The Responsibilities of Restaurant Owners and Operators in Food-Handling Training*

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RESTAURANT sanitation is the composite of practices and conditions in food-handling establishments, which safeguard the health of the customer. There are four distinct elements that go into this composite. The first is the raw material that is purchased, that is the food. "Purses cannot be made from sows' ears." Raw milk, infected meat, filthy baked goods, adulterated canned goods, contaminated grain products, polluted water have no place in a healthful restaurant. Keep these things out of the buying list.

Second is the methods that are used. Equipment must be used for the purpose for which it was designed and in the manner described in order to guarantee satisfactory results. Every procedure must be done by the method that protects food and keeps it from becoming a conveyor of sickness and death.

The third element is the equipment that is available. It is true that extremely conscientious workers using very careful methods can accomplish some minor miracles with poor equipment, but for most restaurant workers good tools go a long way to make a good worker.

The fourth is the man who does the job. To do a job well a man must be well trained. An important part of the job of food handling is to keep that food safe for eating. For the food handler, his own health and his own personal hygiene habits are inseparably linked with his job know-how. In increasing number, food-handler training courses are being conducted under joint cooperative sponsorship by local health department and restaurant owner associations to teach the man who does the job how to do it the sanitary way.

The restaurant owners and operators of food-handling establishments have a very large stake in the success of food-handler training programs. With this stake goes certain responsibilities. Some of these may be undertaken before a food-handler course is formally opened, and others must be faced in the many weeks after the formal training course ends. There are two important ones which must be faced as beforehand responsibilities, and in one sense they are relatively easy for they involve only a mental effort without the expenditure of dollars and cents.

First, each owner and operator must convince himself that sanitation in his establishment is a business necessity. If he will think for but a moment, he will realize that sanitation is cheap insurance against the damages he would suffer should food-borne diseases occur among his patrons. As has been amply demonstrated by court decisions in the State of North Carolina and in other states, restaurant owners and operators are legally liable for sufferings caused by sickness and death from food-borne diseases. During the years from 1938 to 1944 there have been no less than 1,485 verified and completely investigated outbreaks of food-borne disease. We know that

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* From an address to the Winston-Salem Restaurateurs Association, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
there are many more which have escaped recording for an investigation requires the time and skill of the medical specialty of epidemiologists. These outbreaks caused 57,591 cases and 299 deaths. You may be sure that the court decisions and settlements of £ many of these cases cost operators hard-earned profits. Such losses could be directly measured, but the losses due to damaged reputations and reduced patronage are hidden losses which all will most certainly agree must have run very much higher than the direct cost of paying out claims.

Another measurable profit-taking cost, which can result from deficiency in restaurant sanitation, are court fines for violations of sanitary regulations. Public health organizations are extremely reluctant to resort to legal action in order to procure compliance with sanitary regulations which are designed to help people. Public health officials will use their legal power of enforcement only as a last desperate resort when an establishment is a self-evident hazard to the health of the people of the community, and the operator is beyond all possible hope of seeing health and sanitation as an asset to his business. Nonetheless it is helpful to our thinking to note that in the City of New York during an intensive effort to raise the level of restaurant sanitation there were no less than 3,182 court actions for violations of the sanitary code, which took $256,799 from the pockets of restaurant operators from June, 1946, to September, 1947. Surely sanitation is cheap insurance against the risks of damages that have been noted. No thinking business man goes without insurance against fire, theft, and property damage. No thinking restaurant operator can go without sanitation as insurance against the risk of a food-borne disease outbreak originating in his establishment.

When he realizes that sanitation can be made one of the strongest assets for promoting business, the restaurant operator will further be convinced that sanitation is a business necessity for his restaurant. During the last year North Carolinians and people throughout the United States have become acutely health conscious as a result of issues which have faced our legislatures and the expanding health education activities in our schools, on our radios, and in our newspapers. We are only at the start of a great era during which all of our people in every walk of life are going to be awakened, and equipped with knowledge as to what they must do in order to enjoy good health. In the past five years there has developed a new specialty among the professions of public health, that of the health educator whose entire training, whose entire job is to bring to all of the people the knowledge of how one gains and keeps health. It is up to restaurant operators to seize upon the opportunity to make customers of the health conscious people of their home area and to capture the transient and tourist trade.

