

teaching note

Off-Site Catering: Prevention of Food Borne Illnesses

Case Overview

There are many issues to consider when catering for an event - some of which are life threatening to the consumer; but when precautions are taken and procedures are set up, these problems are very simple to avoid. Two major problems that caterers face today are firstly, how easily food can be contaminated with bacteria, leading to a business crisis and secondly, the growing number of food allergies among consumers.

Glossary

Food safety: Food safety refers to the conditions and practices that preserve the quality of food to prevent contamination and food-borne illnesses (UMMC, 2014).

Catering: Catering is a service “providing single event-based food services” (US Census Bureau, 2012).

Off-site catering: Off-site catering refers to catering that is done outside of a hotel or restaurant and brought to a site for delivery.

Food borne illness: Food poisoning occurs when you swallow food or water that contains bacteria, parasites, viruses, or the toxins made by these germs. Most cases are caused by common bacteria such as Staphylococcus or E. coli (UMMC, 2014).

Hepatitis –A: Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. The virus is one of several types of hepatitis viruses that cause inflammation and affect your liver’s ability to function.

Training: Training is providing individuals with the: Information, Skills, and Opportunities to meet or exceed personal and organizational goals.

Crisis: A crisis is a turning point or as the dictionary refers to it as an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; especially: one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome: a financial crisis (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

Introduction

Caterers can run into a number of problems with the food they serve. In the catering business, serving food that is undercooked, stored improperly or has been contaminated with bacteria can cause a business crisis. Off-site caterers need to be acutely aware of and manage food safety issues. The case study identifies specific precautions that must be taken in order to avoid cross contamination as it leads to sick customers. For example, cross contamination can be dangerous to consumers who have food allergies or when harmful bacteria are found in the final product. The danger is real and is demonstrated

by the number of cases of food borne illnesses each year. Just one outbreak of food poisoning could ruin a company’s reputation and business. A food safety issue can result in a business crisis. By following simple protocols, off-site catering companies can easily avoid contaminating the food they serve; without these procedures

Objectives

The objectives of this case are as follows:

- To identify problems many catering companies face in dealing with food, mishandling, prevention etc...
- To find clear, definable solutions to the problems caused by cross-contamination and other catalyst of food safety issues in the food industry.
- To create a food safety training program.
- Tie the food safety program to a crisis management plan and
- To identify problems outside of food handling which caterers might face.

Case Analysis

When analyzing this case, the following questions can be used to engage students and ensure full comprehension: Prompt questions will assist students to better analyze a case.

- Off-site catering companies must be considerate of customers’ needs - particularly in terms of common food allergies. How does being mindful of customers’ special needs benefit the catering company?
- While specific food-handling laws differ from state to state, there are general fines associated with the mishandling of food; what other consequences are associated with the incorrect preparation of food?
- Are these scenarios 100% preventable?

Background information in risk or crisis management the content area, may be necessary for students to readily analyze and evaluate the facts of a case. A review of literature on the topic may be able provide students with decision making frameworks for the case. The issues of dimension and control are critical decision making factors and involve management decisions and public policy aspects of business management. A chronology of events should be provided to the students so that they can see how the incident or issue developed. Typically the chronology will include the issues, problems, multiple facts, some relevant others not, stakeholders and an introduction of the stakeholders as well as the culmination of the issue or problem that brought about the case. Students may need instruction and assistance in identifying statements of facts, hypotheses, alternatives and realistic outcomes of a

case situation. Some references are included below.

Brewton (1987) discussed the assessment of both the “dimension and control” of a crisis as essential to placing a crisis in perspective. Dimension refers to the threat to the resources of the organization and control to the ability of the owner or manager to influence the outcome. Brewton scaled events on both dimensions from 1 (low control) to 10 (high control). Low control, high dimension is a situation where there is little control but an issue engulfing a company. High control, high dimension, represents a situation where the management has more influence over the outcome though it is still a very threatening situation. High control, low dimension is a less serious situation that can be managed effectively. Low control, low dimension is a crisis of lesser importance that management can work with.

Lurie (1993) developed Theory “R”, where R stands for radical, for use by managers in crisis situations. This theory has ten basic rules for businesses in crisis. This discussion will apply these rules to the events and responses to the crisis. These rules are: 1) Make sure the crisis is identified. A manager or owner needs to separate symptoms from the real problem. 2) Power is what you have and what the opposition thinks you have. 3) Never go outside the experience of your people. This rule basically indicates that experts should handle crises. 4) Go outside your opponent’s experience or play to your opponents weaknesses. Opponents can be defined as victims, suppliers or anyone who potentially threatens the business. 5) Make the opposition plays by their own rules. If a business is being held to a particular standard make sure that is universally enforced and not on a selective basis. 6) Issues that drag on too long become drags themselves. 7) Keep the pressure on! Never believe that the crisis is over before it is. 8) The threat is usually more terrifying than the problem itself. Lawsuits and threats from outside are usually worse than their actual outcome. 9) You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. If the crisis wins, the business is over, so fight to save the business. 10) The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative which means if a crisis plan or action is suggested do not shoot it down unless a better alternative is available.

Recommended Practices

- Harmful bacteria found in foods can be eliminated when event caterers (and all food handlers) take the following precautions to steer clear of cross-contamination:
- Place raw meats on a plate or pan before storing in refrigerator so the pan will catch any meat drippings
- Do not use the raw meat pan or plate without first washing it thoroughly
- Store raw meats on lower shelves in the refrigerator to avoid drippings on to ready-to eat-foods
- Ensure raw meats are properly packaged to avoid drippings
- Don’t place raw meats next to ready-to-eat foods

- Assign cutting boards and knives to specific food groups (use separate cutting boards and knives for raw meats and vegetables)
- Cutting boards that have deep grooves in the surface should be thrown away as those grooves are ideal places for bacteria to live
- Sanitize work surfaces, cutting boards and knives often
- Work surfaces should be cleaned between tasks – including removing crumbs and food scraps
- Avoid placing cartons or containers on work surfaces that were previously stored on the floor
- Anyone working with the food should thoroughly wash their hands each time they handle raw meats or eggs
- When washing hands, cutting boards, knives or work surfaces, hot, soapy water must be used
- Any food that falls on the floor should be thrown away
- Food packages should not be re-used to store other foods (AVA, 2010)

To avoid bacteria in cooked foods:

- Cook raw meats thoroughly
- Do not rely on cooking times found on the package, use a meat thermometer to determine whether or not the meat is ready to serve (AVA, 2010)

To avoid bacteria in dealing with leftovers:

- Any leftover food should be stored in a container and placed in the refrigerator or freezer within two hours of serving
- Before serving leftovers, the contents should be checked thoroughly – even when left in the refrigerator or freezer, food can go bad. (AVA, 2010)

Teaching Strategy

There are multiple questions that must be addressed. Issues and questions that frame reactions to food safety issues are the relationships between the private and public sectors when dealing with this type of a crisis. Students can address the following questions.

- Does a caterer have a crisis/risk management plan in place and/or should he for the future?
- How do you develop a crisis plan?
- What role did the media play (if any) in the crisis and were they adversarial or objective?
- What strategies, if any, are needed to regain and maintain market share in light of a crisis event and competitor strategies?

Given the focus of the case the most significant issues are “managing crises”. Some guiding questions that an instructor could develop for a case such as this could be:

1. Can blame be assessed in this incident? Why or why not?
2. How might this crisis been prevented?
3. Would a crisis management plan have helped the caterer

- through the incident?
4. Should the health department have immediately notified the media?
 5. What controls could be put in place to prevent this type of incident from occurring again?
 6. What strategies could be developed to regain market share?
 7. Are public policy and manpower shortages in the Health Departments at blame for this incident?
 8. How could the private sector work with the health agencies to enhance the system?

Conclusion

Live food safety issues re; those reported to Public Health and or to the media usually prompt students to ask “how is the company or individual doing now?” From a learning perspective one might argue it does not really matter. However, the process of identifying facts, research background, generating alternatives etc... is what provides the student a learning opportunity. To look to the ‘real world’, instructors could assign students to research the company and its market today and report back to the class. Many of these decisions will be based on what the learning objectives for the case and for the course are. Instructors will need to plan thoroughly to gain the maximum learning experience. For student reference an outline for creating a training program is offered below, Figure 1, Outline for a Food Safety Training Program: Factors to Consider.

References

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Figure 1

Outline for a Food Safety Training Program: Factors to Consider

Training Definition: Training is providing individuals with the: information, skills, opportunities needed to do a job optimally.

- Organizations should have: Education and Training Environment Policy
- Identify the Cost of Not Training
- Treat Training as a Profit center
- When is it necessary to training? Prevention vs. Reactive
- What issues or problems require training?
 - Job Enhancement, **Safety: food safety references here**, Complaints, Save \$.

Cost of a food safety problem? personal injury, business solvency, reputation, image.

Create employees need and desire to learn

- Ability and Motivation

Training Process

- Preparation/Planning
- Demonstration/Presentation
- Performance/Repetition
- Measurement/Evaluation

Preparation of Training

- Objective Setting: Reasonable, Measurable, Timely, Understandable

What are the resources and training methods available to the operator?

- Seminars/Workshops: Trade shows, professional organizations, certifications, In-house Programs, Libraries resources

Content and Interactive Methods

- Lecture, Demonstration, O-J-T, Case Studies, Games, Technology, Role Playing, Support materials and props, Visual Aids

Internal documentation: Task Breakdown: what to do, how to do it, additional information

Communication: speaking, writing, listening

How do you evaluate the training process? Rubrics make expectations clear, Set guidelines for work (O'Halloran, 2002)