The 5 Most Common Reasons Employees Make Mistakes and How to Prevent Them

There is nothing more frustrating as a manager than when an employee makes a mistake after you have already trained them. These mistakes cost your business valuable resources like time and money and can even damage the reputation you have worked so hard to build.

Understanding which are the most common reasons for mistakes will help you identify the root cause of those mistakes and allow you to proactively address them before they happen again.

Here are the most common reasons employees make mistakes and what you can do to prevent them from ever happening again in your business:

1. **Misunderstanding of Instructions**

"I didn't know I was supposed to do it THAT way" is an all too common response from employees when they make a mistake. As a manager, it is easy to immediately jump to the conclusion that it's their fault: You provide instructions and your employee just did not follow them. However, most of the time when this situation happens it's due to the instructions not being clear or detailed enough *to the employee,* despite the fact that the instructions could be perceived as being clear by the manager.

Solution:
First, be as specific as you need to be in your instructions. Never assume that anyone would interpret your instructions the way you do. In fact, assume you are having to dictate the instructions to an elementary school student. If you can make the instructions specific enough to be followed by a child, then you have made it so they can be followed by anyone. Making the instructions as clear as possible leaves no room for interpretation. This is key to having your staff avoid this common type of mistake.

Second, you want to make sure the instructions are easily accessible and visible to your staff. There are [task management tools](#) that provide clear instructions to your employees at the time and place they are performing their tasks. Your staff can even check off each of the steps they need to follow to ensure they are completing what they need to, every time.

2. Intimidation of Complicated Tasks

Sometimes the tasks to be completed by your staff can be too complicated. Having your instructions be too broad and overreaching can overwhelm your employees and intimidate them. If your staff feels intimidated by the task at hand they may not ask for help, try to complete it insufficiently, or worse not attempt to complete the task at all.

Solution:
If the task you are asking your staff to follow is too complicated, try breaking it down into smaller chunks. Consider having different staff members take on different parts of the task. This way each of your employees can specialize and become experts at their tasks which will increase their confidence and eliminate their intimidation.

Segmenting complicated tasks is especially important to consider for crucial and delicate tasks for your business where you need highly developed skills to complete correctly. Having [a task management tool](#) in place will also help each employee have clarity on what it is they need to complete and what tasks other team members are accountable for.

3. Inexperience

No matter how well you train your new employees, there is a learning curve that will take place. They are bound to make mistakes at the start simply because what you are asking them to do is something new to them. The good news is there are certain things you can do to accelerate the learning curve and minimize the number of mistakes due to inexperience.

Solution:
When you are training your staff for the first time, don't just show them what to do but have your new employees actually perform the tasks while you are explaining it to them. This hands-on approach will allow your employees to immediately begin to become comfortable with their new tasks and get their mistakes due to inexperience out of the way during the training.

Also, make sure this training-by-doing is done in a low stake and safe environment. Hold your training during off-hours when there are no customers or during times when it is very slow. This will get your new employees up to speed in no time and will reduce the number of mistakes from your staff.

4. Distractions and Simply Forgetting

"I'm sorry, I totally forgot!" is another common phrase managers hear from their employees as to why they made a mistake. Despite an employee's best intentions to perform as instructed, sometimes they simply forget and miss something they were supposed to do.

Many times your employees are distracted by other responsibilities they have to attend to. Typically the most immediate and pressing responsibilities are top of mind and are addressed first while tasks that are routine and have longer-term (and sometimes serious!) consequences are deprioritized. This is a very dangerous scenario where forgotten tasks can seriously damage your business reputation in the future.

Solution:
You want your staff to address the most pressing matters, however, you also need to make sure they are completing those important tasks that can have long term and potentially serious effects on your business if not done properly.

Setting up a system for routine tasks that are highly visible to your employees is key in order to make sure these routine tasks stay top of mind for your employees. It is also important for your management to have visibility into when these tasks are not being completed. Find a solution that can easily schedule and document the completion of your staff's routine tasks and notify your employees and managers when a task is not completed.

5. Lack of Motivation

Sometimes your employees just don't care enough to do what they are supposed to do correctly. While it may be tempting to write this off as "I hired the wrong person", "They are just lazy", or "They just don't care about this company as much as I do", a deeper examination as to WHY they don't care can potentially uncover misaligned incentives that you are (or are not) offering to your employees.

Solution:
It very well could be that you just hired the wrong person for the job, but if you see that several employees are not showing the motivation and pride in their work as you would like, it is time to reassess your incentive structure.

The first place to start is by looking at your compensation structure and performance evaluation criteria. They should drive the behaviors you want to see in your company. Encourage excellence in execution, a positive attitude, and attention to detail by having these qualities be a part of your evaluation criteria and compensation structure to reward these behaviors.

Remember that reward doesn't necessarily have to be monetary. Recognizing employees in front of their colleagues, such as employee of the month, or just a public mention of their good

work by their manager at staff meetings can be a very effective way to motivate your employees.

Understanding the most common and underlying reasons behind mistakes your employees make will allow you to make the adjustments to prevent these mistakes from ever happening again. Addressing these 5 common reasons will help your managers spend less time retraining and more time working on actually growing your business.

Want to learn more about solutions to eliminate employee mistakes?

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