

Is being a career slasher affording young people financial freedom or triggering financial anxiety?

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Once upon a time, we lived in a world where the question of “what do you want to be when you grow up?” meant giving a singular response about your ideal career. The expectation was that the answer would be one thing, with responses ranging from doctor to teacher to artist. Fast forward to 2021, and choices have become more expansive. Why settle for one when you can juggle multiple at any given time? For young people today, it's not a question of thinking out of the box. For many, the boxes just don't exist altogether.

This generation is not only reimagining the world of work when it comes to what they can do for a living but also how many professions they can juggle all in one go. Much of it can be attributed to the fact many of us don't want to be limited to one thing due to our vast interests and quickness to get bored. This is the world of career slashers.

So what exactly does it mean to be a slasher? This defines people who hold multiple job titles in parallel that are each separated by a “slash” in their LinkedIn bio – for example, model/social media manager/activist/content creator. Slashers are people who can see opportunities where others don't. They are adaptable. People who are likely to get into slashing also tend to be restless in their daily lives, doing multiple things makes them feel like they are adding value and unlocking opportunities to utilise their diverse skill sets.

Often, career slashers have day jobs while they pursue their slash passions as side hustles to earn extra income, build a brand and/or make a social impact. Safe to say, traditional career labels don't apply here. Answering the question, “what do you do for a living?” has become more complex. This is a community of young people with an entrepreneurial and creative mindset.

But what is driving this change?

The truth is that there is no one right answer to this question; different people get into slashing for different reasons. For some, it's driven by a world that offers very little job security due to economic instability, so focusing on more than one job gives them something to fall back on if the other falls through. For others, it's about finding a creative outlet for their passions because their traditional jobs don't allow for that. While some do it because they want additional income or they are just bored so this keeps them busy and gives their life meaning. Hence there are a number of social and economic factors that are either inspiring or forcing this generation to opt into slashing – the biggest one being the pursuit of financial freedom. Even though many young people find themselves in full-time day employment with the safety net of a salary, jobs aren't always as fulfilling for a generation that cares more about making an impact and living a purposeful life. So pursuing side hustles fills the emotional gap while also helping subsidise their income.

Thus, there are many pros to career slashing, but it also comes with its cons. Having side hustles in this new world that encourages young people to ‘secure the bag’ (get the money) also means that they are constantly working and plugged in. Maintaining a 9-5 pm job by day and other pursuits in between. It's a race to make more money with no finish line in sight.

What is the impact of being a career slasher?

With a well-documented spike in mental health challenges like burnout, anxiety, loneliness and depression on the rise, career slashing is adding more pressure on the lives of young people. They live in a world where they expect more and more of themselves, which in turn puts them under pressure to constantly perform and show up while securing the bag and being seen to be succeeding by those who follow them online. They find themselves having to do more work and taking very little time to recuperate and recover – with their minds and bodies giving out under all this stress.

More money may offer some freedom if you take the time to enjoy it, but that is often not the case for this generation. There are some young people who have been able to find some financial freedom from living this way, but in many cases, the multiple hustles barely pay enough to quit one's full-time gig. This leads to overexposure to stress over an extensive amount of time and, eventually, mental health challenges.

How is this culture of hustling different from the generation before?

Historically, 'hustling' meant having one side hustle, but that has changed drastically. This generation is hustling on steroids. This juggling culture that pressures people to prioritise 'securing and chasing the bag' also means many feel like they can never earn enough to keep up with social expectations. So the 'chase' continues at the risk of one's health, which makes it very different from what the previous generation experienced. Social media adds more pressure on young people to uphold the 'looking busy all the time' image and makes it more challenging to take time out to switch off and rest. This is compounded by their fear of missing out and falling behind because they are constantly comparing themselves to others who show off material success, consequently taking time off means falling behind while your peers are working harder.

All this to say, career slashing can certainly unlock financial freedom for some, but more often than not, it comes at a cost to many people's mental health.