

Understanding and Responding to Changing Customer Expectations in Hospitality - Complete Hospitality Training

Canonical:

<https://cht.edu.au/news/understanding-and-responding-to-changing-customer-expectations-in-hospitality/>

Details:

Less has changed than the phrase suggests. What guests want, food that matches its description, at a price they agreed to, from people paying attention, has not moved. What has changed is a short and specific list, and it is more useful to name it than to talk about expectations in general.

Respond to the expectation you can observe

Our original guide points to digital booking and communication, diverse dietary and access needs, feedback in public review channels, and a stronger interest in flexible experiences. These are signals to investigate in your own venue, not proof that every guest wants the same technology or package. Test the booking journey, ask guests what is missing, and train staff to explain current options accurately. A local partner experience or wellbeing offer can be useful if it fits the business and is deliverable; communicate its conditions before the guest books.

When policies, menus or service times change, tell the team first and make the public information match. Respond to criticism with specific action rather than a generic promise. The training and food-safety duties below set the boundaries for adapting without losing consistency.

What has genuinely changed

Dietary and allergen requests. Both the volume and the specificity have risen. A request now arrives as a condition to be managed rather than a preference to be accommodated, and the operational consequence is that floor staff must know what is in a dish or be able to say they will check. Guessing is the failure mode.

Alternative milks. These moved from a substitution to a default expectation in most coffee venues. The tail is operational: separate jugs and cleaning where a dairy allergy is involved rather than an intolerance, extra stock to hold, and staff who can steam products that behave differently. See the barista course .

Ordering and payment. QR ordering, venue apps, card-only counters and tipping prompts have changed how orders arrive. The risk is not the technology. It is that the order flow no longer forces contact with the table, so nobody is reading the room unless the roster makes that a named job.

Transparency about sourcing. Guests ask where things come from more often than they used to. The only real requirement is that the answer be true. Free range, gluten free and local are representations, and a staff member repeating one that turns out to be wrong creates a problem for the venue.

The six things the training package tells a manager to watch

Before going further it is worth knowing that "changing customer expectations" is not left as a vague managerial instinct in the SIT training package. It is a performance criterion with a named list behind it.

SITXCCS016 Develop and manage quality customer service practices , core in the Diploma of Hospitality Management, requires a manager to review changes in the internal and external environment and integrate the findings into planning for quality service . The unit then names the environmental factors it expects to be tracked:

Factor	Why it moves expectations
Changes in the competitive environment	A new venue nearby resets what guests treat as normal, not just where they go
The economic climate	Changes what a guest counts as value, without changing what they order
Technology	The ordering and payment shift above sits here
Changes in management	An internal change that guests feel as inconsistency
Recruitment practices	Who you can hire decides what service you can deliver
Customer service preferences	The only item on the list that is actually about guests

Five of those six are not about guests at all. That is the most useful thing on this list, because venues almost always read a service decline as a shift in what customers want, when the unit's own framing puts the competitive environment, the economy, the technology, the management and the hiring market ahead of it. Two of the six are entirely inside the building.

The unit also names how you are supposed to find out, and it is wider than a comment card. Its research methods are customer service surveys, focus groups, qualitative research, quantitative research, and seeking feedback from colleagues . The pairing that matters is qualitative with quantitative: a satisfaction score tells you how often something happens and nothing about why, and a focus group or an interview tells you why and nothing about how often. A venue running only one of the two will either chase a number it cannot explain or act on a story that is not representative. Element 1 of the same unit also requires opportunities for customers and staff to give feedback , and requires staff to be involved in developing the service practices, not only informed of them.

Anticipating an expectation is itself a unit

The frontline counterpart is SITXCCS015 Enhance customer service experiences , core in the Certificate IV in Hospitality, which applies to people who deal directly with customers daily and operate independently or with limited guidance. Its first element is the practical version of everything above:

determine and confirm customer preferences, needs and expectations

advise customers on the products and services that meet those needs

anticipate customer preferences and needs throughout the service experience

promptly provide products and services with professional and personalised service that meets individual preferences

"Throughout the service experience" is the load-bearing phrase. The expectation is not read once at the door and then filed; it is tracked across the visit. The unit also requires special requests to be checked before delivery to the customer , which is the assessed version of the dietary point at the top of this page, and it requires customer information to be shared with team members so the same guest does

not have to explain themselves twice.

