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Don't give up the day job

So should you follow that artistic dream or should you play it safe and make sure there's a regular income heading your way? The answer is do both, says **Zenab Short**. Here's how to make it work

Do you spend the nine-to-five fantasising about a creative vocation? Do you believe you could have been a contender, given the chance? Offices are full of people who fell into their jobs, when they really wanted to be actors, artists or pop stars. But then: reality check – you've got to pay the rent. So people with creative ambitions get defeated by the maths – struggling artists are poor, and writers starve in garrets – don't they? Well, they can and often do. But it doesn't have to be that way. With careful planning, it is possible to keep money coming in, while also following your dream.

Pete Mauder was realistic. He knew that to make his dream come true, he would have to resign from a full-time job and freelance instead. Freed from 40 hours a week in an office, he now fits in graphic design work around his music. "It would be foolish to give up the paid job – you have to keep the wolf from the door," he says. "I do know of musicians who won't work at all, to commit full-time to the art. But they sign on, or have parents who subsidise them."

Jessica Jarvis, of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, agrees with Mauder's approach. Even in today's celebrity-hungry world, "only a small percentage of people actually get to be a 'star,'" she points out. "So you should have alternative career paths and build up other skills, in case things don't work out."

While doing an MA in screenwriting, Ellie Woodcock took a part-time job in a shop. "I get good characters to write about from the shoppers who come in," she says. "A friend of mine gave up his day job to create full time, but he's now getting a part-time job. He found writing too intense to do all the time." Work



Wizard journey... following your dream may not lead to Emerald City PHOTOGRAPH: KOBAL

keeps that creeping sense of isolation and despair from setting in when things aren't going well creatively, and the social interaction keeps you in touch with your audience, readers, or viewers.

Sophie Relf, head of campaign management at workthing.com, believes that the secret of success is all in the planning. For people with ambitions to be writers or actors, who need financial security till success beckons, she counsels: "Start by working out when and how much time per day you need to dedicate to your creative interest, and work back

from there. So, if you need to attend daytime auditions, do an evening or weekend job. Then work out what you are good at: if you are a natural at a subject, you are more likely to be able to make money in a job from it". Relf suggests looking at jobs in customer service, sales, retail, catering and hospitality, tourism and leisure. "These all offer a rich source of flexible or part-time work, so you can take up any offers of creative work that come your way."

Ash Chandola runs the Swaraj club night and produces Asian fusion music with his band, Sonik

Gurus. He comments: "You do have to make sacrifices if you want to break through as an artist. It would be impossible for me to work full-time: for example, I often need to fly to India to do the club night. So, I am always short of money. I manage that by living at home with my parents – not ideal! I may get a part-time job, to bring some cash in – on a label, or in promotions. It has to be work related to my passion for music."

Creative people could try teaching their interest to others. "Activities like dance, music and drama are now

largely extra-curricular," says Relf. "Many parents look to private sources for this part of education. You do not need qualifications to teach privately. And City and Guilds run assessor NVQ courses in many creative industries, like fashion and photography. Qualified assessors are very sought after – this is a great supplementary career."

Research by reed.co.uk found that one in four temps is "following their dream". It is the flexibility of temping that is attractive to wannabes, although some posts are more flexible than others. "People with specialised skills may find it easier to organise flexible working," says Alexandra Jones of the Work Foundation. "Employers want to retain the highly skilled."

When people ask photographer Kofi Allen "Wow, how do you get to do that?" he always replies "With great sacrifice!" "I want to do my art full-time," he says. "But it's very competitive, and you can wait ages till the next project comes in. I don't want to pimp my passion by doing the 9-5 just to pay the bills. But I will take a part-time job in a related field, maybe consultancy, to keep afloat."

"Do something about your ambition every day, no matter how small," Relf advises. "Don't lose sight of the fact that you work to live, not the other way round. Have milestones, and celebrate them as you achieve them."

Billy Connolly was a welder, French and Saunders were teachers, Harrison Ford a carpenter – they all had a dream, and fulfilled it. Not by luck but by a combination of passion and persistence. And when you get disheartened just try to think that the struggle will just add to the satisfaction of ultimately achieving success.