

Leave it at work

A short book about bringing the job home in your head
and giving your family the leftovers

unbry · Free to read, yours to keep

<https://unbry.com/read/leave-it-at-work>

First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

Contents

1. Before you start
2. The drive home, and the meeting that came too
3. Why the passenger gets in
4. "Thinking about it is working"
5. "I can't help it, it's just there"
6. "It needs me"
7. "It's only for the drive"
8. "I'm still here, I'm just quiet"
9. "They didn't do anything, so it's not about them"
10. "A serious job costs this"
11. "Once this project's over, it'll stop"
12. "I'll just check my messages"
13. "I think better at home"
14. "I'm fine once I've talked it through"
15. "The weekend fixes it"
16. What the passenger costs you
17. What it costs the people at home
18. What it does to the work
19. The last ten
20. The crossing
21. When the passenger gets in anyway

- 22. The wrong address, delivered
- 23. What to do with the evening
- 24. The decision
- 25. Working from home, shifts, the self-employed, real emergencies, a bad patch, a partner who does it too, and living alone
- 26. When the evening went to work again
- 27. The drive home, the empty seat
- 28. Notes

Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is leaving work at a reasonable hour and bringing it home anyway, in your head. Your hours might be fine. You might be home by six most nights. And still the meeting comes with you in the car, the problem sits down at the table, and the people you live with get whatever's left once the job has had its share of your attention, which is often not much.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the habit makes sense from the inside. Thinking about work feels like working, it feels like caring, and it takes the edge off the itch of a thing left unfinished. The second is that most of what rides home isn't the kind of thinking that moves a problem. There's a body of research on what people do with work in their heads after hours, and it separates two kinds of thinking that feel the same from the inside and do opposite things. The kind most of us do in the evening is the kind that gives nothing back to the job and takes a good deal from the evening. The third is practical. Close the day on paper before you leave. Mark the move from work to home with something you do on purpose. And when the problem gets in anyway, answer it with a line rather than an evening. Chapters 18 to 23 cover how.

This book isn't about caring less about your work. Some of the people who bring it home most are the ones who do it best. It's about where the caring goes in the hours it can't do anything.

Three cautions.

If the trouble is the hours themselves, the eleven o'clock finishes and the Sunday afternoons at the laptop, that's a different habit and an earlier book, *The work will still be there*, is about it. This one assumes you leave at a sensible time and the job follows you anyway.

If the job is the problem, if you're being bullied, or given more than anyone could do, or treated in a way you'd tell a friend to walk away from, then the thinking that follows you home is a reasonable response to an unreasonable situation and no evening routine will fix it. ACAS describes bullying at work as unwanted behaviour that's offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, or a misuse of power that undermines or humiliates. If that's your week, their advice pages are the place to start, and chapter 24 says a little more.

And if what follows you home is dread, if you're lying awake most nights, if you've felt low most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, the NHS says to see a GP. That's not a habit, and this book isn't the right tool.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

The drive home, and the meeting that came too

It's twenty to six and you're at the roundabout you've been round a thousand times. You couldn't say what colour the car in front is.

What you can say, word for word, is what your manager said at ten past three, and what you said back, and what you should have said back, which is much better and which you've now said to the windscreen four times. By the time you park, you've had the meeting again. It went the same way, and it didn't get any shorter.

Inside, you do the things you do. Coat, bag, kettle. Someone asks about the boiler and you answer, and a minute later you couldn't say what you answered. Your daughter tells you about a shoe that went missing at school and turned up in the wrong cloakroom, which takes a while, and you're nodding at the right places while a spreadsheet that wouldn't reconcile this afternoon reconciles itself, or doesn't, behind your eyes. You're at the table. You're not at the table. Dinner happens. At nine you notice you've been staring at the same page of a book, and the page was the spreadsheet.

Nobody has done anything wrong. You didn't work late. You didn't open the laptop. But the evening is over and you weren't in it, and the people who were in it got a version of you that was mostly elsewhere.

These are invented, but I'd guess yours is close. Some words. **The passenger** is the work problem that gets in the car with you and comes home. **The rerun** is the meeting or the conversation played again, usually with better lines. **The fret** is going over how bad it is, and **the working-out** is thinking that moves the problem

forward. They feel the same from the inside and chapter 3 is about the difference. **At the desk** is where you are when you're at home in body and at work in your head. **The leftovers** are what the people you live with get. **The wrong address** is a mood that belongs to work, delivered to them. **The crossing** is whatever marks the move from work to home, and chapter 19 is about building one. **The last ten** is the last ten minutes of the working day, which chapter 18 is about. And **the empty seat** is the drive home with nothing riding along.

Before you go on, do one thing. For three evenings, set something to buzz at nine. When it does, write down where your head was in that moment, and if it was at work, what the passenger was. Not what you were doing. Where your head was. Three lines is enough. You'll want them in chapter 3.

Why the passenger gets in

Nobody decides to spend the evening at the desk. It's not a choice you make at the roundabout. The passenger is there before you've noticed the car's moving, and the question is what it's giving you, because a habit that gave nothing wouldn't last a week.

It gives you the feeling of working. The problem's still moving, or seems to be, and you're still on it. It gives you the feeling of caring, which matters to you, because you're not the kind of person who leaves at five and forgets. It gives you a sense of control over something that got away from you at ten past three. The rerun, in particular, is a way of having the meeting again with you in charge of it. It scratches an itch, the specific discomfort of a thing left open, a task that was interrupted, a question you couldn't answer when it was asked. And it's company. On the drive, at the sink, in the bath, the passenger is something to think about, and an empty head can feel worse than a busy one.

Underneath those there's a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That thinking about it is working. That you can't help it, because you're the kind of person whose head does this. That the problem needs you, and would get worse unwatched. That it's only for the drive, and ends at the door. That being quiet at home is harmless. That a mood with no target does no harm. That a serious job costs this, and the leftovers are what the family signed up for. That it'll stop when this project's over. That a quick look at messages is free. That you think better at home. That talking it through with your partner empties it out. That the weekend puts it right.

Each of those has something true in it, and each is doing the same job, which is making the passenger look like part of the work rather than something that stops the work from ending.

The passenger is an answer to a real thing. Work does leave loose ends and hard feelings, and they don't dissolve at the door. This book isn't going to tell you to stop caring, or to pretend the meeting didn't happen. It's going to look at whether the evening at the desk does anything for the problem, because the research says it mostly doesn't. Then it'll look at what the evening costs, which the people at home are paying even when they say nothing. And then it'll give you a way to close the day so that the passenger has somewhere to wait that isn't your kitchen.

"Thinking about it is working"

Look at your three lines from chapter 1. If your head was at work at nine, what was it doing there? I'd guess it was going over. The conversation again. How the thing will look if it goes wrong. Whether you should have said something, and what. That's the fret, and it's worth separating from the other thing your head could have been doing, which is the working-out.

Mark Cropley and colleagues asked 268 white-collar workers about what they did with work in their heads after hours, and found three kinds of thinking that came apart cleanly. The first they called affective rumination, which is going over the emotional side of work, how bad it was, how it'll go. The second they called problem-solving pondering, which is thinking that turns a problem over looking for a way through. The third was detachment, which is not thinking about it at all. The point is that the first two are different things. From the inside they can feel identical, because both are "thinking about work". They aren't.

Dawn Querstret and Mark Cropley then asked 719 workers about the same three kinds and about how tired they were. Affective rumination, the fret, was the strongest predictor of work-related fatigue, both the day-to-day kind and the kind that builds up. Problem-solving pondering, the working-out, predicted less fatigue. Their conclusion was that it isn't thinking about work that wears people out, it's the type. That's a survey, so it can't tell you which came first. But it fits what you'd expect if the fret spends energy and the working-out earns some of it back.

