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9-1-2023

Your WFH & Office Gear: From the Basics to Puttin' on the Ritz

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SPECIAL GUEST REFERENCE DESK

Your WFH & Office Gear:

From the Basics to Puttin' on the Ritz

Q What accessories/gadgets would you recommend to create an ideal work-from-home setup?

A quick guide to effective gadgets and work-from-home (WFH) essentials to help you succeed in any work environment.

BY AAMIR ABDULLAH,
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We have learned a lot over the last three years, haven't we? Interesting things, like how challenging it is to pull a three-point turn in the Suez Canal. Or fun things, like how even the most routine legal proceeding can become a treat to observe when one of the attorneys is a talking cat. We relearned some classic lessons too, like it's never a good idea to start a land war in Eastern Europe. We even learned a little something about ourselves: Hi, it's me—I'm the problem.

But more than anything else, we all learned something about working from home. When we went home in March 2020, we knew the work still needed to get done, but how it was going to get done was up in the air. A lot of things that we took for granted got a lot harder (e.g., lending books), but some things got way better (e.g., dress codes). And for the most part, we made it work! We have gone from

fumbling about over how to share our screens in video conferencing to learning how to host online conferences like pros, and from meetings that should have been emails to emails that should have been meetings.

Now, in the 40th year of Al Gore's internet, we are going back to work in person. True, some of us may have been back in the office in late 2020, but others are just now returning.

The pandemic taught us many things about our relationship to work, including:

- the notion of having a “space” where work is done;
- balancing work and personal life when the two have very vague boundaries;
- the value of mindfulness and self-care at a time when we are isolated and afraid; and
- the precious, but fragile, value of what we consider “normal” in a time of uncertainty.

Here's our attempt to synthesize these experiences, along with an infusion of our unsolicited recommendations of all the stuff that made our work-from-home, hybrid, and (for those of us that returned) return to the office suck less.

Ten Percent Happier Headquarters: Harmonizing WFH Funko Form with Functionality *(Amir Abdullah)*

When thinking about the perfect WFH (work from home) scenario, happiness really does lie in the details. From the little Beemo Funko Pop figurine to the dual monitor setup, the harmony of at-home productivity relies on having form meet functionality. And this functionality has to work. When thinking about necessities, one should not overlook the importance of maintaining access to the entire WFH space—literally. This is why I recommend a wide [rolling chair mat](#). My WFH desk and chair rest on the carpet, and I assure you that being able to get into and out of my work chair with ease is the most overlooked aspect of my setup.

Speaking of chairs, I also find it important to sit up straight. For this the one option I constantly go back to is the [Yaheetech ergonomic kneeling chair](#). This chair is great because it complements other chairs I may want to use. Its height is adjustable, and it ensures I sit upright while working. If I want to switch to another chair for parts of the day, the rolling chair mat makes it easy to maneuver it out of the way for the other chairs in my home.

In terms of tech, I think it is vitally important to have a good Wi-Fi router. I currently use the [Netgear Nighthawk X6 Smart WiFi Router](#). This router allows me to control who and what has access to my various Wi-Fi networks. And it has helped me maintain a separate Wi-Fi network for WFH electronics and home electronics.

Moving on to some of the more fun aspects of the WFH space, I want to mention two items that have really changed my world for the best: a [Pure-Wave percussion therapy massager](#) and a [Stanley tumbler with a straw](#). The massager has many heads and various speed settings to work the kinks out of my shoulders and back. And, in terms of the tumbler, I think we can all agree about the importance of being hydrated. Sometimes, when working from home, we may forget to drink enough water. Last but not least, I want to mention the importance of maintaining good head-space. I use [Ten Percent Happier](#), an app to use when you have five minutes or more downtime and really want to check in with yourself. I use it to work through the anxiety and stress I think everyone has felt at one point or another during this trying time.

All joking aside, the items I think are the most important for WFH help maintain an interest in work and ease the turmoil of having a “home office.”

Simulating Balance in Studio-Size Stations: Personality-Infused Perks for Fully Remote Spaces *(Havilah Joy-Steinmen Bakken)*

I have the great luxury of working in an industry that I'm obsessed with and at a job that I enjoy. But having separation between my work life and my home life is important. And even with those two things happening simultaneously in the same 650-square-foot apartment, sitting right next to my husband slash full-time co-worker, I have found some specific tools that have really helped me with the necessary transitions.

