SQF INSTITUTE

Certified SQF Practitioner

Professional Development Handbook

a division of FMI THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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1.0 Introduction

A. Overview of the Certified SQF Practitioner

i. **The Certified SQF Practitioner credential** provides a consistent framework for food safety created in collaboration between SQFI and Exemplar Global. Those who earn this voluntary professional certification credential demonstrate their ability to implement, maintain, and continuously improve an SQF food safety system at any site.

ii. Most importantly, **the Certified SQF Practitioner credential builds trust and reliability** in our food safety systems while enhancing the credibility of our industry. When practitioners follow defined career paths, it demonstrates their commitment to professionalism, continual learning, and excellence. This boosts confidence in our food safety systems among companies and consumers alike.

iii. Companies employing Certified SQF Practitioners can showcase their commitment to food safety and quality, setting themselves apart in the market.

iv. For the food safety professional, this credential creates:

1. **Recognition:** A professional path to career growth and to attract new talent into the food safety professional community.
2. **Continuous Improvement:** Improvement of the SQF Practitioner profession, including a framework for continuing professional development within this critical role.
3. **Career Growth:** Validity when SQF Practitioners change roles, in that their skills are transferable.
4. **Competitive Advantage:** In a competitive job market, holding a globally recognized credential that employers will value is an advantage.
5. **Workforce:** A pipeline of trusted food safety professionals to supply the SQF auditor pool.
6. **SQF Program Knowledge:** This credential is a natural bridge between the Code requirements for the SQF Practitioner and the SQF Excellence Award for the SQF Practitioner.

B. Purpose

i. This handbook is intended to aid the Certified SQF Practitioner in fulfilling the re-registration requirements for Professional Development (PD) as described in the Criteria for Certified SQF Practitioners.

ii. Those who aspire to earn the Certified SQF Practitioner credential are encouraged to create a learning path using this handbook.

2.0 Professional Development

A. Review of Re-registration Requirements

i. The Certified SQF Practitioner is required to re-register every three years. Within that time, the individual is required to undertake a minimum of 45 hours of Professional Development.

ii. One contact hour of a qualified activity accrues one hour of PD.

iii. The individual is asked to create a self-described Professional Development Plan (PDP) to aid in the identification of activities that support ongoing Professional Development.

iv. The individual will attest annually that PD is ongoing.

v. PD is recorded in the individual's Exemplar Global profile at exemplarlink.org

B. Create a Personal Professional Development Plan (PDP)

i. Overview

1. For the Certified SQF Practitioner, a PDP aligned with the site's food safety policy and supported by senior site management is **pivotal for fostering continuous improvement** for both them and their site. PDPs provide a proactive investment in professional growth that not only boosts individual performance but also cultivates a culture of continuous improvement as the site benefits from increased productivity, adaptability, and sustained food safety resilience.

2. **There are four steps to creating a PDP:** Plan, Do, Check, and Act. Each is described below.

ii. Plan

1. **The first step to creating a PDP is to create a plan.** Begin by identifying what to focus on. A skills self-assessment is a great way to identify areas for professional growth. Use the Skills Self-Assessment provided (see Section 5.0). Under each heading in the Certified SQF Practitioner skills self-assessment are skills and knowledge areas relevant to the Certified SQF Practitioner role. For each knowledge or skill statement, choose a rating that best reflects your current level of confidence or competence.

2. **Record the skills and knowledge areas that resonate with you** and add others not listed.

3. **How will you get to where you want to be?** And how will you know you've arrived? SMART Goals are a systematic way to describe your plan for success. SMART is an acronym for the steps involved in developing a goal plan.

   a. **Specific:** Target a specific area for improvement. You've done this by conducting a self-assessment. But are you really homed in on a specific target? Give it a bit more thought and make your goal as specific as possible.

   b. **Measurable:** Quantify the goal. You want to improve, but by exactly how much? Identifying such things as targets, milestones, and end points will help you "visualize" progress along your journey and recognize success when you achieve it.

   c. **Achievable:** Set yourself up for success by making the goal challenging, but not impossible.

   d. **Realistic/Relevant:** Take a moment to think about what you want to achieve and whether you've settled on the right target. Will making this improvement actually help you move closer to your career goal? Is this goal specific to you, or is it someone else's vision of success?

   e. **Time-bound:** Determine the timeframe for completing the goal. It doesn't have to be an exact date, but having an endpoint will help keep you focused and motivated.