Here's a test I'd suggest, and it's mine, not theirs. At the end of an evening at the desk, ask whether you could write down one thing you now know or will do that you didn't know or hadn't decided at five. If you can, some of it was the working-out. If you can't, and there's usually nothing, then the whole evening was the fret. Having the meeting again with better lines produces no line you'll use. Imagining the project failing produces no step that stops it failing. The spreadsheet that reconciles behind your eyes doesn't reconcile on the screen.

There's a version of the working-out that does happen in the evening, and it's real, and chapter 12 gives it a place. But it's rarer than it feels, and a study by Abbas Firoozabadi and colleagues found that even evening problem-solving only helped recovery for people who were good at steering their own thoughts, and made it worse for the rest. For most of us, on most evenings, "thinking about it" is the fret wearing the working-out's clothes.

"I can't help it, it's just there"

You may believe you're simply built this way. Some people can walk out of the office and be somewhere else by the car park. You're not one of them, and never have been, and there's no point pretending an evening routine will change what kind of head you've got.

The research doesn't support that picture. The ability to stop thinking about work after hours has a name in the literature, psychological detachment, and the same person has more of it on some days than others. Sabine Sonnentag and Ute-Vera Bayer followed 87 people in a range of jobs across three working days and found that how much detachment someone managed in the evening depended on the day. Heavier workload, less detachment. On days when people did manage it, they reported a better mood and less fatigue, and the fatigue link was strongest on days of high time pressure, which is to say the days it's hardest. If detachment were a fixed trait, it wouldn't move with Tuesday's workload. It moves.

A meta-analysis by Johannes Wendsche and Andrea Lohmann-Haislah pooled 91 samples and more than 38,000 employees. Job demands were linked to less detachment. So was what they called heavy work investment, which is roughly how much of yourself you put in. Doing work-related things in your own time was linked to it too, at a medium size. Age and gender weren't. Those are all things about the job and about how you're working it, not a temperament you were born with. And a temperament wouldn't respond to training.

It responds to training. Verena Hahn and colleagues gave 48 people two sessions a week apart on how to recover from work, and compared them with 47 on a waiting list. Detachment and the other recovery experiences were higher a week after the training and still higher three weeks after. Sleep quality was up. Perceived stress was down at three weeks. It was a small study and it didn't shift exhaustion, so I don't want to oversell it. But two sessions moved something that was supposedly fixed.

A meta-analysis by Tina Karabinski and colleagues pulled together 30 studies of interventions meant to improve detachment, with 3,725 people, and found an average effect that researchers would call small to moderate. Longer and more intensive programmes did more. The programmes worked better for older people and for people who were already struggling with recovery, which is to say people like the one reading this chapter.

None of that means you can decide at the roundabout not to think about work and have it happen. It means the passenger isn't a fact about your head. It's a fact about your day, and about what you do in the last ten minutes of it, and about what's waiting for you at home to occupy the space. Those can be changed, and the rest of this book is about changing them.

"It needs me"

The problem's not finished. It was half done when you left, and some part of you believes that if you stop holding it, it'll get worse. Not in any way you could explain. But leaving it feels like leaving a pan on the hob. If you're not watching it, something will burn.

The pan is a fair picture of the feeling and a poor picture of the problem. The pan is on the heat. The problem isn't. Nothing happens to the spreadsheet between six in the evening and half past eight tomorrow. The email that needs a decision doesn't change while you're not deciding. The meeting that went badly at ten past three has finished going badly and will not go worse overnight. The watching isn't keeping anything from burning, because nothing's on.

What the watching is doing is answering an itch, and the itch has been studied. Christine Syrek and colleagues followed 59 employees over twelve weeks, matching what they reported on Friday afternoons with how they slept at the weekend. Unfinished tasks at the end of the week predicted worse weekend sleep, and the route was the fret, going over the open things, not the working-out. People who did the working-out about their open tasks slept a little better, if anything. The researchers were drawing on an old idea called the Zeigarnik effect, which is the observation that unfinished things stay in mind more than finished ones. The task being open is what keeps it in your head. Your keeping it in your head does nothing for the task.

So the feeling that it needs you is real and misdirected. It's the feeling of an open loop. The loop is what wants closing, and there are two ways to close it. One is to finish the task, which you can't do at the kitchen table. The other is to give the loop somewhere to sit that isn't your attention, which you can. Chapter 18 is about that, and the short version is that a loop written down on paper, with the next step named, goes quiet in a way that a loop held in the head doesn't. Syrek's team found the same pattern over three months as over a weekend. More open loops, worse sleep. The answer isn't fewer loops, because the job will always have some. It's where they're kept.

There's an honest objection here, which is that some problems do need watching. A server that might fall over, a patient, a deal that could move tonight. If that's your job, chapter 24 is for you, and the answer there is a different one. But be honest about whether your passenger is that kind of problem or the ordinary kind. Most of the reruns and most of the frets are about things that will be exactly where you left them in the morning. They don't need you. They need the morning.

"It's only for the drive"

You might accept most of this and still keep the drive. The drive is dead time anyway. Twenty minutes with nothing to do but steer, and if you use it to go over the day, that's the passenger dealt with by the time you're home, and the evening's clear.

I'd believe that if the rerun ended at the door. Look at your three lines again. If your head was at work at nine, then the drive didn't drain it. The drive rehearsed it. The rerun is the fret in a car, and what the fret does is keep the thing warm. Having the meeting again at the roundabout doesn't file it. It makes it the freshest thing in your head when you walk in, which is why the boiler question got an answer you can't remember.

There's a reason the rerun is so hard to stop, and it's the same reason the earlier book *It's already over* gave for replaying old mistakes generally. The rerun offers a version where you come out better, and each time you take the offer, it offers again. The lines get sharper. Your manager's face gets more unreasonable. None of it changes what was said at ten past three, and none of it's available to you tomorrow, because tomorrow's conversation won't follow the script. The rerun is a story you're telling yourself in which you're the one who was wronged and also the one who wins, and it's a satisfying story, and it does nothing.

There's an honest use of the drive, and it's the opposite of the rerun. It's the working-out, held to one question and given a stopping point. What is the first thing I'll do about this tomorrow. Not what should I have said. Not how will it look if it fails. What's

first. If the answer arrives, it goes on the last line when you get in, and the drive has done something. If it doesn't arrive in a few minutes, it's not going to arrive at the roundabout, and the rest of the drive is better spent on the radio or the road.

Most of the time, though, the drive isn't the place to solve anything, and I'd rather you didn't try. What the drive is for, in this book, is the crossing. It's the twenty minutes in which work stops being where you are and home starts being where you're going, and chapter 19 is about how to use it that way. A drive spent on the rerun is a drive spent bringing the office with you, mile by mile, so that when you get out of the car the office gets out too.

"I'm still here, I'm just quiet"

You're not shouting at anyone. You're not on the laptop. You're at the table, you're on the sofa, you're in the room, and if you're a bit quiet tonight, well, people are allowed to be quiet. Nobody's being harmed by you sitting there thinking.

The families in the research would say otherwise, and the research has been looking at this for a long time. Repetti, in a study of 33 air traffic controllers and their wives across three days, found that on heavy days at work the controllers came home and withdrew. They talked less, engaged less, and were less angry rather than more. Marc Schulz and colleagues followed 42 couples for three days and found that a day that had been more negatively arousing at work was followed by angrier behaviour at home for the women and more withdrawn behaviour for the men. Lisa Story and Rena Repetti followed 43 couples for five days. After days with negative social interactions at work, both partners reported more anger and more withdrawal at home. The withdrawal is what the passenger looks like from the outside. You're quiet because you're at the desk.