If the change you are seeing is in expectations rather than in delivery, those two units are where the competency sits: SITXCCS015 for reading and meeting it on the floor, SITXCCS016 for redesigning the service around it. Both are in the SITSS00077 Customer Service Management skill set along with SITXCOM010 Manage conflict, which is the short route for a supervisor who is not doing a whole Diploma. See how to measure and improve customer service .

The food safety obligation behind the dietary shift

This is where the changed expectation meets actual law, so it is worth being precise rather than approximate.

Standard 3.2.2A of the Food Standards Code commenced on 8 December 2023. Its categories are activity-based, not audience-based , which is the point most commentary gets wrong.

Category	What it is
Category one	A caterer or food service operation that processes unpackaged potentially hazardous food into food that is both potentially hazardous and ready to eat . Restaurants, cafes, pubs, fast food, bakeries, hospitals, aged care, childcare, school canteens, mobile vendors, and service stations or supermarkets that make and serve food
Category two	Retail sale of potentially hazardous ready-to-eat food received unpackaged, or unpackaged after receipt, that the business did not make. Slicing, weighing, repacking, reheating and hot-holding do not count as making it. Delis, butchers, seafood retailers, convenience stores

If your venue has a kitchen and cooks, it is category one . A restaurant or cafe is not category two.

Standard 3.2.2A introduced three tools:

Tool	Who it applies to
Food handler training	Category one and category two
Food Safety Supervisor	Category one and category two
Substantiation or evidence records	Category one only

What food handler training actually requires, and what it does not

The training must be completed before the person engages in a prescribed activity , and the course must cover four topics: safe handling of food; food contamination; cleaning and sanitising of premises and equipment; and personal hygiene .

There is an alternative. Under clause 10 of the Standard, instead of completed training a person may possess skills and knowledge commensurate with the activity they are undertaking. Note what that alternative is not. It is not "trained, or supervised by someone who has been trained". Supervision belongs to the separate Food Safety Supervisor tool and does not substitute for this one. That older framing predates 3.2.2A.

Three other things are commonly stated and are wrong:

The training does not have to be nationally accredited . A free, non-accredited course covering the four topics satisfies the law.

The Standard mandates no refresher period for food handler training.

The business is not required to keep records of it. Record keeping here is optional.

The accredited unit SITXFSA005 Use hygienic practices for food safety buys portability and proof, not permission. It is a Statement of Attainment that moves with the person between employers and states, which in a casual workforce is worth a great deal. But it is not the thing that makes food handling lawful. Our scope also carries the SITSS00068 Food Handling skill set for the same purpose. See the food handling course , the virtual SITXFSA005 option and what food safety certificate do I need .

The five-year clock belongs to the Food Safety Supervisor , not to food handler training. An FSS must hold a certificate issued within the immediately preceding five years, must be appointed before the business engages in a prescribed activity, and must remain reasonably available , meaning on site or easily contacted, for example by phone. Our scope carries the SITSS00069 Food Safety Supervision skill set for this. See the Food Safety Supervisor course .

One honesty disclosure that matters if you are in New South Wales: we are not on the NSW Food Authority's approved provider list , so we cannot issue the NSW Food Safety Supervisor certificate. An NSW-approved RTO issues two separate documents , the national Statement of Attainment and the state FSS certificate, and keeping only the Statement of Attainment does not satisfy the NSW requirement.

The records duty, if you are category one

The substantiation records cover receipt at correct temperature, storage under temperature control, process steps achieving pathogen reduction, minimising time at growth-permitting temperatures, cooling and reheating within specified timeframes , display under temperature control, transport under temperature control, and cleaning and sanitising of food-contact surfaces and equipment. They must be kept for 3 months after being made and be accessible at the premises . A business may demonstrate compliance by other means, in which case an authorised officer may then require records.

Full detail is on understanding Standard 3.2.2A and the food safety management tools .

One thing this page deliberately does not do is state a specific allergen or milk cross-contact duty for coffee service. Our regulatory knowledge base returns nothing on that point, and inventing a figure or a procedure here would be worse than the gap. The practical position stands, that a dairy allergy needs separate jugs and cleaning rather than a rinse, but for the legal requirement check with your state or territory food regulator or your local council, which is the authority on it.

