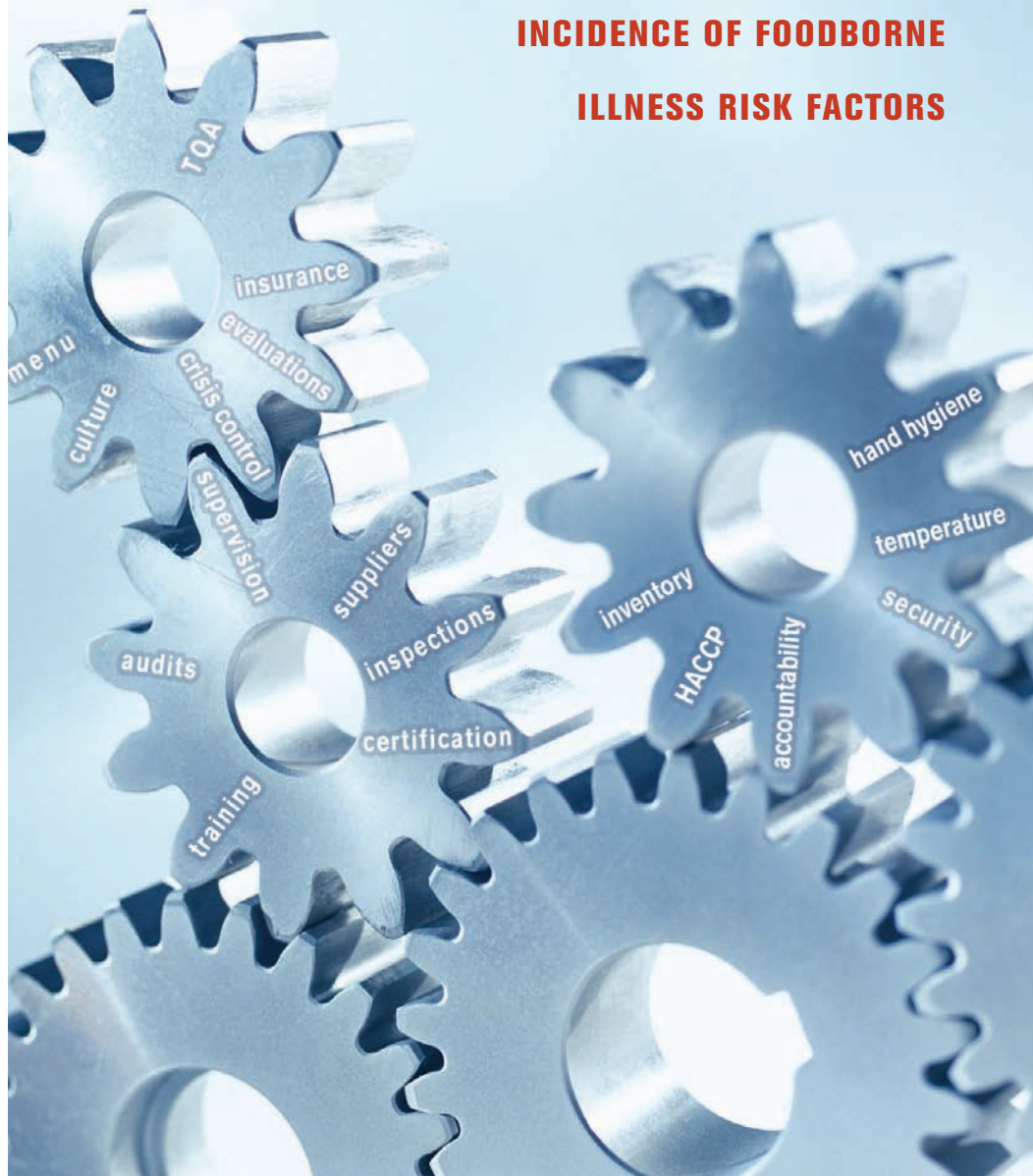


Burger King's Steve Grover didn't need the evidence; as vice president of food safety, quality assurance and regulatory compliance for

Burger King Corp., he's proof that the hamburger giant takes its food safety seriously. "The fact this position exists at the v.p. level speaks to that commitment," says Grover, who joined the company in February, hot off a similar post at the National Restaurant Association. "It says that food safety is every bit as important as operations, marketing, menu development and all the other functional areas of the organization. It has a corporate mandate."

That top-down approach is key to any sophisticated food safety and quality assurance effort—indeed, more and more foodservice organizations are establishing dedicated QA departments that reach not only into food safety training, but also into such areas as purchasing, distribution and supply chain management. "The idea is that you have to address all of these issues in order to serve safe food," says Grover.