Chairs are a big deal for me. I eventually switched to the Gaiam Balance Ball chair and rolled on that all through COVID. When I made the transition from a hybrid position at a public law library to

a fully remote position at a global law firm, the Gaiam Balance Ball chair didn't work for me anymore. My husband has sat in nice gaming chairs ever since I met him, and he had recently purchased the [Razer gaming chair](#). I remember when the giant box arrived, and he literally took up the entirety of the open floor space in our tiny apartment as he built it. I went away to the American Association of Law Libraries Annual Meeting in Denver, and when I came home, I had a matching pink one already built and waiting for me. The chair is fabulous and comfortable, and I especially appreciate the nice neck pillow. One not so great thing about the color: the pink fabric shows everything!

My husband and I now sit in our matching Razer gaming chairs, typing away and dreaming of a dedicated office space. But what is a fancy adjustable gaming chair without an equally tech-forward desk? The [Tresanti 47" Adjustable Height Desk](#) is that desk. It has four height settings, and I use one for my sitting and one for my standing. Speaking of using the standing desk, having the right tool to protect my feet when standing is very important to me. I have found I really enjoy using the [Sunflower Home Anti-Fatigue Wobble Board](#). When I'm in a standing mood I will stand for two or three hours at a time on it, but I always wear my tennis shoes when doing so. I also use the wobble board as a foot bolster when I'm sitting. I have found that standing while in meetings makes me more confident, especially when I'm presenting something.

When my position became fully remote at the public law library, there was a big discussion over PC towers versus laptops. Since I'm also set up with work access on my private laptop, I can check and catch up on work without having to lug my larger company-issued

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laptop around. The one I picked for this role is a 2017 MacBook Air because it's very light and fast. I always buy the refurbished ones from Amazon because the price point is very important to me when choosing personal electronics, and I have always been more of a Mac person than a PC person.

Lucky Cat Comforts & Cards: Flexible Sites and Sensory Scenes for Fluctuating Schedules *(Rachel Evans & Valerie Horton)*

Early on in the pandemic we quickly realized that working from home with children (often showing up in the background!) was not only distracting but disruptive to our colleagues when on Zoom meetings. And after attending a few virtual conferences, many parents like us realized there were two tech items we truly needed: a solid pair of headphones and higher quality microphones. Our favorite headphone is the [3M WorkTunes Connect Hearing Protector](#). With regard to microphones, Rachel's university provided [Yeti USB microphones](#). When not engaged in virtual meetings, we still try to leverage noise reduction and manage sensory overload while working by tuning the world out with either ear plugs or specific types of noise-generating apps.

Two favorite tools for when we truly need to stay on tedious tasks or do deep work for longer periods of time are [Loop Earplugs for Noise Reduction/Focus](#) and the [Binaural Beats Brain Waves app](#).

Of course, totally tuning things out just isn't enough to remain focused sometimes, is it? Since some of us have two modes—completely distracted and hyper focused to the point that we often forget to eat, take restroom breaks, or drink water—little hacks that can help remind us to tend to our basic needs are critical to avoid daily burnout. A popular hack making the rounds this year on TikTok is the [Tama-gotchi water bottle challenge](#). ADHD'ers are raving that the constant beeps can serve as just the right timing and frequency of reminders to pause, take a drink of water, or go to the toilet.

Other hacks we have tested and can vouch for include popper fidget toys like this [2-in-one Tetris puzzle meets fidget](#) and drawing cards. Anything involving chance on a highly distracted day can provide just enough random novelty energy to help one refocus, task switch, or look at any issue from a different angle. An absolute favorite chance deck for the workday are the [Brian Eno Oblique Strategy cards](#). If hand-held fidgets or “games” of

chance aren't your thing and you prefer a stim that is full body, we recommend the [Smart Hula Fit Hoop](#). This infinity exercise tool can get you moving, out of a rut, and help rejuvenate your physical self and your spirit too!

If seeking novelty rings as true for you as it does for us, or your impulse control also makes you prone to distractions, it can be tough to find calendaring, scheduling, or list-making apps that consistently work. We have tried all the project management apps and methods (Trello, KanbanFlow, etc.). Right now a new favorite is [OWaves](#), a visual calendar that doesn't look or behave like your typical calendaring applications. Instead, it seeks to help you “find your rhythm” in a non-linear way.