Which unit covers what

The two food safety units are often treated as interchangeable. They are not.

Unit	Focus	Assessment requirement
SITXFSA005 Use hygienic practices for food safety	Personal hygiene	Each of the following on at least three occasions : correct hand-washing; appropriate use of uniform and PPE; effective personal health and hygiene practices; hygienic food service. Plus procedures to report unsafe hygiene practices

SITXFSA006 Participate in safe food handling practices	Whole system, critical control points, HACCP	Correct methods of controlling food hazards at each of nine critical control points : receiving, storing, preparing, processing, displaying, serving, packaging, transporting, disposing. Plus procedures to calibrate a temperature probe , and procedures to report food contamination incidents
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SITXFSA005 is one of the options for the hygiene elective group in SIT30622, and is core in SIT30722 and in SIT30821 Certificate III in Commercial Cookery. SITXFSA006 is also core in SIT30821. Specific dietary requirements are a core unit in that cookery qualification in their own right, SITHCCC042 Produce food to meet special dietary requirements , which is worth knowing when a guest's question goes past the floor to the kitchen.

SITXFSA005 is also the gateway unit for the beverage stream. Within the food and beverage stream it is a mandatory prerequisite for nine units : SITHFAB022 Clean and tidy bar areas, SITHFAB023 Operate a bar, SITHFAB024 Prepare and serve non-alcoholic beverages, SITHFAB025 Prepare and serve espresso coffee, SITHFAB026 Provide room service, SITHFAB027 Serve food and beverage, SITHFAB030 Prepare and serve cocktails, SITHFAB034 Provide table service of food and beverage, and SITHFAB035 Provide silver service. If the changed expectation you are responding to is on the drinks side, that sequencing decides the order of training. Keep the figure scoped to the food and beverage stream, because the same unit also sits in front of cookery, patisserie and kitchen units elsewhere in the SIT package, which would be a different total about a different set.

RSA reaches just as far. SITHFAB021 is a prerequisite to nine units of its own in the same stream, so the two gate the same number. And four units in the stream carry two or more prerequisites: SITHFAB023 and SITHFAB034 each carry SITXFSA005 and RSA, while SITHFAB030 carries three, adding SITHFAB023 , and SITHFAB039 Manage the sale or service of wine carries three of its own. Those four are the ones to schedule last in any training plan.

What the service units say about dietary and access needs

The core service unit already anticipates this. SITXCCS014 Provide service to customers requires staff to identify customer needs and expectations, including customers with special needs , and its knowledge requirements name special needs awareness including the customs and practices of various social and cultural groups , and communication considerations including assistive technology and interpreter requirements . Its performance evidence requires effective communication with at least one customer with special needs , alongside service to three different internal and three different external customers and the resolution of three different complaints.

SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity , core in both Certificate III in Hospitality qualifications, goes further: its knowledge requirements include different types of disability and their implications for the workplace , cultural and religious protocols of the main social and cultural groups in Australian society including Australian Indigenous people, and of the main inbound tourist markets to Australia , plus sources of assistance in communicating with diverse groups such as interpreter services, disability advocacy groups and cultural organisations. A religious dietary requirement is not a modern trend; it has been an assessed knowledge area all along. See understanding cultural awareness in hospitality .

If inbound visitors are a growing share of your trade, our scope carries two skill sets built for it: SITSS00091 Service for International Visitors , which is SITXCCS014 plus SITXCOM007 plus SITXLAN007 Conduct basic oral communication in a language other than English, and SITSS00090

Who is responsible for noticing the change

There is a unit for that too. SITXMGT004 Monitor work operations , core in the Certificate IV in Hospitality and the Diploma of Hospitality Management, requires the supervisor to identify and take opportunities to evaluate current and emerging industry trends and practices for relevance to their own work situation , to proactively consult colleagues about ways to improve efficiency and service levels, including the potential for new technologies and other innovations , and to assess and respond to opportunities to improve the sustainability of day-to-day operations .

That is the answer to "who should be watching for changing expectations". It is a named responsibility of a supervisory competency, not something that happens by osmosis. On the sustainability point, our scope also carries the SITSS00079 Environmentally Sustainable Hospitality and Restaurant Operations skill set, and environmental training for employees covers the practical side.

