



A Culture of Asking = Improved Food Safety

This guide connects characteristics of your culture to questions to actions.

Why do we continue to focus on food safety in the dairy industry?

- 66% of dairy related recalls (2010-2013) were due to environmental pathogen contamination. While pasteurization is designed to protect consumers from pathogens, post-pasteurization risks are an ongoing challenge.
- About 5% of children under 5 years of age in U.S. have a milk allergy.¹
- Innovation and new product development across the dairy food industry increases the need for challenging existing beliefs around food safety and the connection to culture.

Why are procedures, programs, and external audits not enough?

- The FDA's final rule on Preventive Controls for Human Food includes requirements for environmental pathogen monitoring based on documented risk assessment.
- Processors will need to review the rationale behind their monitoring and testing programs, fully document activities, results and corrective actions, and should be prepared to explain their program.
- Many dairy processing plants are inspected against federal/state regulations and certified to an external food safety standard (e.g., SQF, FSSC22000). While this has improved performance, there is overreliance on these third-party evaluations and the internal food safety and quality team to ensure the safety of dairy products.

How do we connect a culture of questions to our food safety programs?

- If integrated into the culture of the business, food safety programs like Environmental Monitoring and Sanitary Design can help challenge food safety performance and shape culture.
- This required change in mindset impacts the very core of a dairy processor's culture of food safety. It requires a mindset where leaders explain their food safety programs because they have the courage to ask and learn and thereby show the way for others to challenge their programs and existing culture, and ultimately learn.
- 'A Culture of Asking' builds courage, conversation, and continuous improvement of food safety.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db10.htm>



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We grow up and lose the questions from our language. Why?

Some studies say four-year-old children ask about 300–400 questions per day. Mothers ask about 100. The average person asks about 20 questions per day.

The problem is most adults treat asking questions like we treat touching the door handle of a public restroom (especially post-Covid-19): sometimes necessary, but also unpleasant and best avoided whenever possible. Why? Some of us, experts say, become too egocentric to invite viewpoints outside our own. Others are terrified of being perceived a nuisance (a particularly common fear among women, studies show). And still others are afraid of seeming ignorant or incompetent in front of peers, a worry that kicks into overdrive in adolescence and never really goes away (read more: Warren Berger, “A More Beautiful Question”).

What can asking questions do for your food safety culture?

You will validate what somebody else knows. You will become more knowledgeable. You develop bravery and emotional intelligence. All of which shows to others that you care about them, have the courage to be vulnerable, and want to know what they do every day to keep the food you produce safe.

Measure what you treasure

It can be a big change to ask more food safety questions because a new habit must be formed. Start small—even if you target five questions per day. Use this simple template to track your daily questions. Use it with your team: make it a fun exercise to see who is best at consistently asking food safety questions of EVERYONE in the template. Perhaps this is your leading food safety indicator for the next six months!

Additional resources:

- www.idfa.org for education resources and the 3M environmental handbook
- www.usdairy.com for pathogen control guidelines and principles, and introduction to food safety culture
- www.mygfsi.com for the GFSI position paper on A Culture of Food Safety
- www.cultivatefoodsafety.com for the food safety culture maturity model

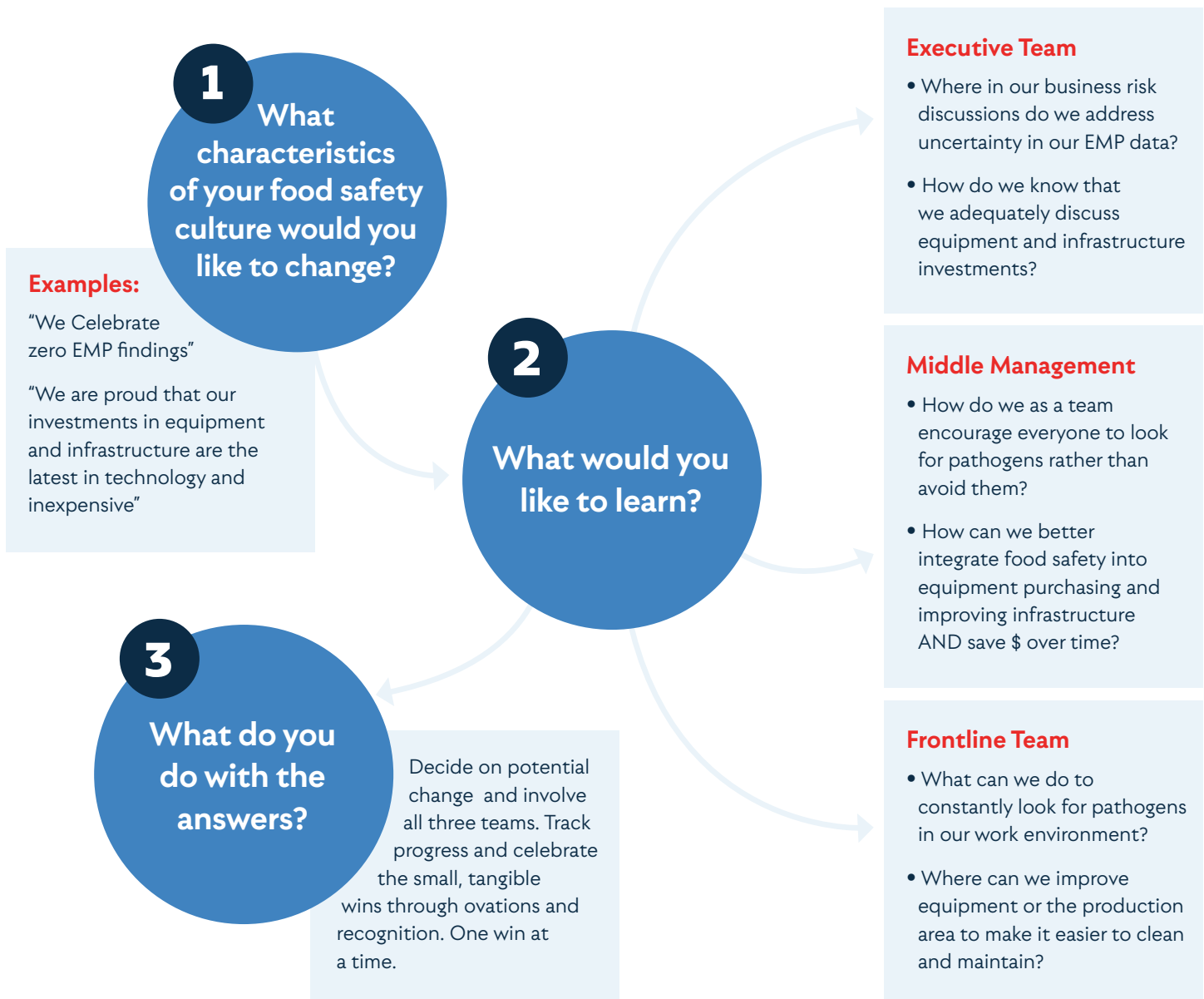


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What could you ask?

For you and your teams to practice asking food safety questions, follow these three steps with the examples. Remember: Be patient and have courage.





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