The point isn't that quiet is a crime. Repetti's original study made an interesting suggestion, which is that withdrawing after a hard day might be how a wound-up person gets back to normal, and that partners who let it happen may be helping. I think that's right, and I don't want you to read this chapter and decide the answer is to perform cheerfulness at the table with the spreadsheet still running underneath. That's the same leftovers with a smile on.

The difference that matters is between withdrawal that's announced and withdrawal that isn't. If you come in and say you've had a day, that you're going to be poor company for half an hour, and that it's nothing to do with anyone here, then the quiet has a shape and an end and an explanation. The people in the room know what they're looking at. If you come in and just go quiet, they're left to read it, and what they read, as the earlier book *It* wasn't about you described, is usually themselves. Your partner wonders what they've done. Your daughter tells the shoe story to a nodding face and learns something about whether her stories are worth telling.

So say so. It's one sentence and it changes what the quiet means. And then give the half hour a real end, because a half hour that's announced and never finishes is worse than one that was never announced at all.

"They didn't do anything, so it's not about them"

The snap at the boiler question wasn't about the boiler. You know that. Your partner didn't do anything, your daughter didn't do anything, and the sharpness in your voice belonged to someone at work who'll never hear it. Since it wasn't aimed at anyone here, the reasoning goes, nobody here should take it personally, and no real harm's done.

Laurenz Meier and Eunae Cho tested something close to this across two studies, one following 470 people over five waves and one with 131 people and their partners reporting separately. They looked at two things at work, heavy workload and rudeness from colleagues, and at what the researchers call social undermining at home, which means the small hostile things, the sharp answer, the criticism, the withdrawn warmth. Both work stressors were linked to more undermining of the partner. Two routes carried it, and they were about equal in strength. One was the bad mood itself. The other was not detaching from work in the evening. The passenger, in other words, is a route by which the day's rudeness reaches your partner, separate from the mood. Being at the desk is enough.

Arnold Bakker and colleagues studied 168 couples where both partners worked and had children. Job demands on one partner led to that partner's work getting in the way of home, which raised the other partner's load at home and their exhaustion. The route, again, was undermining. Men and women showed the same pattern. What starts as a hard day for you ends as a tired evening for someone who wasn't there.

The earlier book *It wasn't about you* was written for the person on the receiving end of a mood, and it argued that most moods have a day behind them that has nothing to do with the person they land on. That's true, and if your partner has read it they'll be kinder to you than you deserve. But it doesn't follow that the delivery does no harm. A parcel to the wrong address is still a parcel. The person who opens it has to deal with what's inside, and the fact that it was meant for someone else doesn't make the contents lighter. It just makes them harder to understand.

There's an honest objection, which is that you can't always control the mood. True. This book isn't going to ask you to arrive home serene. What it'll ask, in chapter 21, is that when the parcel goes to the wrong address, you say so, the same day, in plain words. The people at home can cope with a mood that's been explained. What wears them down is the unexplained one, the sharpness that seems to be about them because nothing says otherwise.

"A serious job costs this"

There's a version of the habit that's a matter of pride. You're not someone who leaves at five and forgets. You care. The job is serious and you take it seriously, and a serious job comes home with you. If the family gets a little less of you on a Tuesday, that's the price of being the kind of person who does the work properly, and they knew that about you.

The earlier book *The work will still be there* took apart the belief that hours measure commitment. This chapter is about the same belief applied to the head rather than the clock. And the research on detachment is inconvenient for it. Sabine Sonnentag and colleagues followed 309 people in demanding service jobs for a year. High demands predicted exhaustion a year later, as you'd expect. But the people who switched off in the evenings were not the ones whose commitment faded. They were the ones who stayed engaged with their work. Among the people under the heaviest load, the ones who left it at work were protected against the fall in engagement that the others showed. The passenger wasn't the sign of caring. It was what wore the caring away.

I want to be fair to the objection, because there's something in it. Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah's pooled analysis found that detachment went with better performance on the core tasks of the job, but slightly worse performance on the extras, the going beyond the role, and slightly lower creativity. Those links were small, and they came from surveys that can't say what caused what. But I'd rather report them than pretend. It's possible that some of what you produce comes from a head that never fully

leaves. The question is whether it's worth what it costs, and whether it's coming from the fret, which produces nothing, or the working-out, which chapter 12 gives its own place.

Most of what a serious job actually needs from you is done between nine and half past five with a clear head. The clear head is what the evening is for. A person who arrives on Wednesday having spent Tuesday night at the desk arrives with Tuesday still in them. Sonnentag and Bayer's diary study found that on the days people did detach, they reported less fatigue, and the effect was biggest on the highest-pressure days. That's the serious job's own argument for leaving it behind. The harder the day, the more the next day needs you to have had an evening.

And the leftovers aren't a price the family agreed to. They agreed to you. What they get instead, on the evenings the passenger rides along, is a body at the table and a person somewhere else, and they didn't sign anything that said so.

"Once this project's over, it'll stop"

The passenger has a name at the moment. The audit. The restructure. The client who's about to leave. The launch. It's a hard patch and it'll pass, and when it passes the evenings will come back on their own, because the thing that's taking them will be finished.

I'd want to know what the passenger's name was six months ago. If you can remember, it was probably a different one, and the evenings were the same. The project changes. The habit of bringing it home doesn't, because the habit isn't about the project. It's about what happens in the last ten minutes of the day and the twenty minutes after it, and those happen every day whatever's on the desk.

Syrek's team saw this across the twelve weeks they followed their 59 employees. The weekend-to-weekend link between unfinished tasks and sleep was there in the short term, and it was there over three months as a pattern. People with more open loops across the quarter slept worse across the quarter. The loops didn't come from one project. They came from work being work, which produces open loops at a steady rate, and from the loops being kept in the head rather than on paper.

There's a comfortable thing about "once this is over". It puts the change in the future, where it needs nothing from you tonight. And most jobs are arranged so that "this" is always something. When the audit ends, the budget round starts. When the client's saved, the next one wobbles. If you wait for the evening when there's

nothing open, you'll be waiting until you retire, and I'd guess the passenger comes to retirement too, in the form of the thing you'd have done differently.

The honest version of the belief is that some patches are worse than others, and that's true. There are weeks when the passenger is heavy and the tools in this book will get you a half hour of evening instead of a whole one. Chapter 24 has something to say about a genuinely bad patch. But the ordinary hard project isn't that. It's Tuesday with a name on it.

So don't wait for it to end. Start on a day when the passenger's ordinary, because the last ten and the crossing are easier to learn on a Tuesday than on the day the client walks. By the time the next hard patch arrives, and it will, you'll have a way of leaving the day that doesn't depend on the day being easy.

"I'll just check my messages"

A look at the phone at half past seven isn't work. It's thirty seconds. It tells you nothing's on fire, and knowing that lets you relax, which is the whole point.

This book isn't mainly about the phone, and I'm going to keep to one chapter. The earlier book *The work* will still be there covered the evening email in more depth, and *Look up* covered the phone at the table. But the look belongs here, because it's the passenger's favourite way back in.

The look doesn't tell you nothing's on fire. It tells you what's in the inbox, and what's in the inbox is a set of open loops that were closed, as far as your head was concerned, at half past five. A message you can't answer until tomorrow is now a message you're not answering. A question you'd have dealt with in the morning is now a question you're holding. The thirty seconds are the thirty seconds it takes to reload the passenger.

