

15. Margin for What Matters

You were never unkind. You were overdrawn. Presence is not a virtue you lack. It is a capacity you spent.

The chapter in brief

Six months after she recognised herself in a score of 31, Maya is standing in the same kitchen at the same 6:40, and almost everything is the same. She did not quit her job or move to the country. The honesty about how little changed is the point.

Consider the order in which your day spends your capacity. Work gets your peak hours and your freshest mind; the commute takes its cut, the errands theirs. The people you love are last in the queue. We file the result under character — I was unkind, I am failing as a parent — and that is both agonising and wrong. What they register is not quantity of time but **margin quality**: the felt difference between someone genuinely in the room and someone present but behind the eyes.

What to hold on to

- **Margin is the infrastructure a relationship runs on.** The hard conversations that keep it honest are cognitively expensive, and they never happen at zero.
- **The return of wanting.** At zero everything collapses into the functional, and the wanted-simply-because disappears. Getting it back is an early sign the account is recovering.
- **Enough, as a decision.** Margin is finally a claim about sufficiency — and the book names whose shelf that sits on: Swenson in 1992, Burkeman more recently.
- **The final guard.** Do not optimise margin into a metric. The system exists so some hours can have no system in them at all.

The evidence, honestly

- This chapter attributes no failure to any reader. Capacity, not character, throughout — a policy held deliberately from Chapter 2 to the last page.
- Two sources here are load-bearing and two are referenced lightly, and the notes say which is which. Findings on technofence are handled with extra care, precisely because this is where a book like this one could most easily do harm.

THE AI THREAD One closing thought on the question shadowing the whole book: what remains distinctly worth a human's margin? Chapter 14 gave half the answer — judgment, the thing that keeps you valuable. Here is the other half. No machine can want for you, and no machine can love for you. It can take the tasks. It can never take the wanting or the loving.

Your Margin Move — The Shared Reading

The only tool in the book you cannot do alone. Take the Scorecard with someone who matters to you, compare shapes rather than scores, say what you saw — and each plug one leak for the other person's sake.

Printable worksheet: ThoughtMargin.com/downloads/the-shared-reading.pdf

Carry forward. Six moves, one loop: measure, plug, deposit, pay down, invest, re-measure. · From *Thought Margin: Reclaiming the Capacity to Think in the Age of AI* by Rachael-Renée Rychling. A companion, not a substitute — the caveats that make the claims trustworthy live in the book.