

Developments in food industry training programs since 1996

A. Evans

The author's 20 years of involvement in the food industry has included working in the Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector since 1996 and developing a career in adult education and consultancy within the food manufacturing and major foodservice sectors. The latter began after joining a food industry specialist consultancy business that had recently become a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) offering nationally accredited training programs. This included the first incarnation of what is now the Food Processing Training package. At this time, very few RTOs were working with the food industry. Managing and delivering food processing training programs was very much unknown as there was very little to compare against apart from the odd lecture-based format of short courses.

During almost a decade that I was working with a food processing company, every new employee was placed through the Certificate II in Food processing as a formalised induction, then articulated to Certificate III. Every new batch of employees was given projects as teams. I have seen the projects related to this training develop from fairly rudimentary tasks such as assisting in writing hygiene rules for the workplace during the early years to current projects focusing on energy usage and waste management.

Whilst these accredited training programs are a tremendous means for workplaces to benchmark employee skills and knowledge by capturing much of the informal learning that goes on, they are, for many, the very first formal education completed in Australia. They also assist greatly with cultural change, employee empowerment and improving internal standards.

The remainder of this article is focused on a few key observations leaning towards the future of food processing training with a newly revised training package, emphasising food processing operators.

Maximising the impact of a training program

Whatever the trigger to commence training, whether it be for meeting compliance, benchmarking or process improvement, the program should produce a commercial and cultural change.

Often this is very difficult to measure as there may not be a direct cause and effect. For example, the ability of staff members to demonstrate consistently and proficiently an online sampling step can be measured as a direct result of training. However, a decrease in lost time due to injury could be via many factors such as improved hazard identification and risk assessments, a proactive safety committee, new processing equipment, an in-house training program or combination of these.

Unfortunately my own experience with training is that it is undertaken in a back room with minimal management input no matter how hard you try to get them involved. It is based on unrealistic expectations, is too focused on attracting government funding, unable to measure workplace performance and seen as a panacea for everything.

For the few that excel, outlined below are key criteria for programs to maximise a return for employers:

- Senior management endorsement and involvement, particularly participation in the program, constant review of staff and program and ability to reassess quickly; not a six monthly review.
- Set realistic and tangible goal posts. These can be financial and cultural, short term and long term.
- Training must be customised to the participants and workplace. This could even include developing materials in other languages and utilising much of the workplace resources including people.
- Staff must be given adequate time off-the-job. Ideally, the more time the better the outcome.
- The delivery methods must be engaging, not just for principles of adult learning but because many staff members have not participated in formal learning for some time, if at all.
- Assessment must be practical, related to the workplace and measureable; not too academic.
- Celebrate success. Although training may be a requirement, staff members need to be valued and recognised for their achievements and recognised for their input.
- Constantly review the program for continuous improvement. As with goals these can be tangible such as "are staff following internal procedures".

Front line managers

Implementation of the various customer and legal standards, along with production targets, often falls on the shoulders of front line managers. This layer of management has predominantly worked their way up and may have been placed in their role because they are more proficient in operating equipment, have a higher level of English or are better organised. Many possess little or no formal education apart from possibly Certificate II or III in Food Processing.

The fundamentals, including managing people, organising production, time management, understating of the process, dealing with people, tend to be learnt 'on-the-go' without any formal training or mentoring. This could be due to companies lacking the time and resources to develop their staff or as a result of upper management having also learnt via this process.

The Certificate IV or even Diploma in Food Processing can be easily adapted to meet the needs of front line managers, especially when building on

previous accredited training and I have been surprised it has not been delivered more to date. However, in my experience delivering programs to one or two people in a workplace, especially in remote areas, may not be viable and even more problematic when attempting to get key managers together at the same time off-the-job. Further work is to be explored in this area, whether in the form of cluster learning, off-the-job workshops, e-learning, conducting in-house projects and formal mentoring.

The future

A newly revised FDF10 Food processing training package has been endorsed and the purchasing guide for Victoria approved. The guide will replace the *FDF03 Food Processing Industry Guide* except for two qualifications – FDF41007 Certificate IV in Food Processing (Food Safety Auditing) and FDF51007 Diploma of Food Processing (Food Safety Auditing) – which are still under review. No new enrolments in the current FDF03 training are allowed after 31 December 2011.

The new training package has been under review for over seven years and includes a progression of what has worked well for almost a decade, along with reflecting industry changes and a higher degree of rigour.

The new training package differs from FDF03 in the following key areas:

- Additional units to be delivered at each level, with a marked increase at AQF 2 and 3.
- The inclusion of environmental sustainability units as directed across all training packages by the current government; also a future permanent trend.
- Additional food industry-focused units such as *FDFOP3001A Control contaminants and allergens in the workplace*.
- Inclusion of a significant number of competitive manufacturing units.
- Allowing greater utilisation of units from any accredited nationally endorsed training package and accredited course.

I am looking forward to working with this training package. I have seen many food businesses shift from the Food Processing training package towards the Competitive Manufacturing training package. This has either been because of previous poor experiences with food processing training providers and/or the industry moving towards Lean Manufacturing. I have personally felt the delivery of the Competitive Manufacturing training package alone did not address many of the intrinsic basics of the food industry such as food safety, quality assurance and OH&S. However, the FDF10 allows a considerable number of Competitive Manufacturing units to be incorporated. This would offer an ideal blended program to operator level upwards, especially if the workplace is embarking on implementing the principles of lean manufacturing.

In summary, the industry is going through another growth phase after the recent economic downturn. As the industry returns to growth, the foundation skills and knowledge of a food processing operator continue to remain the same; food safety, quality assurance, OH&S, product and process knowledge and operation of lines. However, the next evolution of the Food Processing training package further allows workplaces to develop staff in a number of streams; generalist food operators, process specific, industry specific, multi-skilled, leadership, technical and competitive manufacturing. □

Anthony Evans MAIFST is Director, Food Scientist & Technologist and Industry Trainer at A. Evans, Human Resource Management Pty Ltd, which provides services in workplace evaluation and assessment, training of personnel, equipment/workplace hazard analysis and solutions, policy formation, food safety auditing, quality assurance and implementation of OH&S systems. Anthony Evans is also a Member of the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), Member of the Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD) and RABQSA Food Safety Auditor and HACCP Facilitator.

Pepsico – an Employer of Choice for Women

Pepsico Australia & New Zealand has been selected as an Employer of Choice for Women by the Federal Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). This makes Pepsico the only food and beverage organisation to have achieved this commendation, which is awarded to non-government organisations that have demonstrated policies and practices supporting women across the organisation, achieving positive outcomes for both women and the business.

According to Pepsico Australia & New Zealand, gender diversity is critical to their innovation and growth strategies. The company believes that women are 50% of the talent pool and make more than 50% of all consumer purchasing decisions in Australia, so ensuring a critical mass of female talent at all levels is essential to business sustainability.

The company invests heavily in building an inclusive culture to leverage diversity at all levels. This includes regular training in core inclusion skills. They also have a range of initiatives including paid parental leave, a maternity leave "Stay in touch" program that provides a supportive transition to, during and from maternity leave, annual work-life balance discussions called 'One Simple Thing', and a range of flexible work practices including wellness days and birthday leave.

Pepsico's global commitment to developing female leaders has been recognised with a number of business and diversity awards. Recently, **Indra Nooyi**, Pepsico's Chairman and Chief Executive, was selected as one of the most influential women in Business by *US Fortune Magazine*. □