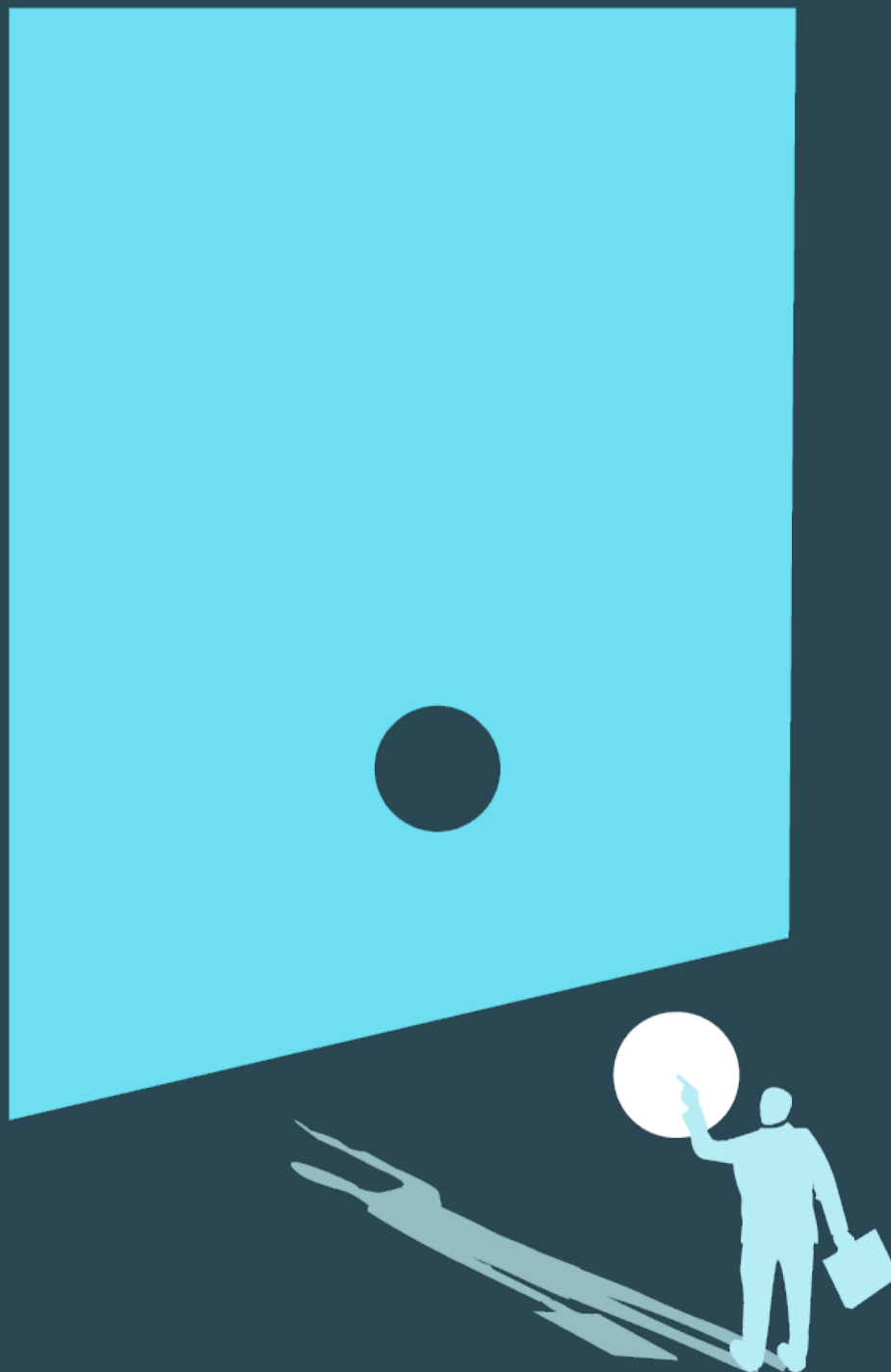


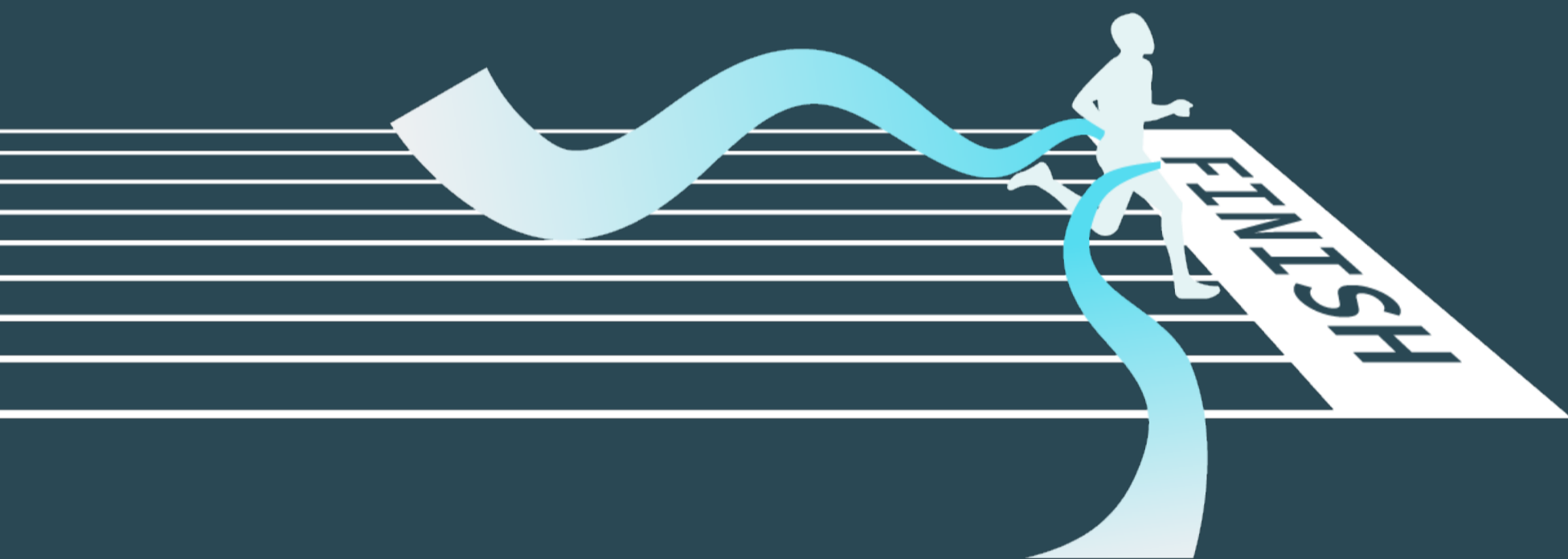
Productivity.

Why Less Is More When It Comes to Productivity

By Donna McGeorge



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Olympian Carl Lewis, the nine-time gold medalist sprinter, was known as a master finisher. He was also considered a slow starter. In a 100-meter sprint, he was often either last or second-to-last at the 40-meter mark but breezed past other competitors at the finish line. Contrary to common sense, he did nothing special toward the end. His breathing and form remained the same throughout the race.

While other runners were clearly having to push harder at the end—clenching their fists and scrunching their faces—Carl Lewis looked exactly the same when he won the race as he had at the start.

It came to be understood later that while others were performing at full throttle, Carl Lewis was running at 85 percent from start to finish. By doing less, he consistently outpaced his competitors.

Create a Margin

Think about your workday. Your eight hours are your total capacity. If you plan to use all those working hours (or more), you aren't leaving yourself any margin.

What do you need a margin for? Think about the last time you put your head down to dedicate yourself to getting something done. How many times were you interrupted? And how much longer did it take to complete what you needed to do? How often do we truly do eight hours of solid work in an eight-hour time frame?

That's why we need a margin. If we plan to operate at 85 percent capacity, when something unexpected comes up (and it will), we can handle it.

In the book Daniel Kahneman wrote with Amos Tversky (*Thinking, Fast and Slow*), he coined the term the *planning fallacy*. As he explained, we tend to be overoptimistic about the time needed to complete a task.

This is why we end up feeling overwhelmed. We underestimate how long things will take, overcommit, and before we know it, we are drowning in overdue tasks or projects.

Here are three ways you can achieve more by doing less.

1. Small Things, Consistently

