

Workplace playtime! The benefits of desktop toys and gadgets

Do you squeeze a squishy ball during a long phone conversation or fire off a Nerf dart blaster when a package set to arrive yesterday still doesn't show up today? You're not alone. Plenty of adults find desktop toys a welcome addition to their work area.

While your office needn't resemble a 5-year-old's playroom, a carefully chosen desk toy or two can prove beneficial. Here's a look at some items people keep around and the purposes they serve:

Fidget spinners

From easing tension to providing nervous hands with something quieter to do than tap a pen, these gadgets rank as popular in the office as they do in the schoolyard.

"I am a business owner who keeps a fidget spinner at my desk," says Deborah Sweeney, CEO of MyCorporation.com. "I even ordered an entire box for my team and gave everyone one for their personal use about a year or so ago when the toys were at their trending peak. If I feel stuck creatively, I spin it around for a few moments. It's pretty fun and never fails to help me get unstuck!"

Euler's Disks

Another common, multipurpose toy is the Euler's Disk. Nick Galov of Hostingtribunal.com recommends it for combining "stress relief, socialization, and aesthetics all in one."

"It makes a great visual addition to any desk, as it's a multicolored ball that spins like a top over a mirror," he says. "The hypnotic movements combined with the sounds emanating from the ball are great for easing your mind on a stressful day. The sound gets progressively louder the longer it spins, which may either annoy your co-workers or invite them to compete to see who can spin it the longest!"

Games

Whether you spend a few moments trying to figure out how to put a Jack Puzzle back together or invite a passerby to shoot a few hoops into a mini basketball net with you, games offer a chance to recharge.

Steve Adams of The Cyphers Agency, an integrated marketing firm, notes the value of having a Cornhole game in the company's creative lounge.

"It serves to give writers, designers and web developers a break from whatever creative block they may hit (even if we're just playing alone)," he says. "It also brings together co-workers from different departments through impromptu games. It even initiates a project brainstorm, when two, four or six employees set up a white board next to the game and throw out their ideas while literally throwing bean bags."

Icebreakers

Especially for people who bring visitors into their office for meetings, interviews, and the like, a toy on the desk can lighten the mood.

William Taylor, career development officer at MintResume, has an eraser and pencil sharpener set called Ramen Doodles on display. As the name implies, it looks like a bowl of the famous noodles.

“It is definitely a conversation starter as people often end up visiting my desk just to ask if it’s edible,” he says.

Physical reminders

Lastly, just as workers display photos to boost mood and remember things outside of the office, desktop toys can serve the same purpose. A Matchbox version of a dream car may inspire hard work to someday obtain the real thing, or a Smurf figurine may trigger a smile because it reminds you of your childhood.

Samantha Lambert, director of human resources at Blue Fountain Media, displays a green army man standing on a USMC coaster.

“My best friend is a Marine, and this little green army man protects me from my own stresses and dark thoughts,” she says. “When I am having a frustrating, stressful or straight-up bad day

. . . I look at this figurine and think of my friend along with all our other past, present and future service members. This reminds me that my day is not so bad after all.”