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3 Lessons From Actor Geoffrey Owens And His Gig At Trader Joes

How to hustle

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Recently, former *Cosby* Show actor Geoffrey Owens made headlines for his job at Trader Joes, and our nation responded with mixed emotions. While a few job-shamed Owens, most praised him for his work ethic and grit. The next day, he told the hosts of ABC's *Good Morning America*, *"There is no job that's better than another. ... It may pay better, it may have better benefits, it may look better on paper. However, it's not better. Every job is worthwhile."*

This sounds like the mantra and attitude of someone who has mastered the art of the hustle. Owens' skills and ambition for acting and teaching ultimately drove him to take a side hustle at Trader Joes to pay the bills and care for his family. The images of him bagging groceries during his shift at Trader Joes, which is frequently [vetted as a great place to work](#), sparked conversations about the gig economy, side hustles, and "no shame" sentiments for good, honest work.

In the last decade, society has changed its perspective on what constitutes a career. Our definition is no longer limited to describing long tenures with a few employers. This is a refreshing twist on tradition, given how greatly it empowers individuals to cater their own careers to their skillsets and lifestyles.

Since the photo went viral, Owens has become an inspiration to many for the way he unapologetically stood proud of his work at Trader Joes. What lessons can we learn from Owens on the art of the hustle?

#1: Find the Hustle That's Right for You

Find your niche and own it. Although he made it very clear that his gig at Trader Joes was the perfect opportunity for him to provide for his family - the work hours allowed for a flexible schedule that accommodated prior commitments and alternate job pursuits. In addition, he didn't just put in time there to collect a paycheck. Instead, he was proud of the work he performed and did his best to meet the expectations of his employer.

It doesn't matter why you've chosen the job you have, just make sure you show up fully with enthusiasm and commitment. At RiseSmart, we have a boot camp for professionals pivoting to alternative work formats. A number of individuals who have come through the program are making major pivots in their professional areas of focus – including some, for example, who have pivoted in their careers to become dog-walkers because it's truly what they want to do.

When people fully own and embrace their work, they excel. Whether your side hustle provides the financial foundation for you to do what you love, or it's a stepping stone to your real passion, there's nothing more appealing than gig workers who own their hustle and stand proud of the work they do.

#2: Research the Gigs in Your Industry, As Well As Those That Allow You To Pursue Your

Priorities

There are now 16 million Americans taking on the [contingent or alternative work](#), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics – so we know Owens is not alone. The growing popularity of gig work has forever changed the recruiting and employment landscape. Hopefully, the popularity of this type of work will continue to change our nation's perception of what it means to work and shift our thinking to appreciate the art of the hustle.

Hard work and grit are the keys to the future expansion of and acceptance of the gig economy. When they enter the flexible workforce, people are able to formulate their own careers and establish a portfolio of positions at various companies either in tandem or sequentially. A gig portfolio might include particular types of activities, or gigs that vary greatly in scope.

Instead of being shamed for accepting non-traditional work opportunities, the perception in society is shifting. As attitudes shift, people become more comfortable considering jobs and careers that help them to either simply pay the bills or follow their passions. In doing so, all of the experiences of a gig worker become part of a varied gig portfolio.

#3: Make the Gig Lifestyle a Part of Your Brand

You don't have to be an actor working side jobs to make ends meet to tell a story of hustle. People who have made lifestyle choices in the past, or who are just about to enter the job market out of college also have a hustle story to tell.

In the past, when working with new college graduates, my colleagues and I have made a point to ask them about every job and activity they pursued. When they explained they worked for 30 hours, took 10 hours of classes, and participated in additional volunteer work or extracurricular activities in any given week, it became immediately apparent they were comfortable hustling and managing their time. Recent graduates often don't think they have anything to add to a resume and shy away from including their time as a waitress, clerk, or other vocation.

Contrary to this belief, it's actually beneficial for those who have the ability to take on a variety of responsibilities and balance competing for priorities to highlight that information in their resumes and in interviews to demonstrate hustle.

Similar situations are often true with professionals returning to work after parental leave or a longer leave of absence from the workforce. They've rarely just been sitting at home—most of the time they've been volunteering with schools and community organizations, coaching soccer games, and managing their family's needs. They've definitely been hustling, they just haven't been getting paid for it.

For these people, the stories of their years of hustle should be part of how they position themselves with employers who want to know that their future employees possess core skills – organization, communication, facilitation – and can juggle multiple activities at once.

Once the picture of Owens bagging groceries at Trader Joes went viral, the acting community stood up and rallied behind his work. He didn't shy away from talking boldly and openly about his passion and commitment to his job. He proved that he has mastered the art of having grit and hustle—and we can all learn a few things from his journey.

Author Bio



Kimberly Schneiderman is the Senior Practice Development Manager at RiseSmart. In this role, she creates and manages RiseSmart programs, training, and support materials, and has led initiatives in the area of recruiter studies, job seeker studies, job seeker programs, flexible workforce initiatives, and professional development practices.

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