

DO THE HUSTLE

Increasingly, women are trading traditional 9-to-5 for a career that combines consulting gigs, freelance jobs, and budding startups—often all at the same time. Could this be the new “having it all”? *By* JESSICA GROSE

Illustration by ELIZABETH RENSTROM



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N COLLEGE,

Rachel Rudwall dreamed of being a diplomat. She liked the idea of hopping from post to post all over the globe, but sitting behind a desk? Not so much. An internship hosting and producing podcasts for a youth-oriented travel agency changed her course. “They sent me—a college kid—to 15 countries over a three-month summer internship,” says Rudwall, 29. After graduation, she ended up at Original Productions in Los Angeles, maker of shows like *Ice Road Truckers* and *Deadliest Catch*. She worked out of the L.A. office for a year and then went freelance—for National Geographic Channel’s *Alaska Wing Men*, the Discovery series *Weed Country*, A&E’s *Storage Wars: New York ...* the list goes on. She’d dig down for three months, say, in Alaska, working insane hours, and then bank the money.

In her free time and during vacations, she worked on her goal: going from behind-the-scenes to on-camera. Now, five years later, she’s still doing this back-and-forth dance. She develops projects (sometimes unpaid) where she’s the host—whether it means flying to East Africa to shoot a video for a nonprofit, or to Thailand for an educational series. Also in the mix: a gig as a brand ambassador and blogger for Athleta, a women’s fitness apparel brand. She’s installed editing equipment for her freelance projects in her house. And she launched a digital travel series, *How 2 Travelers* (now with more than 130,000 followers), in 2013. “If I’m working on someone else’s show six days a week, I’m working on my show on the seventh,” Rudwall explains. “When it feels like too much to handle, I think about how I’m more free to create my path and pursue what really matters to me. Then I realize it’s exactly where I want to be.”

Rudwall isn’t alone in relishing this sort of control, despite the accompanying cascade of scheduling, organizing, and irregular paydays. Sure, you give up the job security (such as it is) and benefits, 401(k), etc., that come with a steady gig. But in order to, *ahem*, “have it all,” many women are finding that the best way to approach this status is to be their own bosses and create their own careers. According to a Families and Work Institute report, nearly 80 percent of all workers say they want more flexibility at work. But at the same time, almost 40 percent believe they would be less likely to advance in their careers if they took advantage of such a schedule. Women who want to travel, enjoy family time, or pursue a variety of meaningful work are realizing that to accomplish all of their dreams, they need to take charge of their own trajectory.

Alexis Grant thought she’d be on staff at a newspaper or magazine forever. Public service journalism was her calling. Grant, 33, who has a master’s in journalism, had been a full-timer at the *Houston Chronicle*. She left there to backpack in West Africa and blog about traveling solo as a woman. Then, with some self-taught social media skills, she grew the blog and, in 2010, wrote an e-book on how to build a social media business. A friend asked Grant, who was by then full-time at *U.S. News & World Report* and living in Arlington, Virginia, for online help drumming up clients for his business. She did such a good job, he suggested she “should really do this for a living.” His boss became her client, and that side hustle—helping people build their brands and customer bases through social media and blogging—became so successful, she quit her job.

That was three years ago, and now Grant has eight contractors working for her content-marketing company, Socialaxis. She writes e-books (five in four years) and mentors people on the side (via clarity.fm, donating those fees to charity). She probably logs more hours than she did working full-time for someone else, but feels more satisfied. “I have autonomy over my work and my schedule,” she says. “I can choose whom I work with and what type of work I do. To me, that feels really empowering.” She can visit

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

How these women with DIY careers are making it work

Know Your Worth

“When I first started consulting a few years ago, I was at a loss since I hadn’t done it before. It’s critical that you have a tribe of friends who have been down that road and can give you tips. Mine took me through the process of getting my pricing together and thinking about what my core value is. Get intel on what the companies and businesses in your industry have paid their consultants. Information about the going rate is sometimes ballpark rather than an exact match, but those are facts you have to pay attention to.”

—Adaora Udoji, CEO and founder of outLoud Inc., 2013 Pipeline Fund Fellow, and Women at NBCUniversal Advisory Board member

Do the “Blockbuster” So You Can Do the “Indie”

“About two-thirds of the work I do is to make enough money to support the one-third of work that I really love to do.

This life involves compromises. If I could, I’d only write books and act in theater, but those are not the most profitable jobs. But it’s a gift to be able to make any money doing what you’re passionate about.”

—Tanya Selvaratnam, writer, actor, producer, and activist

Tanzania or Australia for weeks without asking for permission, and because she's not shackled to a traditional office, she sees her family more. Freelancing is also better for her health, she says, because she makes time for Spin class or yoga every day—hard to do in the old-school 9-to-5 (or 8-to-6:30-or-7) schedule.

