

# 5 SIMPLE STRATEGIES

## That Save \$\$\$ When Obtaining Food Safety Certifications

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# Introduction

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**Are you trying to comply with food safety regulations and feel overwhelmed with where to start?**

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In a recent research report published by the University of Tennessee, where there was input from over 150 supply chain executives across multiple industries; the number one risk stated was quality problems. With increased globalization of sourced products, ingredients and materials, this may represent a significant cost to doing business.

If you participate in the food supply chain, whether processing, packaging, manufacturing the packaging, contract packing, warehousing or distributing food, ingredients or materials; conformance to a GFSI Scheme such as BRC, SQF, etc., or the US Food Safety Modernization Act, and other quality certifications, is inevitable.

You might as well embrace it, it is a great way to get better at what you already do. Most organizations don't realize how many procedures are already in place that meet food safety & quality requirements.

Once there is a decision to participate in obtaining a food safety certification, the inclination is to dive right into the requirements list in a given Standard and forget about building a proper foundation for sustainable business. This is ironic, because most deficiencies documented by auditors go back to the lack of fundamental business requirements.

There are simple ways to keep your operations in check and reassure your food chain customers that your performance standards are superior.

This report identifies **5 Simple Strategies** to incorporate whether on the path to obtaining a food safety certification or simply maintaining and continuously improving your program. It is a simple approach and a foundation to establishing a successful long-term quality management system.

# 1 Document



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**“We do that. We just don’t have a documented procedure or follow-up.”**

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## **Documentation—Documentation—Documentation!**

Specifically; Procedures and Work Instructions.

The is part of the bigger picture and stems from developing a good quality management system. If a procedure or work instruction is important it should fall into the context of the overall quality program.

Knowing how much documentation you need is a challenge. Most often, people miss the importance of writing a procedure or work instruction. When an auditor asks for a procedure, the usual answer is; “Oh, yes we do that .” Doing something and writing a procedure takes the guesswork out of inconsistency that occurs when multiple people are responsible for an activity. If you do not document a work instruction or a procedure, it makes things difficult when you need to implement corrective actions for failed results. Documenting procedures can be a daunting task and in some cases seem redundant when overlapping activities occur. There are many ways to develop good documentation, along with several software programs, that may be purchased to help manage the volume. What is most important is that you chose a method that is practical, simple and affordable to your business.

Some key content components of good procedures include: effective date, revision control, scope, definitions (especially for your specific operations), who is responsible, what are they responsible for and when, and corrective actions (for the procedure failure and person not following the procedure).

# 2 Training



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**“Why are the employees not following the procedure?  
I thought I trained them last week?”**

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Do you ever wonder why employees are doing something different from what you thought you trained them to do?

Managing ‘refresher training and ‘skills training’ within an organization is significant. There often seems to be a race to try to force a lot of information into a training session simply to check the box that it was conducted.

“Ahhh but; the training was followed by a quiz and they passed...woo..hoo!” Go back to my opening sentence.

Teaching in the workplace today is often challenged with mixed demographics in the same environment from millennials to older adults and different levels of prior knowledge as well as learning styles. In addition, we are bombarded with competing media and numerous distractions in our lives and it is no wonder that a person’s attention span can vary from seconds to minutes, based on the interest and entertainment level of the information delivered. In operations and higher education the greatest successes in adult retention of new skills has been through experiential learning (a.k.a. the hands-on approach).

Effective training and measuring competence can provide residual reward and profit to any business. Many of us can relate to the Chinese proverb:

**“Tell me I forget. Show Me I remember. Involve me I will understand.”\***

Studies demonstrate that a worker’s ability to learn tasks and reduce the time it takes through cumulative experience can provide measured operational cost savings.\*\* Take that to the Bank!

Forget the boring classroom lessons and start logging all those hands-on sessions to your training roster!

# 3 Execute



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## “Why is nothing getting done around here?”

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Have you ever tried to follow an instruction and then throw your hands up in frustration because the procedure is ludicrous?

Oh, and the caveat you hear from employees, “ in the real world, things are done differently”

OK so what comes first; the procedure or the practice? Chances are the person doing the work is not very fluent in writing procedures and the person writing procedures has never done the work. It might be good to collaborate with the people doing the work before thinking you impressed an auditor with your procedure writing only to find out you cannot verify the practice.

On the other hand, employees that chose to practice unsafe or improper procedures that may jeopardize product safety, quality and legality cannot be tolerated. Such behavior is usually attached to loss control and huge operational costs when product is affected.

The lesson here is to align, make it right, and simply ‘do what you say you are doing.’

Tasks are often repetitive and consistency is crucial especially where product quality and safety are concerned. In my role as an auditor I would often test the validity of a procedure at random. This would often reveal the weak links in the process and identify where short cuts had been incorporated to beat the clock.

To execute is to perform and accomplish what you set out to do. Optimizing your capabilities results in a win-win scenario for both you and your customers.

# 4 Record



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## True or False?

**Any Employees may fill in records for process observations at any time?**

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Have you heard the expression; “If it’s not documented, it didn’t happen.”

This supports item #2 and provides a basis for compliance.