Belkin and colleagues surveyed 570 working adults about evening email and found something that bears on this. What lowered detachment wasn't the time people spent on email after hours. It was the expectation that they'd be monitoring it. The feeling of being on call was what tired people out, through exhaustion, even when the actual minutes were small. The look is how you keep that expectation alive in yourself, quite apart from anyone else's. If the phone might have something, you're on call. If you check it to see, you've confirmed you're on call. Either way the evening has a thread running back to the office.

There's an honest objection, which is that some jobs need you reachable. That's chapter 24, and the answer there is to make the reachability specific, a phone that rings for one kind of thing, rather than an inbox that might contain anything. For the ordinary job, though, the look is a choice, and it's a choice to reopen what the last ten closed.

The practical line is short. The last ten, in chapter 18, ends with the inbox looked at once and closed. After that it's shut until the morning, and if someone genuinely needs you they have a number. That's all. The point of this chapter isn't a rule about phones. It's that the look isn't neutral. It's the one thing you can do at half past seven that's guaranteed to bring the passenger back, and it takes thirty seconds.

"I think better at home"

Some of your best thinking about work happens in the evening. The office is noise and interruption, and the quiet of the kitchen at nine is where the hard problem finally comes apart. To leave work at work would be to leave your best hours for it on the table.

I believe you, up to a point, and this chapter is where the working-out gets its place. There is thinking that moves problems, and some of it happens at home, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise. But two things need saying.

The first is that this kind of thinking is rarer than it feels. Copley's three-way split is worth remembering here. The working-out, problem-solving pondering in his term, is one of three things your head might be doing with work at nine, and the fret is another, and they feel alike. When you say you think better at home, check it against the paper test from chapter 3. If most of your evenings at the desk end with something you now know or will do, you're a rare case and the rest of this chapter is for you. If most of them end with nothing, then the evenings you remember as good thinking are the few, and the many are the fret borrowing their reputation.

The second is what Firoozabadi's study found. Across 171 employees and five working days, evening problem-solving helped people feel recovered at bedtime only if they were good at steering their own thoughts, at picking a problem up and putting it down. For people who weren't, the same evening problem-solving left them less recovered and worse the next morning. The difference wasn't whether they thought. It was whether they could stop.

So here's what I'd suggest for the real working-out, and it's mine, not the researchers'. Give it a booked half hour. Choose it before dinner, not during. Sit somewhere that isn't the table with a pen and paper, or the laptop if it must be, and one question. Work on it until the half hour ends or the question's answered, whichever's first, and write down what you've got. Then close it, in the same way you'd close the last ten. The problem has had its time, on purpose, with a result on paper, and it can't claim the rest of the night because it's been paid.

The difference between the booked half hour and the passenger is the booking. One is chosen, bounded and written down. The other is there before you've noticed the car's moving. If you think better at home, then think at home, and give it an end.

"I'm fine once I've talked it through"

Your partner asks how the day was and you tell them. All of it. The meeting, what was said, what you said, what you should have said, what it means for the project, what it means for you. Twenty minutes later you feel lighter and the evening can start. Talking it through is how you leave it at work, just a bit late.

Sometimes. The earlier book *Tell someone* argued that heavy things carried alone get heavier and that saying them once to one person changes them, and I stand by that. A genuinely bad day told to someone who cares about you is a good use of ten minutes. But look carefully at what the debrief is, most nights, because there are two things it can be and they look the same from the outside.

One is the telling. The day happened, here's what it was, here's how I feel, done. The other is the rerun with an audience. The meeting is had again, out loud this time, with the better lines, and your partner is asked to agree that your manager was unreasonable, and then it's had a third time from another angle. That's the fret, and the fret doesn't empty. It refills. Story and Repetti's five-day study found that after bad days at work, both partners reported more anger and more withdrawal at home, and that the day's bad mood was the route. A debrief that keeps the mood alive for twenty minutes is keeping the route open.

There's also what it costs the listener. Your partner has had a day too. Bakker's couples study found that one partner's work spilling into home raised the other partner's load and exhaustion. An evening that opens with twenty minutes of the audit, every

evening, is part of that load. It's not that they don't want to hear. It's that they're being asked to hold the passenger with you, and it doesn't get lighter for being held by two.

So I'd suggest a bounded telling, and this is my suggestion rather than a finding. Say what happened in a few sentences, say how it's left you, and stop. If there's a decision you need help with, ask for that, plainly, as a question. If there isn't, you're done, and the sign that you're done is that you can ask about their day and hear the answer. If you notice you're on the second telling of the same meeting, you've crossed from the telling into the rerun, and the kind thing, to both of you, is to say so and change the subject.

The test is the same as chapter 3's. After the debrief, do you know or intend anything you didn't before? If you do, it was the telling. If you don't, it was the fret out loud, and it's had its twenty minutes of your partner's evening.

"The weekend fixes it"

Five evenings at the desk is bad, but there's Saturday. Two days with no meetings, no inbox, nothing due. Whatever the week took, the weekend gives back, and by Monday you're level again.

Charlotte Fritz and Sabine Sonnentag followed 87 emergency service workers through a weekend and into the week after. What happened at the weekend predicted how people were on Monday. Three things predicted burnout and poor well-being afterwards. Hassles in their non-work life over the weekend. Low social activity. And the absence of something the researchers called positive work reflection, which is thinking about the good side of the job. Weekend experiences also predicted how well people did their jobs the following week.

Notice what isn't on that list. Two days off didn't fix things by themselves. What the weekend did depended on what was in it, and a weekend spent at the desk, in the head, has the wrong things in it. It has the passenger, who's had two whole days with no meetings to interrupt. It has low social activity, because you were there but not there. And it has no positive reflection, because the fret doesn't do positive. It does the audit and how it'll go wrong.

There's a mistake of arithmetic in the belief, too. Recovery doesn't bank. Sonnentag and Bayer's diary study found that detachment worked day by day. The evening you switched off gave you a better next morning. The evening you didn't gave you a worse one. Five worse mornings aren't cancelled by a Saturday. They've already

happened. Wednesday had Tuesday night in it whatever Saturday held. The weekend can restore you for Monday, if it's a real weekend, but it can't reach back and give you Wednesday.

The honest version of the belief is that weekends matter, and they do. Fritz and Sonnentag's study is an argument for guarding them, for putting people and activity in them rather than the passenger. Chapter 22 is about what to put in an evening, and the same applies to a Saturday. But a weekend isn't a repair kit for a week of evenings at the desk. It's two more evenings, and two mornings, that the passenger will take if you let it.

So the question isn't how to make Saturday big enough to hold the week. It's how to make Tuesday small enough that Saturday doesn't have to. And that's the last ten, the crossing, and the line on paper, every day, which the next chapters get to after a look at what the passenger costs.

What the passenger costs you

You've read this far thinking mostly about what the passenger costs the people at home, because that's what the title promised. This chapter is about what it costs you, because you're paying too, and some of it you've been calling something else.

It costs sleep. Querstret and Cropley's 719 workers showed that the fret was the strongest predictor of fatigue, and that sleep carried part of the link. Syrek's employees slept worse at the weekend when the week ended with loops open, and the fret was the route. Caitlin Demsky and colleagues surveyed 699 employees of the US Forest Service and found that rudeness at work was linked to insomnia symptoms, that going over the day was the path, and that the path was weakest for people who managed to detach and relax in the evening. The passenger doesn't stop at bedtime. The earlier book *Nothing gets solved at three in the morning* is about what it does then, and the short version is that the problem you took to bed is the one you wake up with at three.

It costs the evening's food, in a small way that surprised me. Cropley's 268 workers who did the most fretting reported eating more unhealthy food, and the people who detached least ate fewer cooked meals and more processed ones. That's one survey, and it can't say why. But an evening at the desk isn't one in which anyone cooks, and I'd guess you've noticed.

It costs energy in a way you've been calling the job. Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah's pooled analysis linked low detachment to more exhaustion, more fatigue, worse sleep, lower life satisfaction and

more physical discomfort, at small to medium sizes across tens of thousands of people. Those are correlations. But if you've been telling yourself you're tired because the job is hard, it's worth considering that you may be tired because the job is hard and then goes on for another five hours in your kitchen.

And it costs the evening itself, which is the one I'd most want you to count. Look at what the passenger has taken this week. Not what you did while it rode along. What you'd have done. The book read, the walk, the conversation with the shoe story in it, the film watched rather than sat in front of. You had those evenings. They were on the calendar. They happened to a body that was at the desk, and you can't have them back, and there'll be five more next week.

None of this is an argument that the passenger is a health emergency. It's an argument that the cost isn't zero, and that you've been booking it to the wrong account. The job takes its hours. The passenger takes yours.

What it costs the people at home

Your partner hasn't said anything. Your daughter hasn't said anything. Your flatmate, your parent, your friend on the sofa, none of them has complained, and if the leftovers were a problem, surely someone would have said.

They wouldn't, mostly, and there are two reasons. The first is that the leftovers don't look like anything. You're in the room. You answered the boiler question. There's no single moment anyone could point to and say, that, that's what's wrong. There's a general thinness to the evening that nobody can name, and things that can't be named don't get complained about. They get lived with.

The second reason is that the people who notice are often the ones least able to say. A child who tells a story to a nodding face doesn't complain that the face was elsewhere. She tells the story shorter next time, and shorter the time after, and in a few years she tells it to someone else. The earlier book *Look up* was about the phone during that story, and everything it said about the phone applies to the passenger, which is the phone with nothing in your hand. The child can't see what's in your head. She can see that you're not there, and she's better at seeing it than you'd like.

Your partner can say, and sometimes does, and what they usually say is "you're not listening" or "you're somewhere else", and what you usually answer is that you've had a day. Which is true, and which ends the conversation, and which teaches them that raising it gets them a closed door. Bakker's 168 couples showed what the leftovers cost at the other end of the table. One partner's work

getting in the way of home meant a heavier load at home for the other and more exhaustion. Somebody was at the table for both of you. Somebody heard the shoe story. Somebody asked about the boiler and then dealt with the boiler.

There's also what the quiet teaches. If most evenings you're at the desk, then the version of you the people at home know best is the one that's half there. Your daughter's picture of what a parent is like at dinner is being drawn now. Your partner's sense of whether they come before or after the job isn't decided by what you'd say if asked. It's decided by Tuesday, and Wednesday, and the answer to the boiler question you can't remember giving.

I want to be careful here, because this chapter could tip into shame, and shame doesn't help. You're not doing this on purpose. Nobody is. The passenger gets in before you've noticed, and the leftovers are what's left when it's had its share. The point isn't that you're a bad partner or parent. It's that the cost is being paid by people who can't see what's causing it and mostly won't say. That's why it's yours to change.

What it does to the work

The one thing the passenger was supposed to be good for was the job. Whatever it took from the evening, at least the work got something. This chapter is about whether it did.

Start with what the working-out produced. If you've been doing the paper test, you know. Most evenings, nothing. The rerun produced no line you used. The fret produced no step. The spreadsheet reconciled itself behind your eyes and was still wrong on the screen. The passenger's contribution to the actual work, on most nights, is zero, and on the other nights it's something you could have had in a booked half hour with a pen.

Now the other side of the ledger. Sonnentag's year-long study found that the people who left work at work were the ones who stayed engaged with it. Under heavy demands, detachment protected against engagement falling. The people who kept the job in their heads all evening were the ones whose interest in it wore down. Fritz and Sonnentag's weekend study found that what people did with the weekend predicted their job performance the following week. Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah's pooled analysis linked detachment to better performance on core tasks. The job, in other words, gets more from a person who left it than from a person who didn't.

There's a mechanism I'd offer for that, and it's mine. Work needs a particular kind of attention, the kind that can hold a problem, try something, notice it's wrong, try something else. That attention is spent during the day and restored during the evening, if the

evening's an evening. A person who spends the evening at the desk arrives with the attention half spent. They do the day on the remainder. The passenger is the job borrowing from tomorrow's attention to pay for tonight's fret, at a bad rate.

I said in chapter 9 that there's a small honest cost, and I'll repeat it. The pooled analysis found slightly lower creativity and slightly less going beyond the role among people who detached more. If your job runs on the idea that arrives in the bath, you may lose one now and then. But the ideas that arrive in the bath arrive to a head that's stopped fretting, not one that's mid-rerun, and I'd guess you've had more of them on holiday than on a Tuesday night at the desk.

So the passenger's case for itself, that it's for the work, doesn't hold. The work would rather you'd gone home. It'll say so on Wednesday morning, in the difference between a person who had an evening and one who didn't.

The last ten

The method in this book has three parts, and the first happens before you leave. The last ten minutes of the working day are when the passenger decides whether to get in the car. Most of us spend them finishing something, or trying to, and leave mid-task with the loop open and the door swinging. The last ten is about closing the door on purpose.

Stop early. Ten minutes before you'd leave, stop working. Not finish, stop. Whatever's half done stays half done, and that's the point, because half done is what you'd carry otherwise. If you're mid-task, note where you are in one line. The earlier book *One thing at a time* called this a parking note and it works here for the same reason. A task with its place marked doesn't need holding.

Write the last line. On paper, or somewhere you'll see in the morning and not tonight. Two things. What's open, as a short list, no detail. And the first job, the one thing you'll do first tomorrow, named specifically enough that you could start it without thinking. Not "the audit". "Reconcile the March tab against the bank export." The list takes the open loops out of your head and puts them somewhere they'll keep. The first job answers the question the passenger would otherwise ask you at the roundabout, which is what happens next. Syrek's employees ruminated about unfinished tasks because unfinished tasks stay in mind. A task with its next step written down is, as far as your head is concerned, less unfinished.

One good thing. Joyce Bono and colleagues ran a three-week study in which people spent a short time at the end of each workday reflecting on something that had gone well. The reflection reduced evening stress and improved health measures over the study. The abstract doesn't say how long it took, and I wouldn't make it long. One line. Something that went right today. It's not for cheerfulness. It's because the fret only remembers the meeting, and the last line should leave you with a truer picture of the day than the fret will give you in the car.

Look at the inbox once and close it. Anything that needs an answer tomorrow goes on the list. Then it's shut. Chapter 11 said why, and the point of doing it now is that you've checked, so the evening look has nothing to offer you.

Leave. The last ten ends with you standing up. If you're at home, it ends with the laptop closed and put somewhere that isn't the kitchen. It shouldn't take more than ten minutes and it can take five. The whole thing is a way of telling the passenger that the day has an end, and that what's open has a place, and that the place isn't you.

The crossing

The second part is the move from work to home. For most of the history of work it was built in. You walked out of one building and into another, and the walk was the crossing. The car has kept some of that. Working from home has removed it entirely, and chapter 24 comes back to that. But even with a commute, the crossing only works if it's used as one, and a drive spent on the rerun is a drive in which the office comes home a mile at a time.

Choose a marker. Something you do, every day, that means work has ended. It should be physical, short, and the same. Changing your shoes at the door. Walking the last street rather than driving it. A shower. Putting the work bag in the same place and not touching it until morning. A coat goes on the hook and stays there until it's needed, and the marker is where work hangs. I'd pick one and keep it for a month before judging it, because the marker works by being repeated, not by being clever.

Use the drive for the crossing, not the rerun. Radio, music, a podcast about anything else, silence if you like silence. If the rerun starts, and it will, notice it, and ask the one working-out question from chapter 6. What's first tomorrow. It's on the last line, so the answer is quick. Then back to the road. The rerun will start again and you'll do the same again. That's not failure. That's the drive.

Give the evening something to do. Sabine Sonnentag and Charlotte Fritz, in the paper that gave the research its measuring tool, identified four things that help people recover from work. Detachment is one. The other three are relaxation, mastery, which

is doing something you get better at, and control, which is choosing how you spend your own time. Detachment on its own is hard, because an empty head fills with the passenger. Detachment plus one of the other three is much easier, because the head's occupied. Chapter 22 is about what to put in the evening. The point here is that the crossing should lead somewhere, and "somewhere" shouldn't be the sofa with nothing in your hands and the spreadsheet waiting behind your eyes.

Say the sentence at the door. If the day was bad, say so on the way in. "I've had a day, I'll be poor company for half an hour, it's nothing to do with anyone here." Chapter 7 said why. It changes what the quiet means, and it gives the half hour an end.

The crossing takes no time you weren't already spending. It's the same drive, the same door, the same first ten minutes at home. What changes is that they're being used to end something rather than to carry it.

When the passenger gets in anyway

The last ten was done and the crossing was crossed and at twenty past eight, halfway through the film, the meeting is back. This will happen, and this chapter is about what to do when it does, because a method that only works when it works isn't one.

Name it. Not fight it. The moment you notice you're at the desk, say to yourself what the passenger is, in a few words. "The meeting." "The March tab." Naming it does something small and useful, which is that it turns a fog into an object, and objects can be put down. Chapter 3's split is worth remembering here too. Is this the fret or the working-out? It's nearly always the fret, and knowing that is most of what you need.

Check the last line. Is what you're thinking about on the list? If it is, it's already got a place and a next step, and the thought has nothing to add. If it isn't, that's the one case where a thought at twenty past eight has done something, and it takes ten seconds to add a line. Then it's on the list, and it has a place, and you're back to the film.

Say so out loud. If someone's with you, tell them. "Work's in my head, give me a minute." It costs nothing and it does two things. It stops the quiet being read as being about them, and it makes you accountable for the minute. The passenger thrives in the unspoken.

Book it if it's real. Once in a while the thing that arrives at twenty past eight is the working-out, an actual idea about the actual problem. If so, write it down in one line and decide whether it needs the booked half hour from chapter 12, tonight or tomorrow. If tonight, book it, do it, close it. If tomorrow, it's on the list and you're done. What you don't do is have the half hour without booking it, in your head, on the sofa, for the rest of the film.

Return. Whatever you were doing, go back to it, and expect the passenger to knock again in ten minutes. It's not a sign the method failed. It's what a habit does while it's being changed. The earlier book *The feeling will pass* without help described urges as waves that rise and fall on their own if they're not fed, and the passenger's knock is that kind of thing. It gets weaker each time it's named and put down, and stronger each time it's given the evening.

None of this stops the thought arriving. Nothing does, and I'd distrust anyone who said otherwise. What it changes is what happens in the ten seconds after it arrives, and those ten seconds are the difference between a knock and a night.

The wrong address, delivered

You did the last ten and the crossing and the passenger got in anyway, and at the boiler question you snapped. The sharpness in your voice was for someone at work and it landed on your partner, or your child, or whoever was nearest. It's done. This chapter is about the next hour.

Say where it came from. The same evening, in plain words. "That wasn't about you. I've brought something home from work and it came out at you, and I'm sorry." Meier and Cho found that the day's rudeness reached partners through two routes, the mood and the failure to detach, and the repair addresses both. It tells the person what they were looking at, which lets them stop searching themselves for the cause. And it makes the passenger visible, which is the first step to putting it down.

Don't explain the meeting. The sentence above is enough. If you follow it with twenty minutes on what your manager said, you've turned the apology into the rerun with an audience, and chapter 13 said what that costs. The person you snapped at needs to know it wasn't them. They don't need the audit.

Do it with children too. The earlier book *Not in front of the children* argued for a same-day apology after a shout, in a few sentences, without conditions. A parent who says "that was about work, not about you, and I shouldn't have" is teaching a child something true about moods and something useful about what adults do after them. A parent who says nothing is teaching the child that the sharpness was hers.

Then close it. The apology isn't the start of an evening about your day. It's a sentence, and after it, the evening continues, and the best evidence that it wasn't about them is that you're back. Ask about the shoe. Deal with the boiler.

There's a thing I'd add about the wrong address more generally, because it isn't only the snap. It's the sigh at the question, the short answer, the "not now", the face that says someone's being a nuisance when the nuisance is the audit. Those don't feel like anything to deliver, and they add up in the person receiving them to a picture of what they are to you. The repair for the small ones isn't an apology each time. It's the last ten and the crossing, done daily, so that the parcels stop being packed. But when a big one goes to the wrong address, say so, and say so that day.

What to do with the evening

An evening with the passenger put down is an evening with a space in it, and if nothing goes in the space, the passenger comes back to fill it. This chapter is about what goes in. It's short, because you know what you like, and because the earlier books on the phone and on boredom have covered the two things people reach for by default.

Sonnentag and Fritz's four recovery experiences are a useful list. Relaxation is the obvious one, and it means what it says, something that lowers the body's idle speed. A bath, a walk, music, a book that isn't about anything. Mastery is the surprising one. It's doing something you're getting better at, an instrument, a language, a run that's a bit longer than last week's, a recipe that's slightly beyond you. It doesn't sound restful, and it works, I'd guess because a head that's learning has no room for the audit. Control is choosing how the time goes, rather than having it go, and it's why an evening that was decided at six feels different from one that happened.

Fritz and Sonnentag's weekend study adds a fourth thing, which is people. Low social activity at the weekend predicted burnout after it. An evening with someone in it, a conversation, a meal at a table with faces at it, a phone call to a friend, is an evening the passenger finds hard to ride along in. It's also, not by accident, the evening the people at home were hoping for.

What I'd avoid as the default is the phone and the television with nothing chosen. Not because they're bad, but because they're the passenger's favourite seats. The phone has the inbox in it, one tap away, and chapter 11 said what the tap does. The television with nothing chosen leaves the head free to run the rerun in front of it, which is how you came to stare at a page that was the spreadsheet. The earlier books The phone can wait and Bored is fine cover both. A programme chosen on purpose and watched with someone is a fine evening. The next episode starting by itself while you're at the desk is not.

There's one more thing the evening can hold, and it's the thing the passenger was standing in for. Chapter 2 said the passenger is company, that an empty head can feel worse than a busy one. That's true, and the answer isn't to make the head empty. It's to give it something that isn't work. The evening you had before the passenger took it, whatever that was, is still available, and it's the thing this book is for.

The decision

Everything so far has been the reasoning. This chapter is the decision, and I'd rather it were one sentence you can keep than a programme you'll abandon.

The rule is this. I close the day on paper, I cross on purpose, and I answer the passenger with a line rather than an evening. The first part is the last ten. The second is the marker and the drive. The third is chapter 20, name it, check the list, say so, return. That's the whole method, and none of it takes more than fifteen minutes of a day you were already having.

I'd write the rule down and put it where the last ten happens. Then make three plans in a form that's been tested more than most things in this book. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran pooled 94 studies of what they call implementation intentions, plans of the form "when this, then that", and found that people who make them are considerably more likely to follow through than people who merely intend. The form matters because it names the moment, and the moment is where habits are decided.