4. **Take a moment to add structure to your goal(s) using the SMART approach.** Start with one of your identified skills from the self-assessment; narrow it down by making it specific; help yourself out by making it measurable; step back and ask if it is realistic; and lastly, identify a timeframe by which you want to achieve your goals. Document your goal plan and post it in a place where you will see it.

iii. Do

1. Look at you! **You're achieving what you set out to do.**
2. At this stage, **you are actively implementing your goal plan.**

iv. Check

1. Just as monitoring a critical control point within a HACCP plan helps a site **determine if the critical limit is met,** taking time to assess your development allows you to determine whether you are progressing, whether your plan is effective, and whether your overall goal is the right one for you. Lastly, tracking will help you recognize success when you achieve it.
2. **As an added incentive,** research published by the American Psychological Association tells us that the more often you monitor your progress toward a goal, the greater the likelihood you will succeed.
3. **Progress is tracked** quantitatively and qualitatively.
   a. **Quantitative:** As food industry professionals, we're used to measuring progress using quantitative means: percentages, charts, counts, time, etc. The same quantitative metrics can be used to track professional goals.
   b. **Qualitative:** Don't forget the power of tracking qualitative progress toward your goals. This is particularly relevant if the goal targets soft skills, such as behaviors and relationships. Here you're looking at activities, patterns of behavior, and the nature of relationships. Relying on a trusted friend or colleague can help you gauge your progress.
4. **A word on accountability:** You are the CEO of Team You. You are accountable to the CEO for meeting your goals, so please check in and share your progress. Being accountable to your goal will keep you on the path to success.

v. Act

1. **Success!** Congratulations on achieving your goal. Before heading off to accomplish your next goal, take a moment to celebrate your success and reflect on your achievement. Reflecting allows you to pinpoint exactly what worked so you can repeat it in the future and what didn't, so you can discard ineffective processes. Taking pride in your accomplishments by celebrating them—even the small ones—can also boost your self-confidence and motivate you to achieve more.

C. Documenting Professional Development

i. The following evidence will need to be provided to demonstrate a minimum of 45 hours of Professional Development. See Section 5.0 for a PD log template.

1. **Date activity was completed**
2. **Activity Title**
3. **Activity Sponsor and Contact Information**
4. **Activity Description**
5. **The Content Domain(s) the activity supports**
6. **Number of Contact Hours**

D. Professional Development Resources

i. Implementing and maintaining an SQF System as an SQF Practitioner is challenging work requiring a wide breadth of knowledge at a comprehensive level. Here are some key points to help you identify professional development activities that will enable you to grow your knowledge and skills.

1. **Knowledge and Skills Development.** Your ability to effectively perform the duties of a Certified SQF Practitioner depends on having both appropriate knowledge and practiced skills. Use the Skills Self-Assessment identified in Section 5.0, which is based on the identified Knowledge and Skills for the Certified SQF Practitioner.
2. **Soft and Hard Skills.** The Certified SQF Practitioner needs a combination of hard and soft skills to effectively ensure the safety of food products. Some relevant hard and soft skills are included in the self-assessment in Attachment 1.
3. **Integrity and Professionalism.** Intentionally integrate the values of integrity and professionalism into your PDP by setting clear goals for ethical conduct and professional behavior. This may involve seeking training in ethical decision-making, committing to ongoing education to stay current in one's field, and actively seeking feedback to enhance personal and professional conduct. Additionally, it's important to establish a personal code of ethics and regularly reflect on one's actions to ensure they align with these standards. By embedding integrity and professionalism into long-term goals, you can build a strong reputation, foster trust with colleagues and customers, and create a solid foundation for career advancement.

ii. Generally Accepted and Unaccepted PD Activities

1. **The individual is responsible** for identifying activities that align with their PDP.
2. **Accepted** — generally accepted PD activities
   a. **SQF Unites** — Education Sessions and Knowledge Swaps
   b. **Continuing education activities** (seminars, conferences) offered by professional associations and formal non-credit courses offered through a university
   c. **Short courses or technical workshops**
   d. **Serving as a speaker in technical sessions** at regional, national, or international conferences
   e. **Teaching employees**
   f. **Writing articles and blogs**
   g. **Self-directed study**
   h. **Formal college or university course work at any level** (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral) offered by regionally/globally accredited programs. Courses may be taken via distance education.
3. **Unacceptable/Generally Unacceptable PD activities**
   a. **Performing activities associated with day-to-day responsibilities** as an SQF Practitioner or food safety professional (e.g., conducting internal audit activities, coaching team members, monthly senior site management updates, verification activities)
   b. **Attending or participating** in committee or board meetings, serving on leadership committees, etc.
   c. **Association membership** and leadership activities
   d. **Business meetings**
   e. **Expositions at conferences**
   f. **Supervision of subordinates**, including interns
   g. **Curriculum development**

3.0 Questions and FAQ

i. For questions about the Certified SQF Practitioner program, qualified Professional Development activities, contact sqfi.com.

ii. For questions about accessing the CPD portal and application, lost login, portal support, contact exemplarlink.org.

4.0 Resources

iii. You can find the Certified SQF Practitioner Self-Assessment, the SMART Goals Planning Tool, the Professional Development Plan Tool, and the Professional Development Activities Log at sqfi.com/training-events/search-for-training/certified-sqf-practitioner-credential.