

# JUGGLING ROLES

## CONTROLLING PATTERNS IN TIME AND SPACE



By SARAH TAN

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It definitely is possible to juggle different roles at the same time. Familiar to us are those who juggle their roles as parents on top of being working people (my parents are honestly the best jugglers I know), colleagues who juggle multiple roles in the organisation, and as explored in this pullout, students who juggle school and work.

Recently, I came to find out how far one can stretch themselves in terms of the latter.

Having had the opportunity to sit at the same table as Leslie Dong during a gala dinner, I had the privilege to make her acquaintance. Aptly described by someone who introduced her during the event, Dong is beauty with brains.

Not only is she the founder of a non-profit organisation called Global Student Initiative (GSI), she is also in her final year in the University of Colorado-Boulder, finishing her double degree in International Affairs and Asian Studies.

After meeting her, I immediately knew I had to interview her, and we had lovely conversation over Skype one morning (for her, it was night).

### HER-STORY

With her dad from Hong Kong, her mum from Taiwan, and she being born in the United States (US), it could be said that Dong grew up very diversely.

However, because of a predominantly white culture where she was born, she never really got a chance to be properly exposed to the Chinese culture.

This problem was dealt with when her parents one day decided to uproot the whole family and move back to China for a few years. There, Dong studied online whilst travelling China with her family.

Fully embracing her culture, Dong ended up studying Chinese language and culture in TsingHua University after completing her high school studies back in the US.

Apart from that, Dong has also studied in Peking University as an international affairs exchange student for one year.

During her time studying in China, she was involved in organising many

exchange programmes, something that came to give her an abundance of experience which she has credited to have helped her time and time again.

### GIVING BACK

After gaining so many skill sets through the exposure to various exchange programmes, Dong couldn't help but provide the same opportunities that she has been gifted to others as well.

Holding onto this passion, she pulled in all her available resources and contacts, collected from four years of being immersed in such activities, to build her own non-profit organisation.

Already up and running, GSI builds ties between Beijing, China, and Boulder and Denver, Colorado, in the US.

Dong hopes to build more ties between different states in both countries, and is looking to add another country to the list to give participants more options.

When asked about the challenges that she has to go through, Dong replies that there are many.

"Currently, I am finding ways to work with and become affiliated with the University of Colorado-Boulder. It's a lot of thinking on your feet," she revealed. "And it can be challenging to meet big names as a final year student."

On top of that, she has two honours theses to work on. Nonetheless, this does not faze Dong.

### WORDS OF WISDOM

When asked for advice to others who might be going through a hectic schedule and are trying to balance many things in one go, Dong says that it all boils down to passion.

"Find something that you're passionate about, and chase after opportunities. Be brave enough to dream big, too. If your dream doesn't scare you a little, it's not big enough," she said.

Apart from that, Dong advised young people to surround themselves with a good support system.

Sharing honestly, she said that she



Leslie Dong

initially didn't have the courage to start her own non-profit organisation and take part in planning some big events.

Having fear hold her back, she came up with many excuses. However, a push from a loved one made her come to her senses.

As she started GSI, Dong began to realise that the workload wasn't as bad as she feared.

"You learn as you go. Find others who can help you, and delegate tasks wisely. You can't do everything," she shared.

The most important factor, according to Dong, is to maintain a good attitude.

"Keep positive and be flexible. There are many things that can go wrong, but the end doesn't matter – it's the process. Give your best," she said.

### LOOKING FORWARD

On her future plans, Dong has a world of opportunities ahead of her.

Despite that, she plans to focus on GSI for now, seeing it as a full-time career.

"There's still so much room for growth and potential," she said.

She hopes to expand the pool of students she can reach and impact, and is already planning out ways to do so.

"It's overwhelming, but exciting," she enthuses, "there's a challenge every day, and I'm always pushed out of my comfort zone."

In spite of the challenges, Dong is motivated by the students she will have an impact on, and thus feels a pressure to play her part well.

She also thinks that making it a habit to push oneself out of one's comfort zone can help that person learn many things – something I wholeheartedly agree with.

### BALANCE CHECK

In the midst of all her work, Dong also admits that it is a bit of a struggle to find a proper work-life balance.

"I'm very passionate so I always give my all, but I know I'm still human and I still need to unwind," she said.

However, it's still important to have a life outside of work. On tough days, she depends on her emotional support system and talks to someone to vent out her difficulties. She also loves hiking as another method of unwinding.

"There are days where I'm scrutinised, and there are days where I receive a lot of support. It's kind of an emotional rollercoaster," she mentioned.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

I personally had such an enjoyable time speaking to Dong, and hope that I can, like her, achieve those dreams that scare me a little bit, and hold on to that passion to keep me running.

You can check out her non-profit organisation at <http://www.globalstu-dentinitiative.com/>.

■ Sarah is still in the midst of searching for her passion(s), and hopes that she's making good progress on that journey. You can tell her your dream (and she might tell you hers), at [editor@leaderonomics.com](mailto:editor@leaderonomics.com). Check out more articles at [www.leaderonomics.com](http://www.leaderonomics.com)

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