

SETTING THE STAGE.....

On May 12, 2015, an Amtrak passenger train derailed in Philadelphia while en route from Washington, D.C., to New York City. More than 200 of the 243 people aboard (passengers and crew) were injured, and 8 people died (Chang, 2015). An investigation into the cause(s) of the derailment showed that the engineer, Brandon Bostian, became distracted while listening to radio transmissions from a nearby train that had been hit by a rock. “The National Transportation Safety Board identified Mr. Bostian’s actions as the probable cause of the crash and argued that he had lost ‘situational awareness’ when his attention was diverted” (Fitzsimmons & Keller, 2016). Clearly, a large issue in this tragedy revolves around the issue of the engineer’s attention.

In this chapter, we will examine attention as a cognitive process or, rather, as a set of cognitive processes. We will see that it is very hard to establish