

Five ways to work smarter

Author and productivity coach **Donna McGeorge** has some advice on how to use your time more effectively at work to achieve your goals

AT THE START of a new working year, many people set lofty resolutions that are difficult to maintain as it progresses, but as a productivity coach I always advise my clients to keep it simple so you can sustain it over the longer term.

Complex systems may offer short-term benefits, but if they are too hard to maintain, you'll drop them like a hot potato when things start to heat up later.

Instead, keep things simple by focusing on using just a few productivity tools or techniques that you can easily integrate into your daily routine.

Here are five ways to work smarter that I recommend to people:

1 Create your own purple patches

When was the last time you had 'free time' in your diary? Most of the time we end up with a bit of free space by accident when an appointment is cancelled. And how good does that feel? Why not book a meeting with yourself?

Blocking out this time for yourself doesn't mean you do nothing; it means you decide what you want to do. You can use the time to your best advantage; use it for what

you want to do. You are not beholden to anyone, and you don't have to have your game face on.

2 Work with the clock in your body, not the one on the wall

Our body clocks are aligned for peak mental alertness at 10 a.m., and our best coordination is at around 2:30 p.m. Tasks that require attention and focus are best done in the morning, and repetitive tasks that require coordination are best done in the afternoon.

When you learn how your body clock

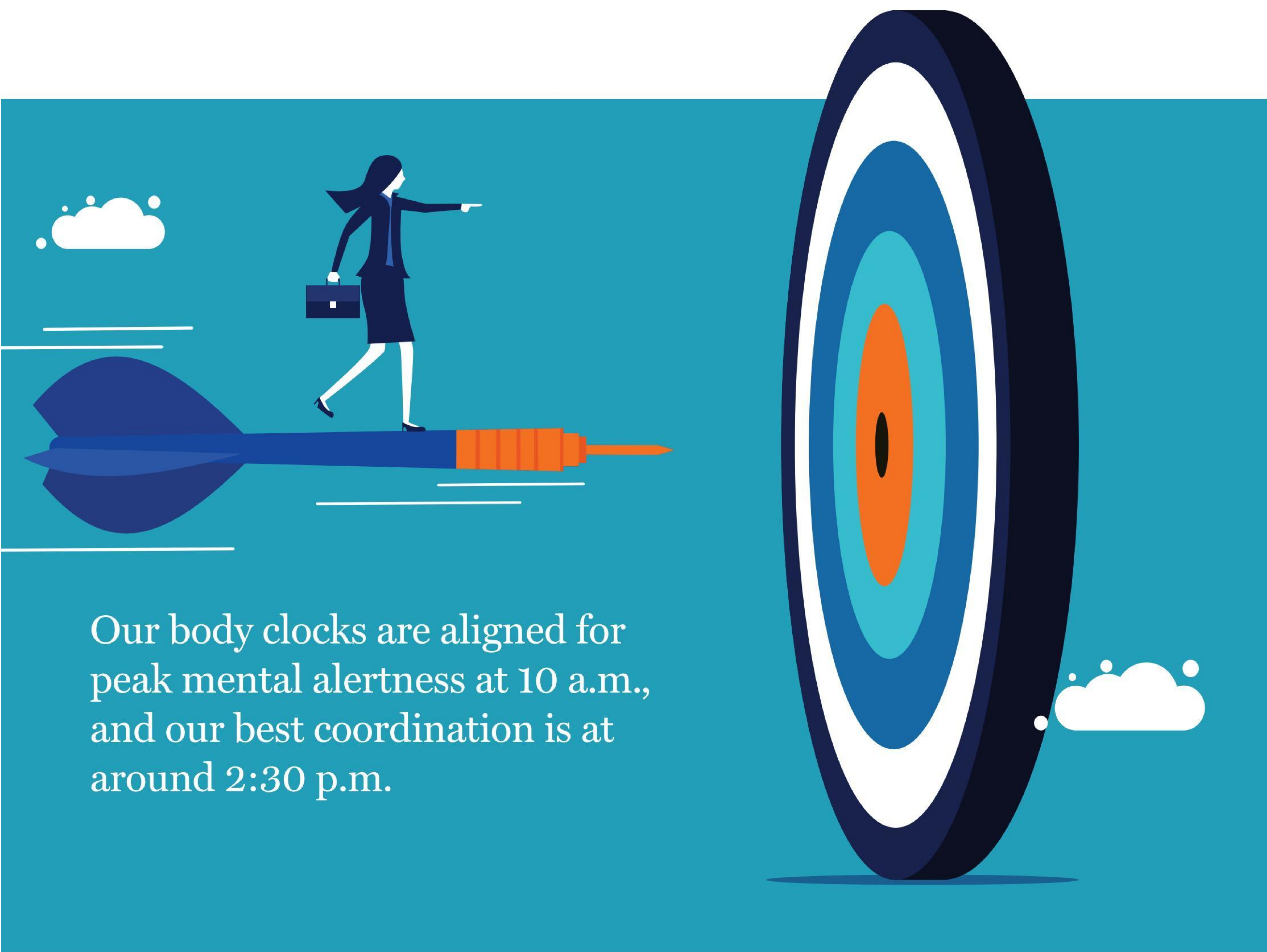
Keeping your regular, business-as-usual meetings to 25 minutes will transform your calendar and create the breathing space you need

works, then you start to understand that there are optimal times for better brain performance at work. This means you can schedule the types of tasks you do to make the best use of your most productive time.

3 Defrag your day

For many of us, our workdays feel insanely busy but are not always productive. You may not consider yourself a multi-tasker, but you may be a 'project jumper'.





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You may sit down to prepare a presentation, then answer a random email, and then start writing a report before heading back to your inbox to respond to another message. You have no system that ensures you complete one job at a time. Instead, you jump from one task to another in an effort to keep chipping away at your never-ending to-do list.

Rather than approaching your work in this way, make a list of everything you need to get done (including personal stuff), then group similar tasks together and protect time in your diary to get them done.

4 Short bursts of focused work Time-blocking or batching work is a very productive and efficient way to get through piles of stuff. I'm a huge fan of the Pomodoro Technique of 25-minute bursts of work followed by five-minute breaks. By focusing on a single task for a set amount of time, you increase concentration, motivation and momentum.

5 Keep your meetings to 25 minutes In the same way, keeping your regular, business-as-usual meetings to 25 minutes

will transform your calendar and create the breathing space you need. Additional benefits are that people show up prepared, focused and less likely to get distracted or lose interest in a meeting.

Start as you intend to go on this year. Any one of the above hacks will make a difference to your life if you stick with it. **MPA**

Donna McGeorge is a bestselling author and global authority on productivity. Her book series *It's About Time* covers meetings, structuring your day and doing more with less. Find out more at donnamcgeorge.com.