**FOOD SAFETY TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION ARE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN LOWERING THE INCIDENCE OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS RISK FACTORS**



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Burger King has put its money where its mouth is, certifying more than 15,000 employees in safe food handling procedures in fiscal 2005 alone, and the program is ramping up significantly under Grover's watch. “Our basic policy is that anyone who leads a shift must be trained and certified,” explains Grover. Not just managers, assistant managers and other salaried individuals, but anyone who has the sufficient experience and time-in-grade to be designated a shift leader—many, in fact, are hourly workers. “This goes way, way beyond local health regulations in every market we operate in.”

And that's not all. The 11,000-plus-unit company has also implemented a number of ongoing programs that address everything from time/temperature log



**STEVE GROVER**

**Vice president of food safety, quality assurance and regulatory compliance for Burger King Corp.**

procedures to regularly scheduled reviews. The Operations Excellence training program encompasses every aspect of operations training, including food safety, demonstrating how fundamental safety is to the overall picture at Burger King. “It's not two different people talking about speed of service and food safety,” says Grover. “It's all one piece. That helps make food safety an ongoing, everyday part of doing business.”

In fact, the company's priority operations initiatives fall under three general categories: Clean & Safe (food safety and sanitation), Friendly & Fast (service), and Hot & Fresh (food). The Clean and Safe program covers all food handling, sanitation and safety procedures, supported by the appropriate guides, manuals, videos and other resources—in both English and Spanish. Individual modules are arranged by function, such as assembling

Whoppers, so that hourly workers can understand all the wrinkles of their work station, including food safety elements and critical control points. In order to become a shift leader, an employee has to know every single workstation in the house—and indeed, shift leaders are also being groomed to become trainers through teach-and-coach process. “This is not a ‘gotcha’ process,” says Grover. “It's set up to function as peer training.”

The Clean & Safe initiative also mandates regular in-house reviews by a member of the company's field-based QA team, as well as new bi-annual audits by an outside firm. “We have our own inspection procedures, but we needed a mechanism for validating our methods and identifying challenges,” says Grover. “We use the audits to determine whether or not our methods are working, and what additional tools may be needed.”

CulinArt is another foodservice company that has



been putting significant resources behind its food safety training efforts. The Lake Success, NY-based foodservice management company recently created a new director of training and development position and moved six-year HR veteran Matt Santarpia, formerly director of corporate recruitment, into the role. Santarpia works in tandem with



**MATT SANTARPIA**

Director of training and development for CulinArt

director of culinary development Roger Beaulieu to devise all of the company's training platforms.

The move says a lot about the company's commitment to the human resources aspect of training; it also links Santarpia's efforts directly to food production—not so surprising given CulinArt's strategic niche, which

revolves around culinary excellence. “From menu writing and recipe testing to execution, everything is keyed back to food safety,” he explains.

Training had been done on an ad hoc basis; now Santarpia is charged with stepping up the program to prepare the company for growth. The training structure is twofold: hourly learn

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the basics, while managers get what Santarpia calls “the full book.” “By using the same topics, everyone's speaking the same language,” he explains. Everyone goes through the training—regardless of their prior experience or how long they've worked for the company. Once the training is complete, employees are certified by CulinArt, which also includes food safety certification. “All of our managers and chefs have to be certified within a 90-day period of first being hired,” says Santarpia. “This is in addition to what the local health code requires.”

Onsite follow-up is key, in the form of regular meetings, self-inspections, checklists and other tools. “I'd love to have a dedicated trainer in every location, but that's unrealistic,” he says. “But we can provide unit managers with all the resources they need to provide that role as part of their regular duties.” These resources take the form of complete, packaged kits—

turnkey training aids, as it were—that include manuals, handouts, procedures, and everything else needed for managers to conduct an effective meeting or an inspection dry-run.

Santarpia jokes that he's called the King of Checklists by his colleagues, but the man has made it his business to write and provide user-friendly checklists on virtually every conceivable procedure, from basic sanitation to checking in an order. “For instance, we have a two-page Safety and Sanitation checklist, broken out by category, which details all of our food safety procedures.”

Copies of the checklists, as well as certification exams, self-inspections, training programs and so on are forwarded back to Santarpia at headquarters so that he can identify problem areas. The company has also implemented a middle layer between HQ and units in the field, comprised of 11 geographic districts, each with its own Safety Committee and coordinator. “These people travel throughout their districts, providing training, spot-checking, problem-solving and general support with safety issues,” says Santarpia. “It provides an extra level of safety.

“We have an aggressive safety program, and we have to,” Santarpia adds. “Obviously, we want to offer a safe environment for our employees and customers, but in a business like ours there can't be any exceptions.”