

Productivity.

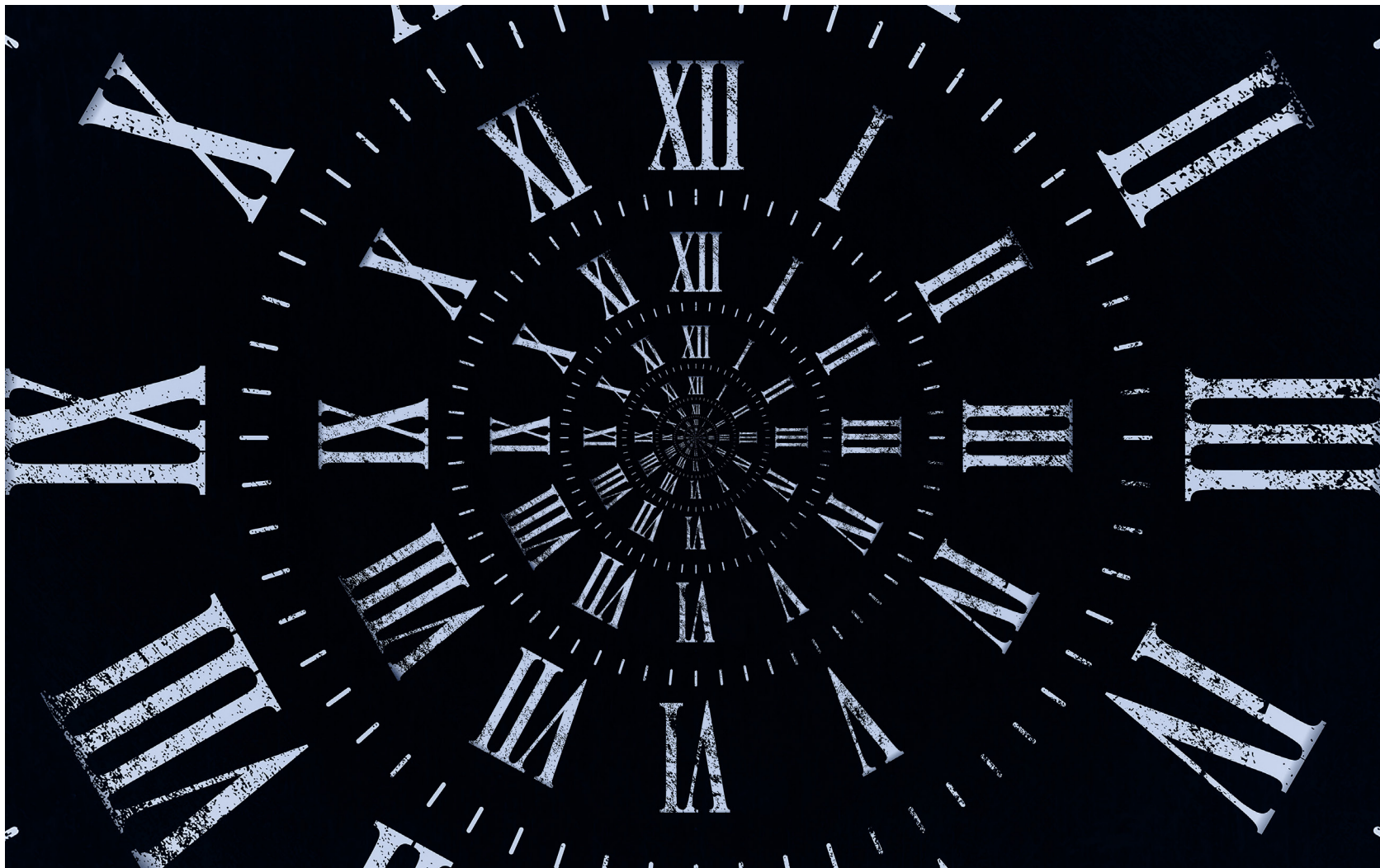
How to Give Yourself a 15% Time Refund

By Donna McGeorge



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If I had asked you in 2019 what you would do with an extra day every week, how would you have answered? You might have said you'd spend more time with your kids, read, take up a hobby, or exercise. Or maybe you would have said you'd catch up on sleep.



I don't think you would have said you would fill the saved time with more email and meetings. And yet, when many of us were working from home in 2020 and 2021, we got our commute time (up to 10 hours per week) "refunded," but we perpetuated our already hectic lifestyles. Instead of recognizing the time refund as a gift, we simply absorbed it back into our busy, out-of-control, overwhelmed lives.

In Australia, we work 3.2 billion hours a year in unpaid overtime, we have 134 million days of accrued annual leave, and 3.8 million of us don't take lunch breaks. We are addicted to being busy, and it's preventing us from getting the rest we need to perform at our best. This is what is leading to burnout, and here are some simple ways to overcome it.

1. Wipe the mind.

Write down everything you have on your mind right now. This is not a to-do list but a brain dump. List everything from “replace batteries in smoke detectors” to “research next holiday” to “prepare client presentation.” Writing things down produces a sense of relief. It’s like a weight being lifted from your shoulders that creates a sense of relaxation and control.

2. Book a meeting with yourself.

How do you feel when a meeting is canceled? If you’re like most people, the primary emotion is relief because you have a whole hour to get some work done. Rather than being at the mercy of someone else, schedule a daily one-hour meeting with yourself that you can look forward to—a break from having to be attentive to others when you can focus on what is important to you.

3. Defrag your day.

For many of us, our workdays always feel busy but are not productive. You may not consider yourself a multitasker, but you may be a project jumper, jumping from task to task in an effort to keep chipping away at your never-ending to-do list. Chunk and batch your similar or like work together to maintain focus. Time block these activities to free up time later in the day.

4. Try a meeting blackout.

Don’t schedule meetings before 10am or after 3pm. This protects your most productive and mentally alert time in the morning and time in the afternoon for you to wrap things up so you can get away from work at a decent hour. Slow down, take stock, and operate with a 15 percent margin or buffer so that you can sustain your performance over time. This might seem arbitrary or too little, and in many ways, it’s more about what happens in our heads than about watching the clock.

Strive to feel as though you are performing at a steady pace, always with this tiny bit of room to breathe, not as though you are constantly catching up or struggling. You will feel in control instead of overwhelmed and exhausted from pushing yourself (or those around you) too far.



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.