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## How to Create a Career without a Full-Time Job

### How some workers cobble together careers with a variety of income streams

By ALEXIS GRANT

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The what-do-you-do icebreaker used to elicit a straightforward response. But for a growing number of workers, it's no longer an easy question to answer.

Rather than working the traditional 9-to-5 job, more workers are turning to so-called portfolio careers, or cobbling together an income from various part-time or freelance-based jobs. Some make the transition because they're looking for more fulfillment or meaning in their work, while others diversify as a means of creating a safety net in a volatile economy.

"I like the variety and the flexibility, and I like the fact that really, no one day is the same," says Laura Glassel, who splits her time between tutoring homeschool groups, [teaching piano](#) and guitar lessons, and freelancing as a German translator. "I look at the 40-hour work-week and think, I would go out of my mind."

But what do you call yourself when you work several jobs, especially when they're in different fields? [Marci Alboher](#), author of the book *One Person/Multiple Careers: A New Model for Work/Life Success*, calls this group "slashers," because members hold one job/another job/another job. "The slash, to me, really capture[s]... people being very proud to have a multifaceted work identity," she says.

Slashers say the constant change of pace means they're always learning, which helps them avoid the job fatigue that sometimes accompanies full-time positions. "Working on varied projects keeps me relevant, it keeps me constantly learning new skills, and I get to start a new job every time I take on a new project," says [Aubree Munar](#) of New York City, who splits her time between freelance writing and marketing, with some technical writing thrown in. "I find it exciting."

While some people take on portfolio careers because they prefer the lifestyle, others fall back onto slashing when they're laid off, which is one reason it boomed during the recession. That's what happened to Lisa Rowan, 25, who lives in Washington, D.C. When she was laid off from her job at an online journalism startup, she saw it as an opportunity to pursue [vintage selling](#), which she'd blogged about for two years.

[See [How to Make a Career Back-Up Plan](#).]

"I saw the invisible hand closing a door and opening a really big window," Rowan says. "[But] with student loans and credit card debt, I knew I couldn't jump into [vintage selling] full-time." So a new vintage shop became one piece of her income pie, and she surrounded it with more lucrative client-based gigs in social media and blogging, as well as a job editing for the Web. Oh, and she also works as a secretary for a homeowners association.

"There's no 9-to-5 anymore," she says. "I can sleep until 10:30 in the morning on some days, but there's always work to be done on Saturday and Sunday. It's a trade-off."

Not having a steady paycheck can be a burden. Often, a slasher's passion isn't his money-maker, but subsidized by other, more lucrative gigs. "One thing you do might be the high earner," Alboher says, "and the other thing might be the place where you make an impact in the world."

[See [Mastering the New Freelance Economy](#).]

**If you're looking to replace your full-time job with a variety of income streams, here are some tips for juggling successfully:**

**Think about how you'll respond when someone asks what you do.** Will you highlight the gig that brings in the biggest piece of the income pie? Will you say you're self-employed? It's a good idea to answer this question differently depending on who asks, Alboher says. If you have one foot in that person's world, emphasize the skill they care about, because the connection could bring you business later. "So much of how we do in our careers has to do with how the world perceives us," says Alboher, who left her slasher lifestyle several years after writing the book and now works full time for a nonprofit think tank. "You really have to be a bit of a brand manager for yourself."

Glassel goes so far to have two business cards—one for tutoring, another for music lessons. While some personal-brand experts say it's better to keep yourself under one umbrella, this approach has helped the 30-year-old connect with new clients.

**Consider finding a steady part-time gig you can depend on.** This is especially important in the beginning, and it's how many slashers get their start. Having money you can count on goes a long way toward helping you feel comfortable without a full-time paycheck. Rowan, the vintage seller/social media strategist/blogger/secretary, spends 20 hours a week editing Web content for one company. "It's that steady job," she says, "but I'm not there all the time."

[See [And On the Side, I'm an Entrepreneur](#).]

**Save for a rainy day.** Having a financial cushion becomes more important when you depend on work that ebbs and flows. "You're going to have lean and mean times," says Munar, the writer/marketer, "and you're going to have to plan for that." Savings will also help you be more selective about which projects you accept, because you won't be desperate for the money.

**Set aside time for yourself.** When you're not on a 9-to-5 schedule, it's easy to forget to take time off. [Vicki Salemi](#), a journalist/recruiter/public speaker/author/career coach, recommends putting aside blocks of time for social events and exercise, when you don't think about work. "I love what I do, so it doesn't feel like work," the New York City resident says. "Sometimes it's hard to shut off." Personal interaction will also benefit your career, she adds, because social events can lead to new connections and spark new ideas.

**Pick one or two focus points.** Even if you're juggling a handful of interests, you'll inevitably put more effort into one or two—and that's OK, Alboher says. "There's a common misconception that people that have these slash careers, that they just go out full-tilt and do all of this at once," she says. "But you plant seeds for different parts of your career at different stages of your life. When you have opportunities [to boost certain aspects], you should seize those moments."

**Allow your slashes to morph.** Sometimes one slash will become more of a money-maker than you expected, and others will fall to the wayside. Saya Hillman of [Mac 'n Cheese Productions](#) started shooting and editing videos for non-profits when she was let go from her job seven years ago, but now her business has diversified. In addition to teaching digital media in schools, the 32-year-old hosts events, often at her home, to help clients expand their professional, personal, and romantic networks. "I didn't mean for this to become a business," says Hillman, who lives in Chicago.

What does she call herself? An accidental entrepreneur.

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