For Rudwall and Grant, and scores of other women like them, the solution has been to create an à la carte work schedule that includes starting a company, consulting, or freelancing—or all of the above. According to a 2014 study from Freelancers Union, 34 percent of American workers are freelancing (18 percent of those—9.3 million people—as “diversified workers,” with multiple sources of income). Within those stats, the numbers tip toward women. A 2012 survey involving some 1,500 freelancers found that 71 percent were women. And the number of women-owned businesses grew at one and a half times the national average between 1997 and 2014, and shows no sign of abating. Attitudes toward business-as-usual employment are changing: A whopping 70 percent of college-educated workers born in or after 1983 said they might reject traditionally organized jobs in favor of working independently, according to a 2013 survey conducted by the consulting firm Deloitte.

It's no wonder women are so ready to jump off the corporate ladder, after witnessing what happened during the Great Recession. From December 2007 to June 2009, more than 2 million women lost their jobs, and were slow to find new employment in the next few years (men have bounced back more quickly in 15 out of 16 job sectors, according to a Pew Research Center report). Young women may be wary of giving their all to corporations only to get laid off when times get tough. The logical next step is to make up a career in order to thrive.

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—ALEXIS GRANT

Nathalie Jordi, 32, says she actually enjoyed her regular, set-schedule jobs—including stints at a cheese shop in London and a cooking school in Ireland. But, as she got older, she wanted to set her own agenda and felt that she worked harder and reaped bigger rewards serving as her own boss. In 2008, on a whim (she was working as a freelance food writer), she and two partners started People's Pops, a Brooklyn-based ice-pop

company. They whipped up treats from locally grown fruit and—riding the artisanal trend—sold out immediately at a food market. That led to a stand at the hipster Brooklyn Flea market, which led to a stall at Manhattan culinary hot spot Chelsea Market. Now there are wholesale and catering businesses, and four NYC locations.

Jordi's boyfriend (now husband) was in New Orleans. So she applied to Tulane's business school there and got her MBA—even after having succeeded at her startup with zero entrepreneurial experience. At the same time, she was falling in love with her new city. So, along with holding a small stake in People's Pops, Jordi currently is working with a business partner, hoping to open a boutique hotel. As a DIY apprenticeship, she's taken jobs in key positions at a local hotel (front desk, reservations). She also had a gig as a researcher for the *Wildsam Field Guide to New Orleans*, a travel book. All these pieces of the puzzle fit for Jordi. “There's no division between my work and my life, and I'm OK with that. I don't separate them,” she says.

The customized career isn't for everyone. One downside is that you're never really off the clock, as Rudwall also admits. But she likes having a modicum of flexibility that she wouldn't have in a typical office. “When I'm doing passion projects, I'm editing at home, and I can actually see my partner when he gets there,” Rudwall says.

Instability is the flip side of freedom from the corporate yoke. A self-determined career can be brilliantly fluid or cobbled-together, marked by cycles of financial feast or famine. Grant's solution was to not quit her day job until her business was booming.

Rudwall says she's only able to make her hustle work because her TV-producing jobs pay well. Those, in turn, fund the projects she loves to do. “I'll work on a project that gives me the financial freedom to take a risk for a few weeks or months. I won't have money coming in right away, so that's a financial risk. But that's the ebb and flow. I use that cushion to pursue what I want,” she says. Having a skill that you can go back to during periods when money is tight is important to making the hustle work.

Forging your own way is not easy. It's anxiety-making *and* exhilarating. It's rewarding *and* uncertain, fast-paced *and* “hurry up and wait.” Still, Rudwall says she actually finds this give-and-take useful. “You're always tearing at yourself to make something exist that doesn't exist yet,” she explains, and that takes a lot of motivation. But, as Rudwall puts it, “It's more valuable to take the big risk for something that really matters than to feel calm in someone else's office.” **mc**

Invest in Yourself

“Carving out personal time in some way is absolutely essential, and I think the worst thing you can do is give everything you have to others and none to yourself. The main thing I do? Sleep more than anyone I know. With a full-time job, a writing career, and a family, sleep is my escape. I obsessively shoot for 10 hours, which, according to my Jawbone, I generally hit.”

—Claire Diaz-Ortiz, manager of social innovation at Twitter, cofounder of Hope Runs, and author of *Twitter for Good*

Reach Out Right

“LinkedIn is the place to be doing anything business-related in terms of social media and self-exposure. Beyond that, the way to get in touch with contacts who may know of more opportunities is not through mass communication, but by connecting directly: private messaging as opposed to posting to someone's wall. And if you put a Facebook page up for your site, ask friends to like it—that's totally OK.”

—Lizzie Post, cohort of the Awesome Etiquette podcast, created by the Emily Post Institute (named for her great-great-grandmother), and coauthor of *The Etiquette Advantage in Business, 3rd Edition*