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Retail Sanitation & Culture: Real-World Case Studies

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Key Takeaways/Rules

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Key Takeaways/Rule

- Examine real retail sanitation scenarios and practical ways to resolve them.
 - Groups will discuss various parts of each scenario
- See how technology, data, and AI can strengthen sanitation programs.
- Understand how leadership and communication drive food safety culture.
- Learn how peers maintain compliance and consistency during disruptions.
- Leave with ideas and tools to improve sanitation systems and safety culture.



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When 'Clean Enough' is Never Clean Enough (Deli Slicer)

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'Clean Enough' Isn't Safe (Deli Slicer)

- Morning deli slicer check shows visible meat residue from the prior night.
- Short-staffed team did a partial wipe-down; full tear-down and sanitizing skipped.
- Checklist was signed as complete; no manager verification.
- Within a week, a Listeria case is traced back to deli meat from this store.

Discussion

- **What feels familiar about this scenario in your world?**
- **Where do you see 'clean enough' behavior in your operations—what equipment or areas?**

Why Listeria Changes the Rules

- Listeria survives and grows in the cold—refrigeration alone is not enough.
- It hides in hard-to-clean equipment and forms biofilms that resist casual cleaning.
- High-risk RTE foods and vulnerable customers make failures high-consequence.

Discussion

- **Where are your highest-risk RTE areas—deli, prepared foods, grab & go?**
- **How confident are you that those areas are cleaned the way we think they are, every shift?**

From Incident to Prevention

- Require full slicer tear-down, correct chemicals/contact times, and visible supervisor checks.
- Create a Listeria ‘hot list’ and playbook for cleaning, swabbing, and product decisions.
- Fix root causes with realistic labor, expectations, and use of data/AI to flag risk patterns.

- **Discussion:**
- **What one change would make it hardest to ‘fake’ slicer cleaning in your operation?**
- **How could data or AI help you spot high-risk stores or shifts before an incident?**



Scenario 2: When 'Clean Enough' is Never Clean Enough (Produce Room)

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'Clean Enough' Isn't Safe (Produce Room)

- 'Clean' fatigue mats stored on top of cutting boards, with visible residue.
- Floor drain covers cannot be removed; drains never truly deep-cleaned.
- Pitted, unsealed concrete floor that holds moisture and debris.
- Intermittent customer illness complaints tied to fresh-cut produce.

Discussion:

- **Where in your stores would you expect this kind of 'looks fine, actually risky' situation?**
- **How often do we really question where 'clean' items are stored and how drains/floors are maintained?**

Why Listeria Changes the Rules

- Listeria survives in cold, wet areas—refrigerated rooms can still be high risk.
- It persists in drains, worn floors, mats, and prep niches if not fully cleaned.
- Cut produce is RTE; any Listeria in the room can go straight to the customer.

Discussion

- **If you walked into your highest-volume prep room, what surfaces or spots would you be most worried about from a Listeria standpoint?**
- **Which of those are design problems versus process problems?**

From Incident to Prevention

- Map likely Listeria harborage points and design a real deep-clean routine.
- Standardize sanitation steps and supervisor verification, not just signed logs.
- Plan for positives and use data/AI to spot patterns and reduce pressure that leads to shortcuts.

Discussion

- **What's one design change and one process change you'd prioritize in a room like this?**
- **How could technology help you see sanitation risk building in advance—before the complaints start?**



Scenario 3: FreshMart Market

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Case Overview

- Regional convenience store chain with 250+ locations.
- Audit scores declined over 12 months.
- Common issues: sanitizer mix-ups, handwashing gaps, dirty food contact surfaces.
- Customer complaints about store cleanliness increased.

Discussion prompt: What would be the first sign that sanitation culture is slipping?

What Went Wrong

- Training was compliance-focused.
- Store teams deprioritized sanitation during rush periods.
- Managers were not reinforcing expectations consistently.
- Logs did not always match actual practices.

Discussion prompt: Why do logs sometimes look better than real conditions

Root Causes

- Weak accountability at the store level.
- Inconsistent manager follow-up.
- Limited hands-on training.
- Sanitation seen as a task, not a shared responsibility.

Discussion prompt: Which root cause is the biggest barrier to change in retail stores?

Actions Taken

- Launched “Clean Stores, Shared Responsibility.”
- Simplified sanitation standards.
- Added visual job aids at point of use.
- Trained managers to coach and inspect daily.
- Increased focus on observation during audits.

Discussion prompt: Which action would have the fastest impact in your stores?

Results and Takeaways

- Sanitation violations dropped by 35%.
- Customer complaints decreased.
- Employees reported clearer expectations.
- Strong culture improved consistency.

Discussion prompt: How do you sustain improvements after the initial push?



Q&A

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