When it's ten minutes before I'd leave, then I stop and write the last line. The trigger is the clock, not the task, because the task will always want ten more minutes.

When I'm at the roundabout and the rerun starts, then I ask what's first tomorrow and go back to the road. Pick your own roundabout. The point is a place on the way home where the rerun reliably begins, and a fixed answer to it.

When I notice I'm at the desk at home, then I name it, check the list, and say so. This is the one that does the work, and it's the one you'll use most in the first fortnight.

What to expect, and this is my expectation rather than a finding. The first week the passenger will get in most days, and you'll notice it later than you'd like, and the noticing will feel like failure. It isn't. It's the thing being learned. Hahn's training study saw detachment rise within a week and hold at three, from two sessions, which suggests the change can be quick once it's begun. Phillippa Lally and colleagues, following 82 people forming a new daily habit, found automaticity built over weeks and that a missed day didn't materially set it back. I'd expect the last ten to feel like a chore for a fortnight and then like the natural end of the day. The crossing takes longer, because the rerun is old. The knock at twenty past eight will keep coming for a while, and get quieter.

The measure isn't whether you thought about work this evening. You will. It's whether the evening was yours, with the passenger visiting, or the passenger's, with you visiting. That's the difference the rule makes, and you'll know which it was by nine.

Working from home, shifts, the self-employed, real emergencies, a bad patch, a partner who does it too, and living alone

The method assumes a job with an end time, a way home, and people at the other end of it. Some of that's missing for a lot of readers. Here's what changes.

Working from home. There's no drive, so the crossing has to be built from nothing. I'd build it out of three things. A place, so that work happens somewhere and the evening happens somewhere else, even if it's the same room and the difference is which chair. A last ten that ends with the laptop closed and put away out of sight, in a drawer or a bag, not shut on the table. And a walk, ten minutes round the block at the end of the day, which is the commute you don't have and does the job of one. Without a marker, home working has no crossing at all, and the passenger doesn't need to get in the car because it never left the kitchen.

Shift work. The last ten works at any hour. The crossing is harder after nights, because you're going home to sleep and the passenger rides along into bed. I'd keep the last line and the marker and be gentler about the evening, which isn't an evening. The earlier book *Nothing gets solved at three in the morning* is useful for the bit where you're lying there.

The self-employed. There's nobody to leave, and the loops are all yours, so the last ten matters more, not less. Give yourself a clock-off time and treat it as a client's. The booked half hour from chapter

12 will get more use than for most readers, and that's fine as long as it's booked.

Real emergencies. If your job has them, a patient, a system, a deal, then reachability is real. Make it specific. A phone that rings for the one kind of thing, not an inbox that might contain anything. The difference between being on call for emergencies and being on call for the inbox is the difference between an evening with a phone in it and no evening at all.

A bad patch. Some weeks the passenger is heavy because the situation is. If it's a hard project, the tools will get you part of the evening and that's worth having. If it's more than that, if you're being bullied, ACAS describes bullying as unwanted behaviour that's offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, or a misuse of power that undermines or humiliates, and gives examples including constant criticism and being deliberately given a heavier load than everyone else. That's not a habit to fix in the last ten. Their advice pages are where to start. The NHS lists the symptoms of stress, and they include being irritable and snappy, difficulty concentrating, constant worry and sleeping too much or too little, and says to talk to a GP if it's affecting your life. If you've felt low most of the day, most days, for weeks, and it's interfering with work, home and the things you used to enjoy, the NHS describes that as depression and says to see a GP. Do that first.

A partner who does it too. Two people at the desk at the same table is a quiet house. Share the rule. The sentence at the door works both ways, and a pair of last lines is easier to keep than one.

Living alone. The leftovers go to nobody, which can make the habit feel harmless. It isn't, because the person getting the leftovers is you. Chapter 15 was about that. The crossing and the evening matter as much, and the social part of the evening, a call, a friend, matters more, because nobody's at the table to make it happen by accident.

When the evening went to work again

It's Thursday and the last ten didn't happen because the meeting overran, and the drive was the rerun from the car park to the door, and the evening was the audit, all of it, on the sofa, and at eleven you noticed. And the thought is that you're back where you started, and that three weeks of last lines were for nothing.

One evening isn't the habit back. It's one evening. Lally's volunteers, forming a daily habit over weeks, missed days without it materially affecting how the habit built, and though her study was about mornings and not evenings, I'd extend it. An evening at the desk after three weeks of evenings that weren't is a lapse in a habit that's forming, not proof that it isn't. The habit is what you do on Friday.

Don't count. The temptation is to tally the good evenings against the bad and decide what kind of person you are from the ratio. That's the fret turned on the method. The method doesn't need a score. It needs the last ten tomorrow.

Ask which belief let it in. The chapters in the middle of this book each took apart a reason the passenger gives for riding along, and one of them was working on Thursday. Was it "it needs me", because the meeting left something open? Then the last line was skipped and the loop had nowhere to go. Was it "I'll just check my messages", at half past seven? Then the inbox reopened it. Was it "I'm fine once I've talked it through", and the debrief ran long? Knowing which one lets you answer it, and the answer is usually

the part of the method that was missed. Thursday's lapse is nearly always the last ten not done, because the meeting overran and you left mid-task with the door swinging.

Don't make the return an event. Friday's last ten is the same as any other. It doesn't need to be longer or better to make up for Thursday. It needs to happen. The passenger would like you to believe that after a bad evening, a good one needs special effort, because special effort is easy to put off. It doesn't. It needs ten minutes and a pen.

And if the evening went to work because the wrong address got a delivery, do chapter 21 tonight, and then stop. One sentence, the same evening, and back to the film. The lapse isn't undone by an evening of apology any more than by an evening of audit. It's undone by the next one being yours.

The drive home, the empty seat

It's a Thursday, some weeks on. The meeting at ten past three went about as well as that meeting goes. At twenty past five you stopped, mid-task, and wrote on the notepad what's open, and under it, reconcile the March tab against the bank export, and under that, the client signed. You looked at the inbox once and closed it. You stood up.

At the roundabout the rerun started, because it does. You asked what's first tomorrow. The March tab. Back to the road. It started again at the lights and you did the same, and by the last street it had stopped trying, and you were listening to something about the Roman navy that you'll have forgotten by bedtime.

At the door the shoes came off and went where they go. The bag went where it goes. Your daughter has a story about a hamster that isn't the class's hamster, and it takes a while, and you're there for it, all of it, and it's a good story. Your partner asks about the boiler and you tell them the man's coming Tuesday, and you'll remember saying so.

At twenty past eight the meeting knocks. You name it. It's on the list. You say, out loud, that work's in your head, and your partner says fine, and it's fine, and you go back to the film. It knocks once more at nine, quieter, and doesn't get an answer.

You'll not do this every night. Some nights the meeting will overrun and the last ten won't happen and Friday will need to be ordinary. But most nights, now, the drive home has an empty seat,

and the people at the end of it get the person who left work, rather than the one who brought it.

Tomorrow, ten minutes before you'd leave, stop and write the last line. That's the whole of it, and it starts then.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical or psychological advice. If work is affecting your health, your GP is the person to ask, and if you're being treated badly at work, ACAS is where to start. The examples throughout, the Thursday meeting, the roundabout, the shoe and the hamster, the boiler, the March tab, the drive with the empty seat, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Where a study is a survey at one point in time, it describes an association and can't show what causes what, and I've tried to say so each time. Diary studies that follow the same people over days can say more about order, but not about cause.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 3. Cropley, Michalianou, Pravettoni and Millward, "The relation of post-work ruminative thinking with eating behaviour", *Stress and Health* 28, 2012, pages 23 to 30. 268 full-time white-collar workers, cross-sectional. Querstret and Cropley, "Exploring the relationship between work-related rumination, sleep quality, and work-related fatigue", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 17, 2012, pages 341 to 353. 719 adult workers, online questionnaire, cross-sectional. Firoozabadi, Uitdewilligen and Zijlstra, "Solving problems or seeing troubles? A day-level study on the

consequences of thinking about work on recovery and well-being, and the moderating role of self-regulation", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 27, 2018, pages 629 to 641. 171 employees over five days. The paper test is mine.