The second beforehand responsibility is that restaurant operators must school themselves to expect their employees to know the sanitary techniques of food handling and to practise the proper personal hygiene as part of their job know-how. This basic know-how is as much a requirement for holding a job as knowledge of the technique of cooking, preparing, and serving. In fact, the sanitary technique and personal hygiene are so inter-wound with these methods that food handling and sanitary food handling are one and the same. The only good food handling is sanitary food handling. The operator and all of his supervisory staff must make it forcefully clear to all employees and particularly the new hires that the use of sanitary food handling technique and compliance with the rules of personal hygiene are things that the employer expects of them as naturally as it is expected of them to be punctual, respectful to their supervisor, and courteous to their patrons.

Another key part of building up
inherent attitudes toward sanitation throughout the staff is that you require the participation of all of your employees in food-handler training courses as a condition of employment. Restaurant operators share in the planning of these courses. They voice their opinions as to what should be included, when the meetings should be held, and where these should be held. In setting up these courses in cooperation with their health departments, they have already made an investment of time and energy. They must make this investment pay, and an obvious step toward making it pay is to have every one of their employees attend all of the sessions.

Intensive food-handler courses which are carried on cooperatively between restaurant owners and health departments may be likened to a honeymoon. There may be a festive occasion, such as an evening dinner of the sponsors that may be compared to the marriage ceremony itself. The joint sponsors gather to celebrate the uniting of the interests of restaurant owners and the interests of the public health organizations, to produce something very much better than they have ever had before. The formal training sessions are somewhat honeymoon-like as the participants work together in an atmosphere and under conditions which are very much different from those under which the newly resolved relationship will have to carry on through the many weeks and months which follow. Very much like the honeymooners, they will have a much better chance of realizing their hopes, if they confront some of the grave aftermath responsibilities which they must meet in order to make a success of the operation.

The health department must think of their aftermath responsibilities and alter their organization's plans and operations to meet their new contract. But more significant are two major aftermath responsibilities which fall on the restaurant owners and operators. First, they must continue to show an interest in the training course after it is completed by seeing that its teachings are applied. This requires that the principles taught be incorporated into the standard practices in their kitchens, dining rooms, and storage rooms, and into the personal hygiene habits of their employees. It also requires that they verify that the teachings and course presentations have been grasped by the restaurant workers. In conversations and meetings with their employees the restaurant operators will be able to determine what things are clear and what needs to be taught again. With such information they will have practical and important recommendations to make for inclusion in future food-handler training courses and conferences. Finally, this responsibility requires them to observe the methods used by their workers and to encourage, compliment, and compensate those who do it the sanitary way.

The second major aftermath responsibility is one which is very tangible for it relates to equipment and materials. Restaurateurs must equip their establishments with the essential facilities and materials required by their employees to practice their learning, and to do their jobs in the sanitary way. In their training, the restaurant workers learn a new role, a new way in which to carry on their jobs. It is up to management to set the stage so that they can perform their jobs in the new sanitary way.

This means that restaurant owners must provide at least the minimum of two of the four parts which comprise sanitation in food-handling establishments. It means that they will insist on food, the raw materials, from sources which have the highest sanitary standards. Any restaurateur who is uncertain of the standing of the suppliers and distributors which serve him should seek help from his health department. There information can be given from a list of approved sources for such products as milk,
meat, and baked goods. To carry out this second responsibility you must also invest in health protection by providing the essentials of handwashing and toilet facilities, refrigeration, hot water, dishwashing set-ups, and equipment and utensils that are easily cleanable and in good repair.

It is clear that if the restaurant management is indifferent to these responsibilities for safe food and good equipment, the workers will conclude that management has little real interest in the sanitation of the establishment, the hygiene of their techniques in food handling and preparation, or in their personal hygiene habits. As our Spanish-speaking friends to the south say, management is “el que manda”—“he who commands.” Commanding means more than merely ordering; it means leading and participating. These things must be done if the new marriage of resolve for better sanitation in the restaurants taken during food-handler courses is to be a productive marriage.

Looking back over these responsibilities, one safe and certain conclusion may be made. Sanitation costs money and requires work. So it is with all things, no good work is achieved without effort and the investment of time, energy and funds. In each individual restaurant today, there are certain things in which the restaurateur takes pride. Things which have won compliments and attracted customers. It may be interior decoration, lighting, attractive window displays. It may be tasty food or novel menus. All of these required money and work, but these are paying off. These are winning profits.

The biggest contribution that any restaurant owner or operator can make to guarantee the success of a food-handler school is his firm conviction that he must add sanitation to the profit-making items that will make this year the best business year that he has ever had. He must remember that his competitors are going to take up this opportunity. He must remember that an ever growing percentage of his customers are becoming more acutely health conscious, and are demanding that there be included in the price of the meal they eat in his restaurant, health insurance against food-borne diseases. That means safe foods, sanitary methods, clean and adequate equipment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY