

## **How to get a 1-Day Refund each week**

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Are you always operating at 100% capacity? Perhaps you use your time before and after work to catch-up on emails, or stay up late into the night after the kids have gone to sleep to play catch up with work projects?

Do you always feel like you're forgetting something, and you seem to be juggling so many balls at once you're afraid of letting something important slip accidentally? Or maybe you're never able to get enough sleep, you have a short fuse, and you constantly feel tired, irritable, and anxious?

Many of us are in need of what I call a "one-day refund" -an extra 10 hours per week for us to reset, recharge, spend more time with our families and do activities that energise us- and this can be within our reach.

During lockdown, many of us were forced to work from home for the first time, and our usual commute time to and from work was 'refunded' to us to do whatever we liked with it.

Let's do the maths: if your usual work commute was around one hour each way, then you saved two hours per day and ten hours a week that weren't spent in a car or on public transport. That's the equivalent of a whole extra day per week saved!

If I had asked you in 2019 what you would do with an extra day every week, how would you have answered? I don't think any of you would have said you would fill the saved time with more emails and work-based tasks.

Unfortunately, however, many of us perpetuated our already hectic lifestyles. Instead of recognising the time refund as a gift, we simply absorbed it back into our busy, out-of-control, overwhelmed lives. This meant many of us were more exhausted than when we commuted. We need to learn how to take back control of our time, so we are not operating constantly at 100 per cent plus capacity.

### **Leave a 15% buffer**

The first step to taking back control of your time is to aim to be operating at only 85% capacity in our day-to-day lives. This may seem counterintuitive, as we're often conditioned to think we need to be operating at full throttle to be productive and get ahead. At first you may even feel guilty for putting in less effort! However, science shows that operating at 85% capacity is the best way to ensure we maintain our energy resources long-term and avoid suffering from burnout.

When you leave a 15% buffer in your day, you're setting yourself up for success by reserving adaptive capacity for anything urgent and unexpected which may pop up (and on many days, it will!) If you're always operating at 100% capacity, then you'll be caught off-guard by unexpected situations, leaving you to have to play catch up later with the tasks you set aside.

In the context of an eight-hour workday, operating at 85% capacity would mean we plan on doing around 7 hours of solid work per day, leaving at least 1 hour of adaptive capacity. This hour can also be used to think ahead, plan our to-do lists and review our upcoming schedule, ensuring that we feel organised and well-prepared for the following day.

## **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?

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

Blocking time out doesn’t mean you do nothing; it means you decide what you want to do, and you can use that time to your best advantage. You shift from reacting to what must be done right now, urgently, to being proactive and planning ahead. This is the magic that creates the appearance of being cool, calm and collected.

## **Create more ‘thinking space’**

The irony is that if we are to be more productive, to come up with good ideas and reach good decisions, we need to slow down and do less. One way to achieve this is through the 3 D’s related to thinking space: decelerate, decompress, and decide.

***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. First thing in the morning, try writing down a ‘brain dump’ list of everything you need to do that day, including work related and personal admin tasks. A great way to release pressure in the brain is by writing things down, removing the need to hold everything at the front of mind.

***Deciding*** can only happen once we have stopped and taken stock. It’s a bit like spring cleaning, we generally get better results if we take everything out and put back only what needs to be there. Because there’s always a bit of chaos before the feeling of control, it’s important first to decelerate and decompress.

In the short term, we may have the stamina to stay up late, pack our schedules with back-to-back meetings and push ourselves to the limit trying to outwork the demands we face, but in the long-term this approach will eventually lead to us running out of steam. Time is our most precious commodity, and by freeing up capacity and getting our one-day per week refund, we can start to create a ‘life by design’ and change our lives for the better.

***Donna McGeorge is a productivity coach, speaker, and best-selling author. Her latest book, [The 1 Day Refund](#), is available in bookstores around Australia or can be ordered online via Donna’s website.***