

The best way to recover from a technological bungle

1 Read the title of the article and choose the option (a, b or c) which best explains its meaning.

- a** how to make your computer more secure and safe for the future
- b** ways to avoid competitors stealing your ideas for new technology
- c** how to make things better, not worse, when you make mistakes using electronic communication

The best way to recover from a technological bungle

By Pilita Clark

A The other day when I got to work, I found an email from a PR woman I have never met congratulating me on my new job at City AM, a newspaper I have never worked for.

‘Sorry,’ she wrote in a hasty follow-up mail. ‘Clearly not concentrating.’ The next day I heard from two men, one from an investment bank, the other a credit-rating agency. Both had made email muck-ups they needed to correct. These people are far from alone. The idiotic mistakes we make at work are awful and getting worse.

B I know this because I make so many myself. The other week I gave one colleague a mis-typed email address for someone she needed to contact and another the wrong date for a meeting. Then I nearly wrote a story with the name of one person spelt two different ways.

C Researchers have been warning for years that people who constantly juggle emails, texts and messages do not memorise or manage their work as well as those who pay attention to one thing at a time. Digital overload has been estimated to cost as much as \$997 billion a year in lost productivity and innovation, just in the USA. No wonder, when it is claimed we tap and swipe our phones an average of 2,617 times a day.

D I am astonished that the levels of office bungling are not far worse. It is still quite rare to see a huge blunder, such as the \$6 billion a Deutsche Bank worker accidentally transferred to a customer a couple of years ago.

E One big lesson I have learnt is this: if you do happen to send an idiotic email at work, unless you have caused a stock market meltdown, just apologise and move on. Never try to recall it.

A look through my inbox shows there was only one month this year – August – when I did not get at least one message from someone announcing they ‘would like to recall’ an email. In almost every case, I did what everyone does in this situation: I tracked down the note to see what it said.

2 Read the article quickly and match the sub-headings (1-5) with the sections of the article (A-E).

- 1 A banking mistake _____
- 2 I make mistakes too _____
- 3 What not to do _____
- 4 Errors in emails sent to me _____
- 5 Why mistakes are made _____

3 Read the article again. Then read these sentences and choose the correct definition (a or b) for the words/phrases in bold.

- 1 Karl has made another **blunder** on the invoices. He doesn't pay attention to his work.

a request b mistake
- 2 Experts advise that workers who **juggle** tasks are less likely to do a good job.

a do more than one thing at time b take frequent breaks
- 3 When I watch TV while messaging and writing a report, I can suffer from **digital overload**.

a the effect of using too many devices b the result of forgetting to turn off devices at the same time
- 4 As requested, the customer **transferred** €2,500 and it arrived in our account this morning.

a sent the money by electronic banking b made a credit card payment
- 5 Is it better to **recall** an email when you make a mistake or simply apologise?

a request delivery confirmation b retrieve an email that has not yet been opened

4 Which statements describe the writer's attitude to mistakes? Is the information *true* (T), *false* (F) or *not given* (NG)?

- 1 She gives examples of errors made by three colleagues.
- 2 She thinks we are making more mistakes than in the past.
- 3 She always checks her emails and never makes mistakes herself.
- 4 Sometimes she suffers from digital overload.
- 5 She is surprised that big mistakes don't happen more frequently.
- 6 She thinks the bank worker should have been fired for his mistake.
- 7 When you make a mistake, say 'sorry' and carry on.
- 8 She has never searched for a recalled email to read the message.

5 Match the email extracts (1-4) with the people who are likely to have made the mistakes (a-d).

- 1** I'm afraid the money was sent in error and needs to be returned immediately.
 - 2** Congratulations on your promotion - well done!
 - 3** Pieter worked in Hong Kong for six months. After that Peter moved to Shanghai.
 - 4** Your work will be more productive if you concentrate on one task at a time.
- a** the writer
b the PR woman
c a researcher
d a bank worker

6 Complete the communication tips with the words/phrases in the box.

correct hasty inbox mis-typed pay attention spelt

It's important to ¹_____ when writing because if you concentrate, you will make fewer mistakes. If you do make an error in your communication, make sure that you ²_____ it quickly. Careful checking will help to avoid most mistakes. Before you hit 'Send' are you sure that you haven't ³_____ an email address or ⁴_____ a word incorrectly? Simple details are sometimes the easiest things to get wrong, especially when writing a ⁵_____ message while you are doing more than one thing at a time. When you look in your ⁶_____, you will find plenty of examples of emails containing errors that are easy to avoid. Try to make sure that your communication doesn't contain the same mistakes.