

By Greta Faccio



One job wasn't enough

sat at my desk wondering whether I would ever feel as engaged in and proud of my work as I had in academia. My job in the R&D division of a cosmetics company was coming easy to me and resulting in products on the shelves. But I thought constantly about what else I could do. I missed the feeling of risk and adventure that being a scientist at the edge of a discovery gives. I knew I didn't want to go back to academia, where I would have to hyperspecialize and study the same thing every day. But I couldn't picture myself in that industry job for years and years. It was time to get creative and find a different solution—or, as it turned out, a combination of them.

I had made the move to the private sector after 5 years as a postdoc, when I became disenchanted with the instability and lack of funding that is inherent in academia. I started my job search by reaching out to Ph.D.s in industry—people I'd worked with or found on social media. I asked about their career choices and what they liked and disliked about their jobs. Many told me they enjoyed the security that came with their long-term contracts, as well as their clearly defined job responsibilities. That sounded appealing.

Through one of those contacts, I landed a job identifying scientific evidence behind cosmetic ingredients and researching new technologies. The stability and great workplace atmosphere lifted my spirits. But the work was mostly literature searches and summaries, and after a while it didn't excite me anymore.

I thought back to what I loved about academia. I had always enjoyed that my days were varied, cycling through a range of activities: planning experiments, attending meetings, problem solving, lab work, discussing results, and other tasks. Research kept me on my toes and challenged me to devise creative solutions that could be communicated to a wider audience. I wasn't getting that with my position in industry.

I looked for other options in the private sector. But no one job offered the variety and chance to explore that I was missing. That's when I asked: Did I really have to choose just one? It might be time to experiment. So instead of pursuing a linear and conventional path, I decided to combine multiple jobs—all focusing on my passion for innovation, all with room for personal growth.

Part-time positions that offered what I was looking for were hard to find. But after casting a broad net and reaching out to companies that I thought might need support in



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their research and scientific communication, I met employers who were open to unconventional solutions. Through calls and lunches together, we identified interesting tasks that were too small to justify a full-time position.

I slowly built up my portfolio, eventually filling out my schedule with three part-time positions. I started by joining a global company as intellectual property manager, overseeing its patent and trademark portfolio—work that only requires a few mornings a week. Later, I added another role one to two mornings a week working as a patent scientist in a law firm that specializes in intellectual property. When I'm not doing those jobs, I'm an independent consultant for food and cosmetic startups, helping scout technology and communicate

the scientific data behind their products.

This work situation has given me the vibrant and varied workdays I was after. My schedule is constantly changing and the series of projects I'm tasked to work on are always new, affording me opportunities to learn and grow. I may not be making new scientific discoveries. But I get to work on challenging and sometimes uncertain projects—especially when preparing patents—which gives me the rush of excitement I was looking for. The flexible schedule also gives me time to be a mum in the afternoons and the freedom to work remotely from a variety of locations, including from where my parents live in Italy.

It was risky for me to try to piece together a career from multiple part-time positions. But it has turned out to be more practical than I imagined—and as rewarding as I hoped. ■

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