DISTRACTION

When attention is spread too thin, mistake risk quietly rises

Distraction showed up more often in our study than any other mistake-risk driver we measured.

Across hundreds of U.S. entrepreneurs, distraction-related behaviors weren't rare outliers — they were everyday conditions. Many participants scored in the "rarely to sometimes" range, which sounds benign. But when we looked closer, even moderate levels of distraction were strongly associated not only with decisions made without full information, but also with execution slips: missed follow-ups, incomplete handoffs, dropped steps, and small lapses that quietly compound.

What's important here is *why* this happens.

Distraction isn't about carelessness or lack of discipline. It's about attention being pulled in too many directions at once — switching between tasks, responding mid-stream, carrying open loops in your head, *or managing ongoing physical discomfort or pain* — and trying to keep everything moving at speed. Under those conditions, your brain works harder just to keep track, leaving less capacity for noticing what matters.

The risk doesn't show up as one big failure. It shows up as small things slipping — until one of them finally matters.

The goal isn't perfect focus. It's reducing the conditions that quietly multiply mistake risk.

Below are three practical tools that help entrepreneurs protect attention where it counts — without slowing the business down.

1. Narrow focus at moments that matter

Not all work deserves the same level of attention.

One of the most effective ways entrepreneurs reduce distraction-related risk is by deliberately identifying **which moments require full focus** — and protecting attention only then.

Examples might include committing to customer promises, pricing or approval decisions, or complex handoffs or instructions.

During those moments, do one simple thing: remove competing inputs. Silence notifications. Close extra tabs. Finish the thought before switching.

This isn't about working this way all day. It's about recognizing that some moments deserve undivided attention — because mistakes there carry outsized consequences.

2. Get ideas out of your head — without switching tasks

Distraction often comes from *good ideas arriving at the wrong time*.

Instead of acting on them immediately (or trying to remember them), use a simple "parking lot" habit. When something pops up mid-task, capture it quickly — on paper, a note app, or a running list — and return to what you were doing.

This does two things:

- it preserves creative or operational insights
- it prevents attention from fragmenting mid-stream

Over time, this reduces unfinished work and mental clutter — two major contributors to distraction-driven mistakes.

3. Use short checklists where memory is most vulnerable

When attention is split, memory becomes unreliable — even for tasks you know well.

Identify one or two activities where distraction would be costly (for example: quoting, approvals, customer follow-ups). Then write down the minimum steps that must not be missed.

Keep the list short. Use it even when things feel routine.

This isn't bureaucracy. It's a way to protect yourself from mistakes you already know how to avoid — but might miss when pulled in multiple directions.

A final note

Distraction isn't a personal flaw. It's a predictable response to load.

The point of these tools isn't to eliminate interruptions or slow your business down. It's to protect your judgment and follow-through when attention is under pressure — so small slips don't quietly turn into bigger problems later.

Questions or reflections? If you have questions, comments, or want to share how the Quiz or these tools helped you, feel free to email me at: **author@williamholsten.com**