At Diploma level the same responsibility comes with numbers attached. SITXCCS016 requires the manager to develop service policies and procedures for at least three different areas of the business , then implement and monitor them over four service periods , then evaluate them and identify failings before adjusting and communicating the revised practice. Four trading periods is the honest answer to how long a response to a changed expectation has to run before anyone can say whether it worked, and a review that finds nothing wrong does not satisfy the unit.

What has not changed

Wait times still drive more dissatisfaction than anything else on this list.

Alcohol law has not softened. RSA is required before serving, it is one unit, SITHFAB021 , regulated separately by eight jurisdictions with no single national credential, and refusing service to an unduly intoxicated patron remains a legal duty that attaches to the person serving as well as to the licensee.

Award coverage still depends on the premises, not the job title , and there are four awards to choose between rather than two. The same job title maps to a different award and a different pay table depending on where the person works:

Award	Code	Premises it covers
Hospitality Industry (General) Award 2020	MA000009	Hotels, pubs, taverns, motels, resorts, casinos, caterers, accommodation, and function facilities operated in connection with them
Registered and Licensed Clubs Award 2020	MA000058	Not-for-profit registered clubs: RSL, bowls, golf, sporting, community
Restaurant Industry Award 2020	MA000119	Standalone restaurants, cafes, night clubs , reception centres, roadhouses
Fast Food Industry Award 2010	MA000003	Takeaway, food courts, and food sold mainly to be eaten away from the counter

Two traps are worth naming because both catch people out. Clubs are not MA000009 — clause 4.4(d)(i) of that award expressly excludes clubs registered or recognised under State or Territory

legislation, and clause 4.3 of MA000058 requires a club to be both registered under a liquor, gaming, associations or corporations statute and operating not-for-profit for members and the community. And night clubs are not MA000058 — a night club is a commercial venue, so it sits in MA000119. See the pay and payslips guide .

And guests still notice being noticed, which no ordering system has replaced.

About us

We are Complete Hospitality Training , RTO 3722, CRICOS 04242E. Level 3, 28 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne VIC 3000, and 410 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010. Contact melbourne@cht.edu.au or +61 3 9654 1554 .

We link to the relevant course and regulatory sources in this guide. Check those sources for current requirements, and confirm course availability, delivery, fees and entry requirements with us before enrolling.

Source records and further guidance

We link the unit records and regulator guidance relevant to this page below. Check the current source before making an enrolment, licensing or employment decision.

SITXFSA005 Use hygienic practices for food safety

SITXCCS016 Develop and manage quality customer service practices

SITHFAB023 Operate a bar

SITXFSA006 Participate in safe food handling practices

SITHFAB021 Provide responsible service of alcohol

Food Safety Supervisor certificate requirements (New South Wales)

Food Standards Code — Standards 3.2.2 and 3.2.2A (food safety practices and food safety management tools)

Hospitality Industry (General) Award 2020 (MA000009)

Restaurant Industry Award 2020 (MA000119)

Does every staff member need food safety training?

Everyone who engages in a prescribed activity involving unpackaged potentially hazardous food does, which is a wider group than the kitchen. It takes in baristas handling milk, bar staff handling ice, fruit and garnishes, and anyone plating or garnishing.

Is my cafe category one or category two?

If it processes unpackaged potentially hazardous food into food that is both potentially hazardous and ready to eat, it is category one. A cafe with a kitchen is category one. Category two is for retail sale of ready-to-eat food the business did not make, where slicing, weighing, repacking, reheating and hot-holding do not count as making it.

Which unit covers reading and responding to customer expectations?

SITXCCS015 Enhance customer service experiences on the floor, and SITXCCS016 Develop and manage quality customer service practices at management level. The first requires anticipating

preferences throughout the service experience; the second requires reviewing environmental change and integrating it into service planning.

What environmental changes does the management unit actually name?

Six: the competitive environment, the economic climate, technology, changes in management, recruitment practices, and customer service preferences. Only the last is about guests, and two are entirely internal.

How am I supposed to research a changing expectation?

The unit names customer service surveys, focus groups, qualitative research, quantitative research, and seeking feedback from colleagues. Running only a survey gives you frequency without cause.

How long should a response to a changed expectation run before we judge it?

At Diploma level the unit sets four service periods of implementing and monitoring, across at least three different areas of the business, followed by an evaluation required to identify failings.

