ScottBradbury Learning at work

Why do people make mistakes?

We look at three of the reasons why all human beings, regardless of how experienced, senior or conscientious they are, sometimes make mistakes.

The financial and human cost of error

Mistakes waste time, cost money and annoy customers. We show you how much errors are costing your organisation.

Proven return on accuracy skills training

Cutting your people's error rate by half whilst also increasing processing speed means you get a measurable and immediate return on the training.

Why do people make mistakes?

Here are three key reasons why all human beings sometimes make mistakes:

1. Our brains make sense out of nonsense

When our brain is distracted or makes an assumption, the information we perceive is not necessarily correct.

Our brain is so powerful it sometimes 'overwrites' the message from the optic nerve and doesn't 'see' what the eye is seeing. This leads to us making an 'eye-po' rather than a 'typo'. When we type something incorrectly we usually know we've made a mistake. The problem with an 'eye-po' is that we don't know we've made a mistake because our brain is unaware of the error.

Our brain 'makes sense out of nonsense' by correcting data as it encounters it. So for example, you can raed tihs auccrately even tuough most of the words are not speelld coerrctly.

Our brain interprets information as it receives it and makes assumptions, which can lead to mistakes.

2. The eye is not designed for reading data

The physical structure of the human eye means that it cannot scan smoothly from left to right over a piece of data. Human eyes have not evolved to read numbers and letters accurately. When scanning across information, the eyeball has to move in little jerks:

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This can lead to characters or numbers being omitted, repeated or transposed.

3. Our reading skills get in the way

From a very early age, when we are taught to read, we learn how to recognise combinations of letters. To read competently we need to take in the overall shapes of words. We do not see each and every letter. Yet to perceive information correctly, we must acknowledge each individual letter or character precisely in its exact location. That means abandoning our reading skills in favour of accuracy skills, so that we are able to perceive the information correctly.

The financial and human cost of error

What does it cost each time an account clerk makes the wrong payment? Or a banking administrator uses the wrong account number or sort code? What happens when a processor uses the wrong batch number or a receptionist looks up the wrong address or telephone number? Who suffers when an insurance claim assistant uses the wrong policy number?

From simple everyday occurrences like taking down a message with the wrong contact telephone number, through to major catastrophes like recording a patient's incorrect operation code or mistakenly keying in £6,000,000 instead of £600,000, mistakes are costly. Financially, emotionally and operationally, errors are damaging. And every day they gnaw away at efficiency.

A typical error rate of around 3% results in around 18% of the salary bill being wasted. How?

3% of the time the wrong information is being inputted.

Another 3% of the time will be taken to key it in correctly.

So that's 6%. How long does it take to find an error once it's in your system?

Typically, twice as much time again – another 12%.

That's a total of 18% of the administrator's time wasted on making, finding and correcting mistakes. Multiply that by the number of people you have in your processing and administration teams and by their average salary to give you an indication of how much it's costing purely in terms of wasted time.

Then think about the consequences of the errors themselves. Compensation payments, money lost on financial transactions and damage to reputation. And then there are the human consequences too – what has happened as a result of the errors? Stress, upset, worry, bad feeling...

Proven return on accuracy skills training

Accuracy is a trainable skill. It can be learned and practised just like any other. But unlike improvements in many other skills, the benefits of accuracy skills training can be measured. The results are clear and the payback on the training is quantifiable. You can measure your delegates' accuracy rate at the beginning and the end of the course and report the results to your organisation. Typically groups achieve a 50% reduction in errors and a 7% increase in processing speed. You can measure the impact accuracy training has on performance back in the workplace and demonstrate both a cost saving and a productivity gain.
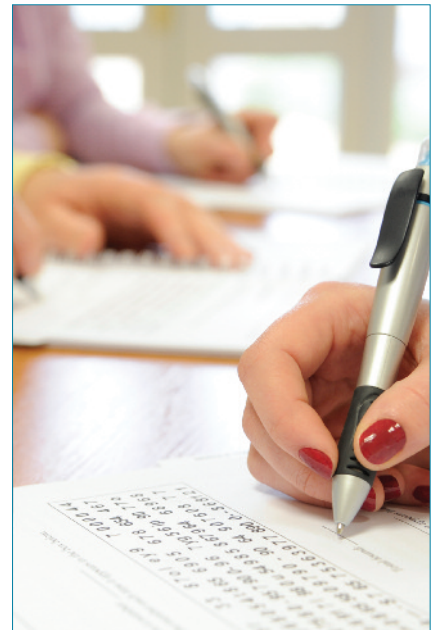
Savings on productivity alone usually run into hundreds of thousands of pounds, even before you factor in the consequences of the errors themselves. A free demonstration of the training shows how results are calculated and the typical return on investment in the training. Through our Coaching for Accuracy workshop we also provide additional post-course reinforcement of the learning back in the workplace to ensure accuracy techniques are applied as part of building an internal culture of accuracy.

Next step...find out more from the experts in accuracy skills training.

Call +44 (0)1638 723590 or email accuracy@scottbradbury.co.uk www.accuracyprogramme.co.uk