Filling in reports, check sheets and other job related information is important to support the operational and procedure requirements. Records must be timely, accurate, legible and recorded by the person responsible for performing the task. Records are a source of legal verification and may be subpoena in a court action.

Let’s consider this from the business perspective. Every business relies on information. Authenticity, integrity and providing data in context provides a means for decision and action. Good record keeping protects you and your customers from risk should the operation and organization become challenged in a legal or conformance matter. It also provides a means to trouble-shoot issues and determine the root cause of some problems.

On a positive note, good record keeping provides commercial advantage with valuable information utilized through business intelligence tools to gain a competitive edge.

The key is to index and properly store records so they are easily retrievable when you need them. Organizing a system, establishing a routine and file the records for safe-keeping everyday! Utilizing a software program to help standardize, even at a basic level, is a proven asset to any business.

# 5 Assess



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**“Why do we keep getting the same complaints about our products & services over and over again?”**

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## **Check it out! Assume nothing!**

A perfect system is no good unless you verify that it is working. That means stressing the processes, procedures, records and training for their validity and effectiveness to the business and your customers. Conducting random checks during different shifts, with different associates provides good information on how well you are doing.

A good quality management system should be responsive to stakeholder and environmental changes. Aligned with business performance measurements, this provides a strategy toward overall business improvement, a positive company image, and improved ability to compete in the marketplace.

An effective quality system review is a formal management evaluation whereby the status and adequacy of the quality system in relation to the quality policy and new objectives arising from changing demands in business is reviewed. This is not a check box in a list but rather an integrated senior management approach to recognize all facets of the business that contribute to quality, product and food safety. Assessing closes the loop and ties all areas together into a complete quality management system.

Bottom line—prevention is far more economical than the cost of quality gone wrong.



# Conclusion

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*“Quality is strategic and integrated in all aspects of the food supply chain.  
A break in the link, impacts the entire business.” Joan Martino, Quality Supply Chain*

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These five aspects are inter-connected in the chain of success. Quality is strategic. Issues are deep rooted and often an indication of flawed design, insufficient organizational structure and lack of motivation among management and employees.

One thing that is even more important when undertaking a Certification process is proper planning. In fact in most small businesses this is the root of failure. Under estimating the value of planning how to get a recognized food safety and quality certification can cost your organization a great deal of money. In fact, the average annual costs of participating in audits is upward of 50-100 thousand dollars.\* The sole purpose of planning is to guide the execution process. Doing it right the first time saves countless dollars in back-tracking and fixing mistakes that could have been avoided.

Even though every business operation is different, having a framework to start the process is important. Planning involves; Here are 3 tips to get you started;

- **Form a team and select a leader**

YES—you need a team! The team should represent different functional departments and members should have authority for decision making. This is what keeps things moving.

- **Create a plan**

List activities and steps that will be needed to achieve the result and assign an estimated time-frame in order to track progress. Things to consider when doing this: other company projects or assignments, availability of people, external demands on operations and customer requirements. Another important consideration is the requirements within the specific Standard for Certification. For example: a HACCP plan should be in place and fully operational in order to collect sufficient records for an auditor to audit. Using a software tool, such as a Gantt Chart to keep track of your plan can be most helpful.



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**Quality is strategic and integrated in all aspects of the food supply chain.**

**A break in the link, impacts the entire business.**

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- **Discuss the Budget**

This is one of the hardest steps to be taken and one that everyone likes to avoid. If you think the cost of getting Certified is simply paying the auditing company, think again. Here's why it is important to form a team. The process of getting Certified involves hard work, dedication and money. Here are some questions to consider; Is there a budget? Who will be doing what? Is there overtime involved? Do we need to fix equipment, floors, walls, etc.? Do we need to hire outside resources? Will this affect costs of other projects or work planned? What is critical to successful relations with our customers?

Basic considerations to any endeavor start with 3 simple questions; what needs to be done? How long will it take? How much will it cost?

Be honest about the process and open the dialogue early. By building a strong foundation and using a systematic quality management approach, you will address the majority of deficiencies spotted by an auditor.

**Get it right!**

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\*Popik, Barry, Entry from December 19, 2012, <[http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new\\_york\\_city/entry/](http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/)> 06. 2014

\*\*Swink, Morgan, Managing Operations Across the Supply Chain. Irwin/McGraw Hill 2014.Print.

Report: The Cost of Quality Audits, J.E.M.& Associates International, June 2014

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## About the Author

**Joan Martino** is CEO and Founder of Quality Supply Chain, [www.qualitysupplychain.com](http://www.qualitysupplychain.com). As a quality systems expert she helps businesses in the food supply chain obtain and maintain Quality and Food Safety Certifications. She has 25+ years of top drawer experience with some of the largest national and private label brands in the food sector, including; General Mills, Safeway, Saputo, Nestle and many others. Her focus identifies gaps, measures risks and integrates cost effective strategies for sustainable business practices.

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*"From the shop floor to the board room, it's the people that make all the difference." Joan*

At Quality Supply Chain we help you achieve the highest quality standards that make a lasting impression on your customers.

**IT'S SIMPLE!**



We show you how to leverage your strengths!

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