

Managing a Side Hustle

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At the time of writing this, I work full-time for a design firm, am a full-time speaker traveling at least once a week, sit on the leadership team for a consulting firm, and serve on the Board of Directors for a non-profit, 1 in 6. I write regularly, am published at least once a week, love cooking, and make it to the gym every day. I do not recount these for praise. In fact, I could care less and never publicly talk about most these things. I only mention these commitments because, in our field, they are profoundly relatable.

In fraternity and sorority life, everyone has a side hustle. Within the industry, everyone wears multiple hats. A quick look at resumes and we have campus-based professionals who are also speakers and headquarters-based professionals who are external consultants. We blog, and we teach fitness classes. We backpack across mountains and are working on dissertations. Above all else, everyone is a facilitator or volunteer and making commitments to multiple organizations. Everyone in our field does everything.

Notice, I never mentioned friends, significant others, or families; having social lives; or having hobbies. We are the very thing we tell students not to be – over programmed and over committed.

There is nothing wrong with this. I love my commitments and thrive in a world where I am always busy. I know countless others who are the same. The key, however, is realizing where it is okay to have a side hustle (or two or three) there are a few pieces we should be careful to implement in our work.

Find Your Niche

Too many people do too many things. The tendency with side hustles is to over-correct, to get hands everywhere. The key to maintaining multiple projects is finding your niche.

My niche is being a storyteller. Simple. I am a writer and speaker. Across my design firm, my role fits this by running our media arm. I speak full-time. Even across 1 in 6, this is part of what my commitment entails. When I decided to become involved in multiple things, I became strict about what I would and would not do. I will not seek out opportunities unless they meet my desired role or if I am being utilized for my specific strengths.

Sounds selfish? Well, it slightly is. But this is my time and commitment. I need to be solid in what I am doing. When operating from my niche, I am the best version of me. In turn, I contribute the most to my commitments.

In life, in commitment, we must understand we have to make choices about what our niche will be. You cannot be the expert on everything, but you can excel at a few things. Do not do a lot of things okay; do a few things great. With a side hustle, you need to find your niche and stick to it

Do What Makes You Happy (Only as Long as it Makes You Happy)

Another part of a side hustle is self-care. Stop committing to things you hate. I will not volunteer to facilitate programs because I do not like facilitation. It is fine to be picky in our commitments. Figure out what makes you happy and chase those things. Yes, sometimes this means saying no, turning down opportunities, or missing connections, but it is better to love your time than do something you dread just for the sake of doing it. A full resume means nothing if you hate living. Skip a commitment you do not enjoy in pursuit of one you love.

Use Others for Validation

No this is not about social media. Using others for validations means you cannot judge your successes. When maintaining side hustles, you are going to want to do great at all commitments. Too often the human mind allows us to trick ourselves into creating a reality we think is true.

It is not enough for you to think you are doing well. It matters more how others perceive your performance. Be intentional in seeking out feedback from supervisors, loved ones, and peers. Are you excelling at your job? Are you meeting their needs? Are they okay with your commitments?

We need others to validate our work by letting us know it is meeting the standards expected.

Never Do Something for Praise

Congratulations, you did something outside your regular work. If the only reason you are doing it is for external praise, stop right there. Doing anything for praise means you already failed your commitment before you even started. Your side hustles should be about fulfillment and willingness to be a part of something; it should never be about how many likes you can get on social media or awards you can win. The people best at their jobs do not talk about how great they are at their jobs. They just do.

Understand the Five Components

In life, I believe we have five areas in which we must be happy. These five areas are interpersonal relationships, romantic relationships, work, physical location, and hobbies. You need to be satisfied in at least three of the five. Sometimes we hate where we live but love our friends, relationship, and hobbies. Great. Sometimes we miss friends and hate a location but have a great relationship, job, and hobbies. Good. As long as you have three of the five, you can survive. Five of the five means you are thriving. Never sacrifice more than two. If picking up a side hustle puts you in this position, reevaluate. If taking on a new hustle means giving up a component, the time is not likely right to begin.

Maintaining a side hustle can be difficult, if you do not find the proper foundation for engaging in the activity. The busier I get, the more I find I am extremely happy when I am obligating myself to commitments that meet my needs and use my unique skills. In side hustling, the most important part to remember is this: “To Thine Own Self, Be True.”