



60% of global car sales in 2030 will be attributed to electric vehicle as their popularity grows due to improvements in battery technology.

CAREERS

Slash Career? Balancing Work and Life with Cakes

Last summer, a popular tweet from Happy Researchers (@hapyresearchers) caught my attention. The tweet asked who else is thinking of this career path: “Undergraduate → PhD → Postdoc → PI → bakery shop owner.”² I laughed and retweeted, as my career path is similar, just slightly different: “Undergraduate → PhD → Postdoc → Principal researcher **AND** bakery shop owner.”

In the past 10 years, I have always held two jobs. I began designing and selling cakes in 2013, and I opened a boutique café, Cake Researcher, in 2018. During this time, I also became a mother, completed my Ph.D., and worked as a postdoc. I now serve as the head of research and insights for a consultancy company in the Netherlands, while also owning Cake Researcher.

WHAT IS A SLASH CAREER?

The term “slash career” or “slasher” was popularized by Marci Alboher in her book, *One Person/Multiple Careers: The Original Guide to the Slash Career* [1]. Slashers pursue multiple careers instead of just one—akin to the slash symbol “/”—often working on other projects during their free time and generating multiple sources of income. Being a slasher, curious friends and colleagues constantly ask, “How could you manage all these? Do you still have time to watch TV with your legs on the couch?” I always reply positively and tell them I make time for re-



Figure 1. [a] The author as a human-computer interaction researcher [photo credit: Lisa Hu] and **[b]** as a cake designer and a boutique café owner.

laxation and self-care. Although it can be exhausting at times, I am passionate about my work. Nigel Marsh’s TEDx talk “How to Make Work-Life Balance Work” highlights that work-life balance is not just about balancing time, but balancing passion and fulfillment in all aspects of life—intellectual, emotional, and spiritual [2].

SUCCESS AND STRUGGLE

Making career choices is an ongoing challenge. During the final year of my Ph.D., I was eager to leave academia and opened my café. More recently, I have struggled with the decision of whether to take a tenure-track position at a prestigious university or join in-

dustry for new challenges. It’s difficult and even frightening to choose one direction, as I have a constant fear of missing out on opportunities that the other path may provide. Fortunately, I have had fantastic mentors throughout my career journey who have guided me.

After completing my Ph.D., I had dinner with two professors, Elmer van Grondelle and Koos Eissen. We shared a red velvet cake that I made and discussed my idea of leaving academia and becoming a full-time bakery owner. Both professors supported my cake business, but they also expressed regret if I were to waste my years of research experience right after my long

1 PI is principal investigator.

2 The original tweet is available at: https://twitter.com/hapyresearchers/status/1551395167331962881?s=46&t=9izpVEsOJns_6LBoX02l6w, retrieved on February 3, 2023.

2030 According to the UN, one billion people will be added to the global urban population by the end of this decade.

Ph.D. journey. They suggested, I try to do both. As both professors were slashers themselves, they understood that pursuing both paths could be the best way to maximize my passions.

Their advice sparked a new perspective for me. I didn't have to give up one career for the other. This realization led to the opening of my café in 2018, while I undertook my postdoc. The café only opened on Saturdays. After a 40-hour work week, I would start baking cakes on Friday night and work until late. After getting some rest, I would decorate and slice the cakes starting early on Saturday. The business was a huge success, with people lining up to buy my cakes. Often, all 200 slices were sold out in just 45 minutes.

However, after more than a year of working in this manner, my passion was diminished. The repetitive work at my café drained me, leaving no room for creativity and putting emphasis on quantity rather than quality. My ideal vision for being a café owner was a slow-paced and peaceful environment where I could welcome guests, listen to their stories, and share cakes and happiness with them. Unfortunately, the reality was far from my vision, as I found myself overwhelmed and unable to interact with guests, who often had to wait in the cold due to the long lines outside.

In 2020, the pandemic impacted my business operations. Cake Researcher was forced to close, giving me the opportunity to focus on my health and reflect on my experience of running a business while also working full-time as a postdoc. I was initially concerned people would forget about the bakery, but I was proved wrong. Despite the café being closed, orders for my cakes continued to pour in. I dedicated myself to each cake—showcasing my creativity, love, and respect—and clients were willing to pay a premium for my more intricate creations. My revenue continued to grow, even as I produced

fewer cakes, and my business evolved into a premium brand. Now, in addition to my research job, I reserve two nights for making cakes. I only open my café once a month for public cake tastings, and the waiting list is over six months long.

PROS AND CONS OF BEING A SLASHER

There are a few pros and cons of pursuing multiple careers. On one hand, it creates extra income and reduces the risk of unemployment. It also offers an interesting life story, making you stand out in conversations with new colleagues, business partners, or potential employers. Moreover, it gives a high sense of fulfillment as you develop diverse skills and become an expert in time management. On the other hand, being a slasher can lead to an excessive workload, which can harm your relationships and health. To counteract these cons, slashers need to be mindful of their capacity and say no to excessive work. It's important to schedule time for family and friends and to maintain a regular exercise routine. After all, good health is paramount for everything. My story is meant to inspire you to think about your true passion. And if you can't make a choice, consider doing both.

References

- [1] Alboher, M. *One Person/Multiple Careers: The Original Guide to the Slash Career*. 2012. ISBN-13: 978-0615598710.
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Biography

Jie Li received her Ph.D. in human-computer interaction from the Delft University of Technology. Afterwards, she worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the Dutch National Research Center for Mathematics and Computer Science. Currently, Jie serves as the head of eesearch and insight at EPAM Netherlands, where she leads research on social XR. In addition to her research career, Jie is also a cake artist and owns a boutique café, Cake Researcher, located in the Netherlands (<https://www.cake-researcher.com>).

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