If behavior scientist B.J. Fogg's *Tiny Habits: Why Starting Small Makes Lasting Change Easy* teaches us anything, it is that getting small things done consistently over time will have the greatest impact on our results and productivity.

If you work at 85 percent capacity and focus 100 percent on the task at hand, you will get more consistent results.

2. Give Yourself a Break

You'll do far better if, rather than operating flat out at 100 percent capacity all the time, you perform below your peak capacity, thereby giving yourself some breathing room to relax as well as some capacity to surge when necessary.

For example, when building a business, giving 100 percent would mean working 20 hours a day, seven days a week. Clearly, this isn't sustainable.

I know it feels wrong to put in less effort, but rest and relaxation are essential elements in producing your best work. Studies have shown that trying too hard at work doesn't usually result in positive career outcomes and is actually detrimental to one's career.

3. Purple Patches

When was the last time you had free time on your calendar? Most often, we end up with a bit of free space by accident when an appointment is canceled. And how good does that feel?

One of my clients identified these rare moments as *purple patches*. I encouraged him to block these patches so he could take advantage of them any time he liked. He color-coded the time—in purple—in his calendar.

Using that time effectively allows us to shift from reacting to what has to be done right now, urgently, to being proactive and planning ahead.

This is what creates the appearance of being cool, calm, and collected. It also creates space to deal with any emergencies that may occur.

In the end, deadlines are useful, but it's your capacity that will drive your projects.



Author: Donna McGeorge is a best-selling author and global authority on productivity. Her book series, *It's About Time*, covers meetings, structuring your day, and doing more with less and is available in bookstores around Australia or can be ordered online via www.donnamcgeorge.com.