Comforts can be the magic key to staying focused and not feeling overwhelmed in the midst of all the work you may have to do. We have also tried to make our desk areas at home and at work the kind of environment we enjoy being in. For Rachel, this includes softer lighting (warm-colored lamps like the [Himalayan Salt Lamp](#), rather than fluorescent overheads), options for stimulating or relaxing scents (a [USB-powered small essential oil diffuser](#)), and if you're fortunate enough to have windows, try to let the sunlight in for maximum natural light with this [solar-powered waving lucky cat](#), which makes both of us smile and lets us know when the sun is coming through—a cue to raise the blinds.

Last, but certainly not least, is one of our latest and greatest accouterments to date: a warm cup. If you are like us, perhaps for years you have regularly gotten or made hot beverages, sat them right beside the computer keyboard and then realized three hours later it is ice cold! During our initial work-from-home phases in 2020 and 2021, we rediscovered how

wonderful holding a warm mug could be (since we could all make warm drinks while we worked and generally enjoy them before they got cold). Now that Rachel is back in the office, she still makes it a point to make a warm mug part of most workdays. This [cat-shaped coffee cup warmer](#) is both adorable and affordable. Pair it with your favorite mug each and every day. Want an all-in-one solution? Try Valerie's favorite, the [Ember Temperature Control Smart Mug](#) instead. With 80 minutes of battery life, this app-controlled heated coffee cup is better suited for those who want less mess and might still be dealing with less desk space while working remote.

A Hybrid Zen Respite from the Cluttered Campus Suite: Carefully Curated Environmental Effects *(Jason Tubinis)*

As many introverts probably already know, work from home kind of rocked. Being able to focus deeply on projects without the hustle and bustle of library office spaces was one of the silver linings of the world falling apart. But as the months wore on, it became increasingly clear that managing my WFH space to create an environment that was conducive to concentrating and filtering out other introvert-friendly distractions was going to be of utmost importance.

First and foremost were mindfulness apps. Life is stressful even in the best of times, so as the planet got collectively ill, having a healthy way to deal with that stress was key. I recommend the [Koru Mindfulness App](#). I had the good fortune of being coached through early mindfulness practices via Zoom sessions, but the app itself does a fantastic job of guiding you through meditation and other exercises. I am a big fan of Gatha meditation, which

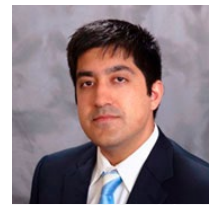
has helped me wile away the time when I have had to wait patiently and stemmed off more than a couple panic attacks.

Second were chairs. Chairs are super important. I think I can state that without worrying about being challenged. My criteria were a little specific: I wanted something that would endure. To that end, I took a slightly different direction than the hyper-ergonomic route—faux luxury. I am a big fan of my [La-Z-Boy Delano Big & Tall Executive Office chair](#). While the “Big & Tall” has some . . . connotations, I must point out that chairs designed this way have incredibly resilient springs that provide the base support. Wherever you are in your health journey, trust me when I say that sitting on a firmly plush cushion with a stout spring supporting you is just the best.

Finally, my [Germ Guardian air purifier](#) has made the transition from my WFH arrangement and back into my normal office. It provides a gentle din of white noise, a reassuring glow from the UV light mode cooking any nasty particulates, and the comfort of knowing that I'm not constantly huffing my own flatulence. It was one of the keys that transformed my living/dining room table from just a place to put my laptop into a home office. The health benefits are self-evident, but more than anything, I now associate the hum of my purifier with “it's time to get s*** done.” And I think that might have been the most important thing I have learned about working in the home office as well as when I'm back in the office. More than the “things,” it's the “feeling,” and these items help me feel like I can create a space to do important work—which just so happens to be the same place I binge *The Owl House*. ■

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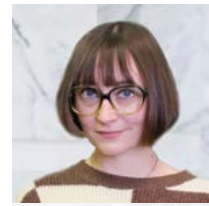
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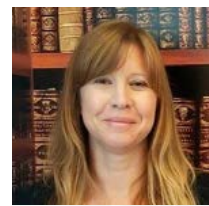
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