

HOW TO ASK YOUR BOSS IF YOU CAN FIDGET AT YOUR DESK

A one-page guide for the person asking — and the person being asked

FOR THE PERSON WHO WANTS TO FIDGET

WHAT TO SAY

Keep it short. You're asking to keep a small, silent object on your desk — not requesting a corner office.

"Hey [name], I focus better when my hands are busy. I'd like to keep a small fidget tool on my desk — something quiet, palm-sized, stays in my workspace. Just wanted to give you a heads-up."

WHAT YOU DON'T OWE ANYONE

- **A DIAGNOSIS.** "I focus better this way" is a complete sentence.
- **A PEER-REVIEWED EXPLANATION.** You're not defending a thesis.
- **AN APOLOGY.** You're telling someone how you do your best work.

IF THEY SAY "WON'T THAT DISTRACT OTHERS?"

- If it's silent and stays on your desk, it's less distracting than pen-clicking, knee-bouncing, or hair-twirling you're already doing.
- Offer to keep it below sight-line in open-plan setups if that helps.

IF THEY SAY NO

Ask what specifically concerns them. Usually it's one of:

- **NOISE** — easy fix, pick something silent.
- **PERCEPTION** — keep it in a drawer between uses.
- **THEY JUST DON'T GET IT** — hand them the other half of this page.

FOR THE MANAGER BEING ASKED

WHY IS SOMEONE FIDGETING DURING YOUR MEETING?

It almost certainly means they're trying to pay attention, not that they've checked out. For a lot of people, keeping their hands busy is what keeps their brain in the room. Same reason some people doodle during calls — the movement is a focus anchor, not a distraction.

WHAT TO SAY YES TO

- Anything silent and contained to their own workspace: putty, stress balls, fidget rings, textured stones.
- Doodling or sketching during meetings — yes, even if the doodles aren't notes.

WHERE A LIMIT MAKES SENSE

- **SOUND.** Clicking or snapping in shared spaces. Fair ask: "keep it quiet."
- **MOVEMENT.** Spinning objects in a meeting room. Fair ask: "hands-only, below the table if on camera."
- That's basically it. If it's silent and stays in their hands, you're out of things to regulate.

HOW NOT TO MAKE IT WEIRD

- Don't ask what condition they have. They told you how they work best.
- Don't make it a performance conversation. If their work is fine, desk habits are irrelevant.
- Don't announce it to the team. They're keeping a small object on their desk, not installing a standing drum kit.
- Treat it like a standing desk or headphones — a work preference, not a special exception.