Does the food handler course have to be accredited?

No. A free, non-accredited course covering the four required topics satisfies the law. The accredited unit SITXFSA005 buys portability and proof, not permission — and, because a prerequisite can only be satisfied by the unit itself, it is also the only route into the nine stream units that list it.

How often does food handler training have to be refreshed?

Standard 3.2.2A mandates no refresher period for food handler training. The five-year cycle belongs to the Food Safety Supervisor certificate, which is a different tool.

Do I have to keep records of who has been trained?

Not for food handler training. The business is not required to keep those records. The records duty under the Standard is the separate substantiation obligation, which applies to category one only and requires records to be kept for 3 months and accessible at the premises.

Can an untrained person work if a trained person supervises them?

No, not on that basis. The alternative to completed training is possessing skills and knowledge commensurate with the activity being undertaken. Supervision belongs to the Food Safety Supervisor tool and does not substitute for the food handler training requirement.

Can you issue me the NSW Food Safety Supervisor certificate?

No. We are not on the NSW Food Authority's approved provider list, so we cannot issue the state certificate. In New South Wales an approved RTO issues two separate documents, and the national Statement of Attainment on its own does not satisfy the state requirement.

Is an allergy the same as a preference?

No, and treating them the same is the mistake. A preference can be accommodated; an allergy has to be managed through preparation, equipment and honest answers. In a coffee venue that means separate jugs and cleaning where a dairy allergy rather than an intolerance is involved. For the legal allergen requirement specifically, check with your state or territory food regulator, which is the authority on it.

What is the difference between SITXFSA005 and SITXFSA006?

SITXFSA005 is personal hygiene, assessed across at least three occasions each for hand-washing, uniform and PPE use, personal health and hygiene practices, and hygienic food service. SITXFSA006 is the whole system, assessed against nine critical control points and including calibrating a temperature probe.

Which units does SITXFSA005 unlock?

Nine, within the food and beverage stream: SITHFAB022 clean and tidy bar areas, SITHFAB023 operate a bar, SITHFAB024 non-alcoholic beverages, SITHFAB025 espresso coffee, SITHFAB026 room service, SITHFAB027 serve food and beverage, SITHFAB030 cocktails, SITHFAB034 table service and SITHFAB035 silver service. It is the gateway unit for the whole beverage stream, so it belongs first in any training sequence — alongside RSA SITHFAB021, which gates nine units of its own. Four units in the stream carry two or more prerequisites: SITHFAB023 and SITHFAB034 carry two, SITHFAB030 and SITHFAB039 carry three.

Who has to be the Food Safety Supervisor?

Someone appointed before the business engages in a prescribed activity, holding a certificate issued within the immediately preceding five years, and remaining reasonably available, meaning on site or easily contacted, for example by phone.

Do we need to retrain when we change ordering systems?

Brief the role change, not just the buttons. The part staff get wrong is what their job becomes when orders stop arriving through them. If nobody is now forced to approach the table, somebody has to be given reading the room as a named task. Technology is one of the six environmental factors SITXCCS016 requires a manager to track for exactly this reason.

Are religious and cultural dietary requirements a new expectation?

No. The cultural and religious protocols of the main social and cultural groups in Australian society, including Australian Indigenous people, and of the main inbound tourist markets to Australia, are long-standing assessed knowledge requirements of SITXCOM007, a core unit in both Certificate III in Hospitality qualifications.

Whose job is it to spot a changing expectation?

The supervisory competency's. SITXMGT004 requires evaluating current and emerging industry trends and practices for relevance, and consulting colleagues about improvements including new technologies. SITXCCS016 makes the same duty explicit at management level.

How many awards cover hospitality?

Four: MA000009 for hotels, pubs, taverns, resorts, casinos and caterers; MA000058 for not-for-profit registered clubs; MA000119 for standalone restaurants, cafes, night clubs, reception centres and roadhouses; and MA000003 for takeaway and food courts. The premises decides, not the job title.

Where does this sit in a qualification?

Food safety and customer service units sit within SIT30622 Certificate III in Hospitality (/workplace-training/sit30622-certificate-iii-in-hospitality/) and above, and individual units and skill sets can also be completed on their own. See courses (/courses/), and confirm current fees and intakes with us directly.