

We wash our hands here!

How to set hygiene norms in the workplace



Today consumers have 60% higher expectations of hygiene in restaurants

Source: Essentials Initiative Survey 2020 – 2021, Essity



“The trick is to make handwashing a social norm and a positive experience in the workplace.”

Linda Lindström

is a behavioral strategist and the cofounder of Beteendelabbet—the behavior lab—in Stockholm, Sweden. Established in 2016, Beteendelabbet combines psychology, design and behavioral economics to create better behaviors. The company has achieved great success in a wide array of industries, changing behavioral patterns by using tools that effectively influence how people think.



Keeping up with good hygiene in foodservice is key in all areas of your business. Good hygiene routines will help you ensure the best and safest experience possible for both your guests and staff. With help from Behavioral design, you can learn more about how people act and think, and thus how you can make it easier for them to follow the hygiene routines needed.

“What you think you’re doing and what you’re actually doing are two completely different things. Humans want to believe that we’re much better than we actually are. The truth is that we’re fundamentally lazy; we want to do the easiest thing possible and not have to make decisions. We want most things to go quick and easy. Therefore, we need a bit of help to really wash our hands as often as we should, and we need to be reminded why and how to wash them so we can understand how effective it is and make it a habit. Humans are herd animals; we want to belong to a group and follow the behavioral patterns of others. The trick is to make handwashing a social norm and a positive experience in the workplace”, Linda Lindström begins.

It should be easy to do the right thing.

“It’s easier to go to the sink if the soap feels nice, the paper towels are absorbent and the trash can is emptied”

It starts with you as a role model

As a restaurant manager and a team leader, you have an important job in this context.

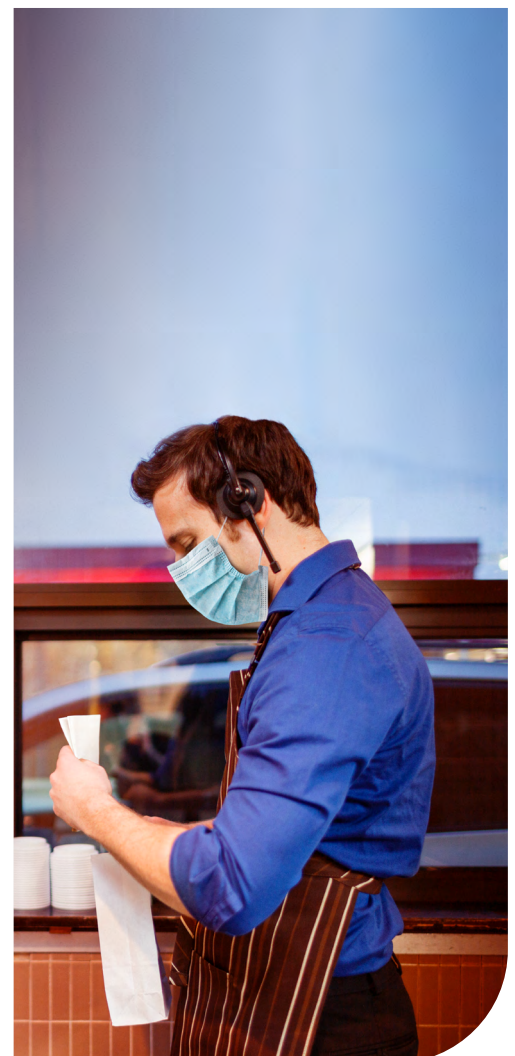
- **You are a role model—so make sure you are a good one!**
People appreciate the feeling of being part of a group; we keep an eye on those around us. Our brains are programmed to follow what everyone else does. We simply don’t want to perform less than anyone else and we want to fit in.
- **Create the right conditions for hygiene compliance**
Are the handwashing stations fully stocked with soap and hand towels? Have the trash cans been emptied? If something is missing or seems complicated, it’s enough to find a reason not to do it.
- **Identify distractions and competitive behaviors**
Are there guests at the door who need help or waiting to order? A dishwasher beeping that it needs to be emptied? A pot that needs to be taken off the stove? It’s important for your staff to know what always comes first. With clarity and strict routines, employees won’t hesitate to do the right thing.
- **Include your staff in creating the processes and routines**
Research shows that when people are given influence, they are more likely to take ownership of the process and thus follow through on it.

