

# Velocity Errors

## *Are you working at the speed of mistakes?*

Most people today find themselves moving so fast that they may miss opportunities, overlook relevant details, or make foolish mistakes—doing something wrong when they know better. Do any of these examples sound like things that happen to you?

- ▲ A service administrator overlooks a note from a homeowner that he's home on Thursdays and by doing so makes completing the repair work needed in that home more difficult for all involved. The homeowner and the trades affected conclude that the service staff pays little attention to detail.
- ▲ A warranty manager fails to note an appointment with an already difficult homeowner and schedules a meeting with a trade for the same day and time. She realizes the error when the trade mentions the very same homeowner during the meeting. Now the warranty manager dreads calling to apologize, puts off making the call, and makes matters even worse.
- ▲ A department head receives a memo regarding the upcoming staff meeting. He glances at the agenda briefly and adds it to the growing pile of papers on his desk. Failing to read the last sentence, he misses reading that the conference room is scheduled to be painted on the same day as the meeting. The meeting will therefore take place at a nearby sales office instead.

The day of the meeting he arrives at the conference room exactly on time to find the painters at work. No other department heads are present. After checking with the receptionist he learns where the meeting is being held and arrives 20 minutes late. Compounding this professional faux pas, he scolds the office manager in front of everyone for not telling him the meeting location was changed. In response, and also in front of everyone, she hands him a copy of the memo he did not read, reciting the last sentence for her intrigued audience.

- ▲ Working with out-of-town buyers, the superintendent completes the home on time and within budget. Unfortunately, in the rush to keep all the jobs in progress moving along, he overlooked a change order. The buyers become upset when they see that the bay window they ordered for the master sitting area is missing from their completed home.
- ▲ Accounting issues a check to pay a trade for courtesy work in a home under warranty. The bill is for 28 hours of work at \$18 per hour, performed by one technician, all on the same date. In approving the invoice, the warranty rep failed to read the detail and question the illogic of it. Had he called the trade, they would have uncovered the error: the decimal point was missing. The bill should be for 2.8 hours—a difference of \$453.60 or 90 percent (\$504 versus \$50.40).

Efficient work habits have always been valuable. In today's fast-moving, ever-changing, information-abundant environment, such skills are vital to survival. The hints that follow offer a self-assessment of behaviors proven to keep a busy day under control. Rate yourself 1-5 on each item with 1 meaning you have room to improve, 3 meaning you are average, and 5 meaning the behavior is already saving you from problems. Then select one or more of your loser score items to practice and ward off errors caused by working at the speed of mistakes.

- ✓ Use *one* appointment book. Keeping two or more calendars updated and accurate is nearly impossible and takes up too much of your valuable time. If someone needs a copy of your schedule, make a copy of your original one at appropriate frequencies—daily if needed.
- ✓ Record commitments *when you make them* in that one appointment book.
- ✓ Always have something to write on and write with. The fast pace and large number of details to track make memories vulnerable.
- ✓ Last thing each day or first thing each morning, review and update your to-do list. Keep an eye on your horizon so big projects do not sneak up on you. Anticipate future events and plan for them.
- ✓ Break large projects into small tasks and establish several interim deadlines. Avoid allowing assignments to loom over you, causing anxiety and productivity paralysis. Work on them in chunks. For example--

That big report begins with making a list of resources. Step two might be making contact with the resources. Step three, gather data from each resource. Four is reviewing and evaluating the data, identifying gaps. Five, fill in the gaps. Six is a rough draft. Seven is polishing and proofreading. As you focus on just one segment of the work, the size of the assignment is held at bay, causes less stress and results in better work.

- ✓ Maintain a contingency factor in your schedule—especially for big projects or unfamiliar tasks. When was the last time you had a week, or even a day, with no interruptions? Interruptions are a natural part of life and work; they are inevitable. Leave space in your schedule for them.
- ✓ Maintenance tasks must also be performed—such things as putting gas in your car, eating, sleeping, and so on. Avoid pretending you are somehow exempt from these needs.
- ✓ One of the biggest reasons we find ourselves rushing is that we take on too much. Being overly optimistic about how much you can accomplish in a day results in a frantic pace—and errors follow. Develop a realistic approach to your schedule and commit to time frames you can meet.
- ✓ Determine, if you do not know already, which time of the day is your golden time—the hours when you are at your mental best, well-focused, and best able to produce. Put that knowledge to good use by scheduling work that requires your best abilities for that time of day. More routine tasks can be left to the remaining time slots.
- ✓ On busy days, remind yourself to stay calm and focused. Your goal is to move quickly with a calm mind. If you find yourself dropping things, being unable to do common tasks (like unlocking your car door), it's time to take a breath and calm down. Double check that you are indeed putting your time where your priorities are.
- ✓ Practice several ways to say *no* courteously and use one of them when your schedule is full to avoid taking on too much. Get in the habit of suggesting alternative sources of help when people ask you to do things you do not have time for. “My schedule doesn't permit me to help with that but Mary in accounting may be available and I know she's interested in that project.”

- ✓ Approach each task, however minor, with concentration. Your goal is to deal correctly with each issue and avoid having to perform the same chore twice, having to apologize for errors, or being unprepared for an event you care about. Recognize when you are operating in “frantic mode.” Pause to calm down and refocus on the task at hand.
- ✓ Take time to read company memos, letters, and reports carefully. Keep sticky notes handy in case you want to record some thoughts without writing on the original copy.
- ✓ Have systems in your work area. A standard place for items you need to read, copy, approve, file, or otherwise address helps you to avoid losing things. You can also see at a glance how much of which type of work is waiting for attention. Keep your desk tidy; clutter is distracting and encourages losing items. If you had all the time you spend looking for something, you’d get a lot more done in a calmer frame of mind.

If you slow down and concentrate you will get more work done and it will be done better than if you had rushed. This ultimately save you the time it takes to re-do tasks, not to mention the embarrassment. Most velocity errors can be avoided. You will enjoy your work (and life) more if you avoid working at the speed of mistakes.