Chapter 4. Sonnentag and Bayer, "Switching off mentally: predictors and consequences of psychological detachment from work during off-job time", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 10, 2005, pages 393 to 414. 87 people over three days. Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, "A meta-analysis on antecedents and outcomes of detachment from work", *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, 2017, article 2072. 91 samples, 38,124 employees, correlational. Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag and Mojza, "Learning how to recover from job stress: effects of a recovery training program on recovery, recovery-related self-efficacy, and well-being", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 16, 2011, pages 202 to 216. 95 people, quasi-experimental with a waitlist. Karabinski, Haun, Nübold, Wendsche and Wegge, "Interventions for improving psychological detachment from work: a meta-analysis", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 26, 2021, pages 224 to 242. 30 studies, 3,725 participants, average d of 0.36. Sonnentag and Fritz, "Recovery from job stress: the stressor-detachment model as an integrative framework", *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 36, 2015, pages S72 to S103, a review, for the general picture.

Chapter 5. Syrek, Weigelt, Peifer and Antoni, "Zeigarnik's sleepless nights: how unfinished tasks at the end of the week impair employee sleep on the weekend through rumination", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 22, 2017, pages 225 to 238. 59

employees, 357 matched Friday and Monday observations over twelve weeks. The pan on the hob and the claim that the itch is about the loop rather than the problem are mine.

Chapter 6. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is It's already over. The argument is mine.

Chapter 7. Repetti, "Effects of daily workload on subsequent behavior during marital interaction: the roles of social withdrawal and spouse support", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, 1989, pages 651 to 659. 33 air traffic controllers and 27 wives, three days. PubMed gives initials only, so the surname stands alone. Schulz, Cowan, Cowan and Brennan, "Coming home upset: gender, marital satisfaction, and the daily spillover of workday experience into couple interactions", *Journal of Family Psychology* 18, 2004, pages 250 to 263. 82 people from 42 couples, three days. Story and Repetti, "Daily occupational stressors and marital behavior", *Journal of Family Psychology* 20, 2006, pages 690 to 700. 43 couples, five days. The distinction between announced and unannounced withdrawal is mine.

Chapter 8. Meier and Cho, "Work stressors and partner social undermining: comparing negative affect and psychological detachment as mechanisms", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 24, 2019, pages 359 to 372. A five-wave study of 470 people and a multisource study of 131. Bakker, Demerouti and Dollard, "How job demands affect partners' experience of exhaustion: integrating work-family conflict and crossover theory", *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93, 2008, pages 901 to 911. 168 dual-earner couples, cross-sectional structural model. The earlier book referred to is It wasn't about you. The parcel is mine.

Chapter 9. Sonnentag, Binnewies and Mojza, "Staying well and engaged when demands are high: the role of psychological detachment", *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95, 2010, pages 965 to 976. 309 human service employees over twelve months. Also cited in *The work will still be there*. Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, as above, for the contextual performance and creativity findings, which the abstract reports as significant and negative without giving sizes. Sonnentag and Bayer, as above.

Chapter 10. Syrek and colleagues, as above, for the three-month finding. The claim that the passenger changes name is mine.

Chapter 11. Belkin, Becker and Conroy, "The invisible leash: the impact of organizational expectations for email monitoring after-hours on employee resources, well-being, and turnover intentions", *Group and Organization Management* 45, 2020, pages 709 to 740. 570 working adults. Verified for *The work will still be there* from the Crossref abstract and not re-fetched for this book. The earlier books referred to are *The work will still be there* and *Look up*.

Chapter 12. Cropley and colleagues and Firoozabadi and colleagues, as above. The booked half hour is my suggestion.

Chapter 13. Story and Repetti, as above. Bakker and colleagues, as above. The earlier book referred to is *Tell someone*. The distinction between the telling and the rerun with an audience, and the bounded telling, are mine.

Chapter 14. Fritz and Sonnentag, "Recovery, health, and job performance: effects of weekend experiences", Journal of Occupational Health Psychology 10, 2005, pages 187 to 199. 87 emergency service workers, three measurement points. Sonnentag and Bayer, as above. The claim that recovery doesn't bank is my reading of the day-level findings.

Chapter 15. Querstret and Cropley, Syrek and colleagues, Cropley and colleagues, and Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, as above. Demsky, Fritz, Hammer and Black, "Workplace incivility and employee sleep: the role of rumination and recovery experiences", Journal of Occupational Health Psychology 24, 2019, pages 228 to 240. 699 US Forest Service employees, cross-sectional. The earlier book referred to is Nothing gets solved at three in the morning.

Chapter 16. Bakker and colleagues, as above. The earlier book referred to is Look up. Everything else in the chapter is my observation.

Chapter 17. Sonnentag, Binnewies and Mojza, Fritz and Sonnentag, and Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, as above. The mechanism of borrowed attention is mine.

Chapter 18. Syrek and colleagues, as above. Bono, Glomb, Shen, Kim and Koch, "Building positive resources: effects of positive events and positive reflection on work stress and health", Academy of Management Journal 56, 2013, pages 1601 to 1627. A three-week field study with an intervention. The abstract doesn't give the sample size or the length of the reflection. The earlier book referred to is One thing at a time. The rest of the last ten is my suggestion.

Chapter 19. Sonnentag and Fritz, "The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work", Journal of Occupational Health Psychology 12, 2007, pages 204 to 221. 930 people across the validation samples. The marker and the coat on the hook are mine.

Chapter 20. No research sources beyond those above. The earlier book referred to is The feeling will pass without help. The method is mine.

Chapter 21. Meier and Cho, as above. The earlier book referred to is Not in front of the children. The repair is my suggestion.

Chapter 22. Sonnentag and Fritz 2007 and Fritz and Sonnentag 2005, as above. The earlier books referred to are The phone can wait and Bored is fine.

Chapter 23. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119, for the when-then form. Hahn and colleagues, as above. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", European Journal of Social Psychology 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested as a package and what I say to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 24. The ACAS page on bullying at work, at [acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The NHS pages on stress and on the symptoms of depression in adults, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September

2026. The earlier book referred to is Nothing gets solved at three in the morning. No claim is made about the effectiveness of any service.

Chapter 25. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a missed evening is mine.

Looked up and not used. Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate's 2000 paper on boundaries and transitions between roles, in the Academy of Management Review, had no abstract available to me and isn't cited, so the idea of a marker in chapter 19 is presented as mine. Hülshager and colleagues' 2014 diary study of mindfulness at work and detachment, and Querstret, Copley and Fife-Schaw's 2017 randomised trial of an online mindfulness course for work rumination, were both read and left out, because I didn't want to make a brand of one method. Thiart and Ebert's 2015 trials of online recovery training for teachers with insomnia were read and left out because the samples were clinical. Leroy's 2009 paper on attention residue is the natural source for chapter 17's mechanism, but an earlier book found its abstract unavailable and I haven't cited it. Smit's 2015 conference abstract on leaving work at work, and Copley, Dijk and Stanley's chapter on teachers' rumination and sleep, had no abstracts available and aren't cited.