

Why Goofing Off at the Office May Not Be a Bad Thing

“You want me to spend time *doodling* at the office? Are you nuts? My boss would kill me!” George, my client, shouted into the phone, his impatience clearly straining his voice. The thirty-eight-year-old business manager had sought my help as a life coach to improve his performance at work and achieve his goal of promotion. Clearly, George was taken aback by the advice I’d given him. “He already thinks I don’t have a sense of urgency about my work. I’m falling behind on projects, I’m too stressed out to sleep at night, and I’m afraid I’ll lose out on the promotion—and you’re telling me to take up doodling?”

I was sensitive to his concern. Before leaving the corporate world to establish a successful business of my own, I had lived, breathed, and worked as an executive many times over in my career. I know full well the need for today’s managers to stay sharp and results oriented on the job, but I persisted in making my point. Why? Because I also knew that George, like many managers and other executives, was in trouble. In his near-frantic efforts to perform and to impress the boss, he was moving too fast and getting almost nowhere—except farther from his goals and closer to a heart attack, high blood pressure, and other medical emergencies.

In today’s cutthroat business climate, it’s all too easy to lose our focus, vision, and creativity in the race to meet deadlines, outshine colleagues, and snag the next promotion. When we allow stress to overtake our balance, our performance on the job, and our well being, our workdays become a series of knee-jerk reactions to whatever crisis (real or imagined) appears before us. The result? Our peace of mind is shattered, our creativity dries up, and our chances of achieving our goals become smaller and smaller. Instead of killing ourselves by working harder, we should be centering ourselves so that we can work *smarter*.

That’s where goofing off at the office comes into play. The key is to “goof off” in mindful, or meditative, ways that allow us to regain our balance and open up our minds. Doodling is just one of many mindful techniques that can be easily used in the workplace to calm our nerves, improve our focus, visualize our future, and boost our creativity. Other forms of mindful goofing off include finding a quiet space to meditate for a few minutes, gazing at fish swimming peacefully in an office aquarium, or simply taking a contemplative stroll around the block. Einstein worked passionately at everything he did, but his greatest accomplishment, the theory of relativity, came from the time he spent daydreaming. Athletes consistently incorporate visualization into their “work days” to enhance their performance. And yes, many a brilliant business idea or invention had its start as a simple doodle on the back of a napkin. While none of these

activities may strike us as examples of “working,” they all help to free the unconscious to allow the bubbling up of untapped riches.

Of course, not all forms of goofing off produce the benefits that fantasizing, doodling, or meditating can offer. We’re unlikely to relieve stress or gain clarity by playing an adrenaline-pumping video game, gossiping at the water cooler, or mentally reliving the fight we had with our spouse the other night. The key is to avoid activities that cause additional stress or block us from tuning into our own thoughts and feelings. Instead, try incorporating any of these mindful, meditative ways to goof off into your daily work schedule.

- **Watch animals.** If you’re fortunate enough to have an office aquarium, spend some time gazing at the fish as they swim, rhythmically and peacefully, in their environment. Those with access to windows may find that bird watching is also centering and calming.
- **Play with water.** If you’re near a pond, a lake, or even a fountain, try skipping stones across the water. Gaze at the rippling, expanding circles produced by the pebbles as they skim the water’s surface.
- **Pet an animal.** Those who work near or with animals can benefit from the soothing, stress-relieving qualities that petting a cat, dog, or other creature provide.
- **Whittle wood.** Whittling not only relaxes us, but it also allows us a creative outlet. Keep a pocketknife and a small block of wood in your desk, and pull them out whenever you feel the need for a few minutes of goof-off time.
- **Rub worry stones, rosary beads, or Mala beads.** Stones and beads have been used for centuries to aid in meditation and quiet contemplation.
- **Gaze at pictures or into a mirror.** Looking at images of ourselves and others “give[s] us reflections of what ordinarily remains outside our awareness or field of view,” says Michael H. Brown in the book *Mandala Symbolism*. “They help us stay connected to loved ones, and to ourselves.”

The bottom line: Working frantically doesn’t ensure better work; it just creates frenetic-looking work. Good, solid work comes from a mind that is calm and clear. By incorporating a little mindful goofing off in our daily lives, we can help ourselves stay balanced, focused, and open to the shimmering possibilities all around us.

Shirley Ryan is the author of *Searching for the Waters of Antiquity: A Follow-Along Meditation Process* (Soul Moments Publishing, \$24.95), a meditation tool and a unique integration of her extensive career experience and her painting and meditation skills. The founder and president of Working Together, a business specializing in helping people manage life’s changes in mind, body, and spirit, Ryan has worked as a professional life coach since 1994.

Shirley Ryan, PhD, CCHt is a practicing hypnotherapist and spiritual mentor. See more at <http://www.shirleyryan.net>