



Author Gavin Buckettt

Remember Rule No. 1? Well it ain't always true!

Rule No. 1: The chef is *always* right.

Rule No. 2: If the chef is wrong, see rule number 1.

This is how I was raised in a kitchen and in my 15 years, I worked under some brilliant chefs where this was in fact believed by all. How about you? Are you a chef now? Do you take this attitude to work with you? While I think it is healthy to have this sort of respect, and in many cases it is warranted. But are they *always* right?

What about the customer? Aren't they always right? Isn't that something we are also taught? So what happens when the customer and the chef disagree? Who wins that one? What if the customer is a chef? Does that make it 2:1? Anyway, I think you get my point. The chef needs to be right *most* of the time and his/her brigade need to believe that they need to be led, but it doesn't *always* mean that the chef is right. Do you listen to your customers? Do you seek and/or receive feedback and look to continuously improve on what you do?

I don't remember the exact statistics, but it is something like 1 in 10 customers who have a complaint will actually tell you. The other nine will tell 10 of their friends. So if a customer has a complaint, how do you handle it? Whenever friends or family came into my restaurants, I encouraged them to tell me if *anything* was wrong? How else do you know? Similarly if a waiter receives a complaint, you need to make sure that they pass that complaint onto you.

But what you do if the complaint is up to you? Do you dismiss it out of hand, backing your own self belief or do you investigate it? Now I know there will always be people who are making a complaint just to try and get a freebie, but there are many customers who do know about food and wine. They know what is right and what is not, so you need to listen to them. You can't possibly taste everything you serve, but your customers taste everything you serve them.

If you have a food safety program, the program should have a customer complaint procedure and when the complaint is received, corrective action should be taken and recorded. The corrective action should include a *quick fix* and a *long term fix*. If your program does not have customer complaint procedure (or you do not have a food safety program) I suggest you develop one. It should include:

- How are complaints received (remember this may include emails, letters or social network reviews)?
- Are they recorded?
- Who are they reported to?
- Who is responsible for ensuring the complaint is addressed?

- What sort of actions may be taken or are permitted by management (refunds, vouchers, complimentary drinks or desserts etc.)?
- How is the complaint investigated?
- How will corrective actions that are taken be assessed?

You should also have a prepared monitoring form that contains all of the triggers that need to be completed as part of the complaint including:

- Name and contact details of the complainant (if they agree)
- The nature of the complaint (what was wrong?)
- Who the complaint was received by?
- Who the complaint was reported to?
- What action was immediately taken with the customer (the quick fix)
- What action was taken to make sure the complaint doesn't happen again (the long term fix)
- The results of the action taken (did it work?)

Remember that complaints are more often than not genuine and may be as simple as too much seasoning or a steak that is tough. However occasionally it may be something much more important to your business like evidence of pests (flies/cockroaches etc.) or that a menu item has gone off. These are complaints that should never be received if you have good preventative food safety controls, *but* if they are received they must be acted on immediately and not dismissed.

Eat well. Eat safe!

Gavin Buckettt

Founder and Managing Director

The Gourmet Guardian Pty Ltd

web www.australianfoodsafety.com.au

email admin@gourmetguardian.com.au

phone 1800 366 372

P.S: To the restaurant that claims on their website to be Melbourne's Best (cuisine suppressed) Restaurant but serves on New Years Day reheats from the night before and fish that was clearly off, this article may be a waste of time. For those of you that are interested, we made a genuine complaint to the manager on duty, and she could smell that the fish was off (you should have seen her face - she wouldn't even get close to it), yet came back 2 minutes later to say that the chef had eaten the fish that everything was OK is ridiculous (we hope he wasn't sick the next day).

For owners of restaurants reading this – what lines of communication do you have with your staff when you are not onsite? Are you letting them handle these complaints as they see fit (and to protect themselves) or do you have clear procedures that need to be followed? It is *your* investment, not theirs!

BTW: Please feel free to contact our office if you need assistance with any food safety program requirements, including customer complaints.



The
**Gourmet
Guardian**



Providing safe food solutions and quality assurance services