

# Investing Was My Side Hustle

By [James de Oliveira](#)

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There are various reasons someone would decide to take on a second job. I suspect the most common reason is that someone wants some extra income. Often someone sees the need to have additional income no matter what. We all need ways to survive... but also a chance to thrive. Lately, people call the thing they do outside of work that is not their main income, but another source, their “side hustle.”

I have been worried about my future for as long as I thought that I might have one... one that lasted past my 30th birthday. This led me to research other ways to make money and secure my future. My mother encouraged me to invest in stocks when I was younger. I never thought stocks would be the main source of my income. Investing was something I did at home and when I was in between jobs. It was my side hustle, my Plan B.

Before I ever thought to risk my money on a hopeful outcome, I saw a series of issues in front of me. It seemed that the world had been structured so as to prevent me from succeeding no matter what I did. Social Security would run out of money, the government had an unimaginable amount of debt, I would never have a pension or earn enough to save for retirement much less my sons’ college tuition. The deck was stacked against me.

In the Industrial Age people were encouraged to learn and perfect skills that would help to create opportunities for employment. The more those skills involved repeatable tasks, the more people would find themselves competing with lower wage workers and sometimes, with machines.

For centuries people have created tools and machines to lessen the drudgery of everyday work. Machines were improved upon over time and some were so cleverly designed that they needed few workers and sometimes none at all. Every time a machine can do something less expensively and more efficiently than a human, the machine will get the job, hands down. Once a machine was “hired” for a job, it had no incentive to stop working.

And then [Moore’s Law](#) (the prediction that the price per unit of compute power will fall in a consistent time frame) and all the second order effects that came from it made computers and cameras (and all sorts of other things) both much more affordable and more powerful. The Internet made it possible for people from across the world with similar skills to do work for far less money. Younger people could undercut the payscale of older people. The competition was everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Over the past several decades, many jobs that used to be exclusive for humans have become work that can be assigned to machines. All evidence suggests this trend will not stay

the same. It will accelerate exponentially. Software is a type of invisible machine that can do things people might not think possible. Please know that I am human. This article was written by a person, not by some bot based on programming logic, blindly assembling statistics. The truth is that more articles are written by bots on a daily basis than most people would like to admit. Some do much more than assemble strings of predictable words.

We are collectively in a period of massive transformation. The machines that we have created are poised to take more and more of the tasks that we have collectively referred to as “work” from us, as if ripped from our hands. Once assigned, machines will not willingly quit. For many, work has become a source of identity, a person’s *raison d’être* (reason for being or existing). A person might say he or she is a carpenter, an editor, engineer or therapist.

Without work, I thought to ask, who am I? What does it mean to exist, to live?

To me, to exist or live means that I do something in my life that has value in a historically meaningful context. My value comes from what I create and contribute, the ways by which I do my part to move the proverbial ball for humanity.

People my age are referred to as “Generation X” (also known as the “Forgotten Generation”). Being one of the original “latch key kids,” I understood that my future was more influenced by the choices that I made rather than the forces outside of me. As an adult, I decided it was necessary to secure my future and that of my family regardless of what circumstances life handed me.

A long time before today, my mother and father taught me how businesses worked. Businesses had people who created and sold things that were more valuable than those items cost to create. My father was a teacher/administrator, but also owned a tutoring company. Both at his job and in his business, he taught people to read and do math, skills that would help people to provide for themselves. And my mother taught me about the magic of compound interest, what Einstein reportedly called the most powerful force in the universe.

In its most basic form, a business is an organization that creates and sells things of value. When you buy the stock of a company, you own part of the value they create over time. There is value in creating something that someone else had not yet thought to create. If you could discover, design or create something which no one had ever done before, you could add value, convenience or even joy to other people’s lives.

Create value. That is what we need to do.

We live in unprecedented times. [Cathie Wood](#) and her team at [Ark Invest](#) have published some excellent work intended to understand disruptive innovation and its consequences. The last time we had massive technological disruption, there were only three technologies introduced: telephones (long distance communication), electricity (powerful work machines and

artificial light), and combustion propulsion (planes, trains, and automobiles). Automobiles allowed the suburbs to exist. Electric light allowed people to educate themselves after the sun went down. Prior to electricity it would not have been possible for [Philo T. Farnsworth](#), a Mormon farmer, to invent television.

