

# Effective Inspection Interviews

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# Objectives

- Ask questions with intention
- Ask better questions

# Interview Fundamentals

## Ask questions with Intention.

1. Consider your **inspection objective**.
2. Structure questions to **elicit valuable information**.

# Interview Fundamentals

## Inspection Objectives

- Identify significant violations
  - Adulteration
  - Gross insanitary conditions
- Address significant violations
  - Take enforcement actions
  - Ensure corrections

# Interview Fundamentals

## Valuable information

- Substantiates alleged violations
- Drives your next enforcement steps
- Helps you establish the scope of the issue
- Required to take regulatory action

**Soymilk Scenario:**  
Ask Questions  
with Intention.



# Valuable Information

# Interview Fundamentals

## Valuable information

Focus on your most urgent information needs

- What specific information do you need at this time?

**HINT: Focus on identifying direct contamination violations.**

- What specific information do you need to trigger enforcement action?



# Interview Fundamentals

## Ask questions to elicit Valuable Information

- Location of violative food
- Food safety control measures
- Root causes of violations
- Corrective actions
- Etc.

# Interview Fundamentals

- Anticipate **obstacles**
  - How will you handle unexpected answers?
  - *Be prepared to rephrase your questions*
  - How will you handle evasive responses?
  - *Be prepared to ask yes/no questions*
  - How will you handle meandering answers?
  - *Be prepared to redirect to clarifying questions*

# Interview Fundamentals

Have a plan & ask questions with purpose.

- Focus on your **Inspection Objective**.
- Ask questions to elicit **Valuable Information**.

# Effective Interviewing

Asking questions and Gathering inspection information

# Improving Inspection Interviews

Building rapport is the first step to an effective interview.

When food safety concerns are observed.

1. Explain how the concern was discovered.
2. Present all relevant facts upfront.
3. Summarize your concern.
4. Explain the significance of your concern.



