

# Understanding Mistakes and Error

---

**John Tooley**

Let's discuss intent as the driver of actions we must take for the lack of following program standards, procedures, policies or deceitful representation of customer needs. All work is a process and process fails more than our people doing the work. People do not come to work with the desire to do wrong. You know, high fiving in front of the truck saying, "Let's go in today and screw up this house." When something goes wrong we often look for the person responsible for the defect. We all have considered how good the job would be if it weren't for those darn workers. It bears saying again, process fails more than workers. When something goes wrong we must look at our process to see how it allowed the defect to happen. Then, there are times when blame must fall on the people doing the work. Liability of intentional wrong doing and assigning blame are proper actions in some cases of error in the workplace. We must strive to make sure we stop and consider, what was the intent at the time of the defect?

1. **Intentional Wrong Doing:** The issue of volition is fundamental to the notion of doing wrong; therefore, the term error can only be applied to intentional actions. We cannot allow these intentional actions to go unattended or with little to no response. Rewarding bad behavior will only encourage more bad behavior. Intentional wrong doing must be dealt with swiftly and with actions to eliminate it. It is like an infection. Left unattended, results in its spreading and sickness. When it comes to a rat, I first try to prevent its entry into my house. Upon its entry I promptly buy a cat. The cat's job is to kill and remove the rodent. No cat I'll buy a trap. Trapping rodents is a noble task. Intentional wrong doing (deceitfulness, stealing, cheating, etc.) are rodents eating away at our bottom line.
2. **Unintentional Wrong Doing:** Failure of work to go as intended (slips or lapses of attention) or failure of work to achieve its desired objective (mistakes) are action with no intent to do wrong. These errors demand we pursue prevention processes and mistake proofing tools. We all have had a lack of attention and ran out of gas in our car. We also have slipped and cut our hand while preparing food. None of us has gone without mistakes in our life. All these actions were without intention. We hope no recurrences of each. Hope is not enough. We must set about employing actions that will prevent each of these misfortunes. Quality control and quality assurance persons must have a full understanding of each shortcoming. We must prevent mistakes, slips and lapses of intention from becoming defects. Lastly, not knowing how to do a task, but trying, only to result in objectives or desired outcome not being met, has no intention to do wrong. Prevention here is to assure proper training.

I hope our attention is spent more on creating a culture of prevention of the unintentional actions. A culture of prevention takes place at the "Gemba," the Japanese word for where the work is done. Prevention at the point of work (Gemba) cost very little and can reduce our costs. Continual attention on intentional wrong doing is expensive because it takes place after the work is done and involves a homeowner. It also steals our time, attention and peace of mind. I would rather go to bed tonight with thoughts of prevention of mistakes from becoming defects, rather than how to catch a rat.

Sure it's a big job; but I don't know anyone who can do it better than I can. - John F. Kennedy