Now, the changes that are happening have been the result of multiple disruptive innovations overlapping. Back when he was a professor at MIT, [Ray Kurtzweil predicted](#) many of the changes that we are now seeing. Youtuber and independent financial analyst [Galileo Russell](#) describes the massive changes in his excellent book, [Hyperchange](#). At present there are at least five disruptors: AI (natural language processing and machine learning), genomics (DNA sequencing, editing), robotics and autonomous vehicles (self-driving cars, trucks, drones), fintech (the intersection of finance and technology), and additive manufacturing (3D printing).

We will not know for quite some time how this all works out.

And that is a good thing.

Here's why. One thing that has been very much misunderstood throughout human history is the ability of human beings to adapt. No one can predict how things will be because human beings are so damn unpredictable.

Sit with that for a minute.

We are collectively the X factor. The part where X, like in algebra, represents a variable of indeterminate value. We still do not know if there is a limit to what we can create.

What if we could DO more?

What if we could BE more?

Understand one thing... where we are is not where we are going to be. Ultimately we will go, for better or worse, where our energy and trajectory take us. It is easy to identify and complain about the problems in the world. It is harder to take responsibility and to do our part to make the world better. Once we decide on our destination, isn't everything else a discussion of what we work on to get there efficiently?

Let us get where we want to go. Let's create a kinder, more productive, more decent and functional world. Let's get there together.

Because of changes in the economy, my sources of income were rapidly shifting. Back when I had steadier work I learned to invest in stocks. I invested in companies that I thought created the most value. My strategy was simple. I wanted to own the companies that owned the

future. I spent much of my free time doing research to learn about the changes that were happening in the world.

When the Great Recession started in 2008 I increased the time I spent educating myself. I read articles about business, history and finance. I read every article I could find by [Morgan House](#) who's wonderful storytelling and explanation of how people behave with their money helped to unravel complex and interrelated and overlapping subjects. I also studied emerging technologies and trends, demographics and generational shifts, economics, politics, race and gender inequality, cryptocurrency... everything.

At the end of 2015, I was laid off from my full time job. Because I saw the world changing faster than many could adapt, I started a company called [Xponential Tech](#). The way I see it, well chosen and well deployed technology can create exponential value. We can put our machines and their software to work in such a way that we get more done in less time and with fewer resources. Technology can put the power for us to provide for ourselves back in our hands, empower people and organizations to be their best and, like an exponent, multiply our ability to create value. Like it says on my website, “Technology to the *power* of you.”

For my business to succeed I had to learn about pricing, sales, marketing, and social media. I discovered that other people, part of the emerging [creator economy](#), were publishing excellent work on Youtube and Twitter. For many of them it started as a side hustle. [Steven Mark Ryan](#), a self-described “Tesla Fangirl,” created a Youtube channel called [Solving the Money Problem](#) that explained his investment thesis. This channel and channels like [Now You Know](#), a highly informative channel produced by a father and his son, helped me succeed with my investment side hustle, earn more money, and, more importantly, give me more time to invest in learning, in understanding.

Investments work in multiple ways. I want to make choices that would make my family proud, honor the people who cared enough to educate, mentor or do business with me. I wanted to make good on their investment in me.

If you hate your job or see big problems in the world, try to understand why things are the way they are and then find some way to make it a bit better. It might not be possible for you to quit your job and start on a whole new path without disrupting whatever you have accomplished so far. You just need to carve out a bit of time to start a side project, define a mission with audacious goals. Make it something about which you are truly passionate, find people to help or people that can help you, and start to do what you need to get it done.

Having something on the side gives you options you might not otherwise have, it allows a low stakes way to test ideas in the real world without asking permission. If you think you do not have enough time for such a thing, consider this. While running two multi-billion dollar companies, Elon Musk [started a side hustle](#) which became [The Boring Company](#). Apple, Instagram, Craig’s List, Oculus Rift and many other companies started in one way or another as side projects. Great things can happen if you invest your time and passion into making something you imagined come into being.

Investing was my side hustle but now it is my focus.

I want to invest in people and companies that do not see things as they are, but as [they ought to be](#) and then work to create what they imagined. I want the money I invest in stocks to help great businesses grow. I want my company to help people and companies to adapt to exponential change. I want those companies to create new and better things and services, be wildly successful and profitable so they can exist for a long time. Great companies [add value to](#)

[the lives of their workers and vendors](#), [think long term](#), [protect our environment](#) and are [good citizens of the world](#). I want to invest my money, but more importantly my time and effort, in making the world a bit better. Let's all invest in a future like that.

Even if it is our side hustle.

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