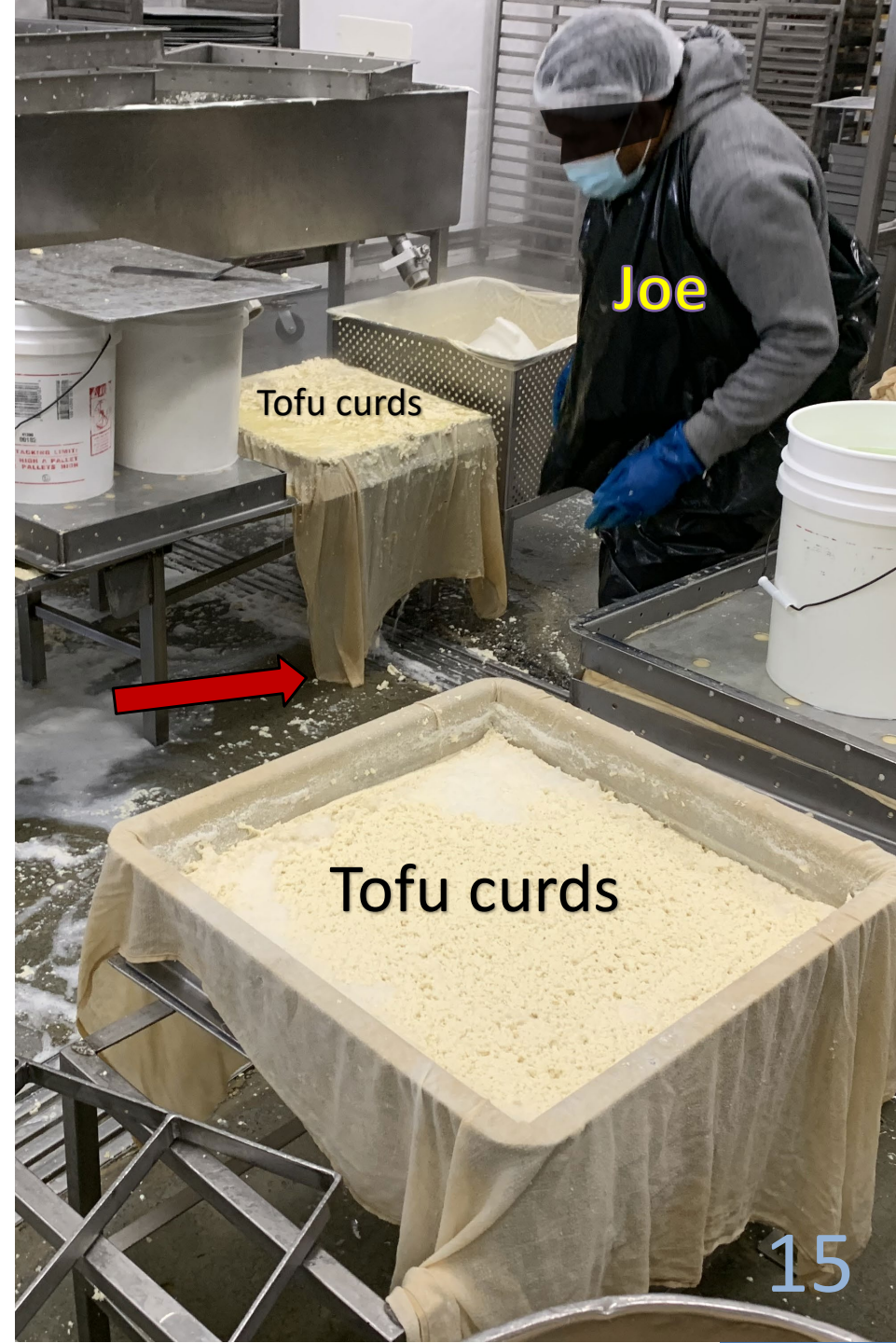
Tofu curds

Tofu curds



# Be Direct

1. Explain how the concern was discovered
  - I was in the processing room watching Joe getting the tofu curds ready for the tofu press.
2. Present all relevant facts
  - I saw a cheesecloth touching the dirty floor, and I saw Joe flip the cheesecloth on top of the tofu curds.
3. Summarize your concern
  - My concern is that Joe is contaminating your tofu curds.
4. Explain the significance of your concern.
  - The tofu is adulterated and will be ...(seized, embargoed, condemned, recalled, etc.)



# Improving Inspection Interviews

## Types of Questions

- Open vs Closed



# Improving Inspection Interviews

## Types of Questions

- **Closed** question asks for a specific piece of information. Typically, it can be answered with a single word.
  - Did you sanitize the tofu press machine?
  - Did you fix the temperature control issue in your cooler?
- **Open** questions are an invitation to the respondent for broad discussion or explanation.
  - Tell me about your sanitation procedures for the tofu press machine?
  - How did you address observed temperature deviations in your coolers?

# Improving Inspection Interviews

## Five Functions of **Open Questions**

- 1) Getting detailed information
- 2) Hearing a person's frame of reference
- 3) Encourages sharing of new information
- 4) Getting leads for follow up questions
- 5) Reducing anxiety

## Five Functions of **Closed Questions**

- 1) Getting specific information quickly
- 2) Changing direction of an interview
- 3) Maintaining control
- 4) Confirming agreement
- 5) Focusing attention

# Improving Inspection Interviews

More Types of Questions to be aware of

- **Loaded:**

- Contain a hidden assumption, which the respondent confirms by answering the question.
- Make the respondent guarded, defensive, and distrustful of the interviewer.

- **Indirect:**

- Attribute the question to someone other than the interviewer.
- Are useful to address sensitive subjects.
- Reduce the level emotional confrontation.

We want to know the root cause of this unsanitary condition. Let's ask.



**Loaded Question:** (makes respondent feel defensive)

- How did you allow this equipment to become so dirty and poorly maintained?

**Indirect Question:** (less direct emotional confrontation)

- How does the sanitation crew maintain and clean this equipment?

# Improving Inspection Interviews

## Properly **phrasing** questions

1. Consider your information needs.
  - Broad & Detailed (open) or
  - Narrow & Basic (closed)
2. Consider the respondent's knowledge/experience level.
  - Sanitation crew,
  - Food handler,
  - Supervisor,
  - Owner,
  - HACCP/PC Coordinator

# Improving Inspection Interviews

Skilled interviewers:

1. Ask the right type of question for the situation.
2. Customize questions according to the respondent's presumed knowledge and experience.
3. Have “go to” interview questions and statements.

# Phrasing



# Proper **Phrasing** of your Question

## 1. Information needs

- How much tofu was contaminated by this poor cheesecloth handling practice?
- What are the planned corrections?

## 2. Respondent's knowledge

- In this scenario we'll talk to the production Supervisor.





# Phrasing of your Questions (Examples)

- **Open:** Describe the training you provide to your employees regarding cheese cloth use and handling? (Root Cause)
- **Closed:** How many batches of tofu did Joe manufacture this week? (Scope of issue)
- **Indirect:** What could be done at this time to make sure contaminated tofu is not distributed? (Voluntary destruction)



# Inspection Interview Tips

Three go to **statements** for most situations

- 1) Tell me what's going on here.
- 2) Please walk me through the process.
- 3) Tell me what you call this equipment and how it's used.

# Inspection Interview Tips

Four **open questions** for most common situations

- 1) Describe how you prevent contamination at this step?
- 2) What challenges have you had with this process/area/product?
- 3) How can these violations be prevented in the future?
- 4) What can be done to improve these conditions/correct these violations?

# What did we learn?

- We learned that the **purpose** of inspection interviews is to get information to characterize and address violations
- We learned how to improve our **interview strategy** by focusing on our inspection purpose, identifying our information needs, and pre-planning to address obstacles.
- We learned how to conduct more **effective inspection interviews** by building trust with transparency, asking expertly phrased questions, and making appropriate information gathering requests.

# Thank you.

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