



DONNA MCGEORGE IS THE AUTHOR OF THE PRODUCTIVITY BOOK, THE 1 DAY REFUND. SOURCE: SUPPLIED.

STRATEGY

ADD

The one-day refund: Four steps to regaining precious time

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PRODUCTIVITY

5 MINUTE READ



Let's face it — we're addicted to being busy. Many of us pack our schedules full of work, family, and social commitments, leaving very little breathing space in between! We like to burn the candle at both ends, staying up late to catch up on work, life admin and Netflix — and getting up early again to get the kids ready in time for the morning school run.

We are chronically 'rest resistant'. In Australia we work approximately 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. 7.4 million Australian's don't get enough sleep.

Over time, our busy addiction causes us to feel tired, irritable, and burnt out. It also affects our work productivity and performance, with research revealing that sleep deprivation costs the

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Australian economy \$14.4 billion per year in lost productivity.

Yet what's one of the main causes of sleeplessness? Staying up late to catch up on work. It's a vicious cycle.

So how can we regain control of our time and end the busy spiral? Imagine if you had a whole extra day per week available to you, what would you decide to do with it?

The capacity conundrum

The key to achieving our one-day refund is through leaving ourselves *adaptive capacity*. There are four types of capacity: impaired, surge, wasted and adaptive.

Impaired capacity is when we don't have enough time or energy to do the important things in our world. It's like working on a treadmill, expending energy but never getting anywhere. Work can feel like this. We use up time and energy on mundane activities and have nothing left for the people and activities that really matter.

Surge capacity is the kind of capacity we should use when there's a crisis or something super urgent crops up. Simply put, it's when we have a lot of energy but not a lot of time. For many of us, this is our modus operandi most of the time. If you are feeling out of control, rushed, just scraping by, getting stuff done but only just, then it's likely you are operating at surge capacity.

Wasted capacity is when we have a lot of time but not much energy. You know this is you if you have a lot to do but cannot muster the energy to make it happen. You have hit your energy limit.

For many of us, unfortunately, we're operating on impaired, surge or wasted

capacity most of the time.

Adaptive capacity, on the other hand, is the ability to take advantage of change, respond to disruptive circumstances positively and to cope when the unexpected happens. Scientifically speaking it can be described as the ability or capacity of a system to modify or change its characteristics or behaviour in response to existing or anticipated external stresses. You will recognise people in your life who have adaptive capacity; they're the ones who remain calm under pressure. They never appear stressed or challenged when things don't go well.

The 15% rule

Exactly how much adaptive capacity should we aim to leave ourselves, so that we don't end up with wasted capacity?

The magic number is 15%. Aiming to work at 85% capacity leaves us a 15% buffer for any unexpected tasks or situations that might occur. If you do the maths, 15% of an eight-hour working day is at least one to one and a half hours reserved for adaptive capacity. Multiply that by five working days in a week and you end up with an extra 5-7 hours — a one-day refund.

So what are some practical ways we can aim to leave a 15% buffer while still maintaining the same level of productivity and keeping on top of all our responsibilities?

How to get a one-day refund

1

Declining pointless meetings

At work, do you ever feel like you're endlessly caught up in other people's agendas and priorities, with not enough time left to look after your own responsibilities? If this is you, you need to start saying 'no' to pointless meetings.

For every meeting you attend it should be clear what your role or purpose is and what actions you need to take as a result. Organisations should also consider implementing a '25-minute meeting rule', as having only 25 minutes creates clarity about what's important. It forces us to think about the top two or three things to discuss and having a sense of urgency drives immediate action.

2

Time blocking

For most of us, we're most alert and energetic in the mornings, making it the perfect time to tackle our most complicated or creative work. If you feel as though you're struggling to make headway with important projects, try blocking out the first two hours of every day for deep work, and protect this time from emails, pointless meetings, and easier admin tasks.

3

Limit time spent on emails

If you feel that you're constantly spending your

working hours answering emails without enough time to get your 'real work' done, it might be time to try a different approach. Perhaps only check your inbox once or twice a day, or don't check it at all until lunchtime, giving you protected time in the morning to focus on deep work.

If this isn't a practical approach, try instead spending only 10 minutes per hour, at the top of every hour, dealing with your inbox. Remember, we don't have to be constantly connected and accessible to everyone; we need to allocate time to focus on our own priorities as well.

4

Decelerate, decompress, decide

Decelerate, decompress and decide are the '3 D's of thinking space.' Creating enough thinking space in our life is essential for gaining clarity and boosting productivity and creativity.

Decelerating is about slowing down or stopping, taking time out just to pause and be. You are off duty and beholden to no-one. Decompressing is about letting off the pressure. We can release pressure in the brain by writing things down, removing the need to hold everything at front of mind. Deciding can only happen once we have stopped and

taken stock. Because there's always a bit of chaos before the feeling of control, it's important to first decelerate and decompress.

Time is by far the most precious commodity we have. When we practice making space for our one-day refund we regain control over our time and our lives, increasing our productivity, boosting our mood, and ultimately helping us to live a life by design.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Donna McGeorge

Donna is a speaker, author and mentor who helps people make their work, work. She is the author of *The 25-Minute Meeting: Half the Time, Double the Impact* and *The First 2 Hours: Make Better Use of Your Most Valuable Time*.

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