Making it easy and positive

Another important aspect is having employees associate handwashing with a positive experience rather than an annoying imposition. “It’s easier to go to the sink if the soap feels nice, the paper towels are absorbent and the trash can is emptied,” Lindström says. If the experience is the opposite—dirty sink, no soap, no paper towels and an overflowing trash can—that’s enough to make us avoid going back.

“Help your team to follow through on these important hygiene measures, by making sure that handwashing is always a pleasant experience,” Lindström explains. “Make stocking handwashing stations part of the regular daily tasks. The sinks must always be clean with plenty of soap and paper towels and there should always be room in the trash can for used towels. Fresh and clean facilities make it easier to follow hygiene routines.”

Handwashing stations should be cleaned and restocked regularly.



“We learn best from simple and short information that isn’t negative or difficult to read”

Knowledge and repetition

- **An effective tool is to educate**
Raise awareness of why handwashing is important and repeat the information often, preferably as close to the point of decision as possible.
- **We need a context of our behavior**
It’s easier to establish the habit if we know why we should. “I’m doing something that really works to reduce the spread of infection.”
- **Repeat the information**
Print out a poster showing how to wash your hands and hang one up at every washing station. Share brief facts about each part of the procedure: what the soap does, what the water does and why it’s important to dry your hands thoroughly.



Feedback—evaluating and setting up measurable goals

Set up measurable goals and provide feedback for the new routines you’ve set up and the changes you’ve made. It is important to show that this is a priority issue and give your team the results of your efforts. It gives them an opportunity to share their experiences and promote future improvements. Ask basic questions about how it’s gone, are there things that work better than before or worse? Do you see a change in terms of reduced sick leave? How much more soap and paper towels do you go through each week since the pre-COVID-19 era?

And finally, evaluate. What works in one team doesn’t necessarily work as well in another.

Tip: You’ll find signs and posters with simple and useful facts at the end of this article which you can download and use in your workplace, preferably next to a handwashing station.

“7 in 10 say the virus would spread less quickly if people were better at washing their hands”

Source: Essentials Initiative Survey 2020 – 2021, Essity

In summary

Your goal as a manager is to get your entire team to wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds in each risk situation. Your best indicator for success is that we're all creatures of habit so we appreciate routines and clear guidelines. Let knowledge, repetition, clarity, simplicity and positive experience be your guiding concepts. And make sure to be the role model that your team needs and expect of you.



5 key takeaways for establishing a strong routine

1. Provide the right conditions for good hand hygiene

We are comfortable creatures looking for the easiest way.

2. Be a role model

Make sure that you and someone else on your team guide the way. Humans don't want to perform less than anyone else and we want to fit in.

3. Be clear about the rules

Don't give options and be clear when and how to wash your hands. Eliminate all competing behaviors.

4. Educate and explain why we wash our hands

This is most effective as close to the decision point as possible. It's not enough to say "to stop the spread of infection"—explain how soap, water and drying your hands make a difference. It's easier when we can put our behaviors into a context.

5. Repeat and remind about the routines

Orally, with posters, stickers on the floor, etc. Make the path to the sink an unconscious routine.

Resources

Here you'll find additional resources that can help you to educate your team and give them a context to their actions. Use the posters where the behavior takes place, then it will have the best effect!

How soap works #1

[Download](#)

How soap works #2

[Download](#)

Dry your hands #1

[Download](#)

Dry your hands #2

[Download](#)

When to wash your hands

[Download](#)

How to wash your hands

[Download](#)

Get in touch
 email us: torkusa@essity.com | call us: 866-722-8675 | Where to buy: