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Work and Play: Drumming and reliability

BY [NANCY COX](#) | SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

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Abstract

In the Venn diagram of work and play what happens when work and play overlap?

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Q&A with Mireya Arteaga, Lead Customer Researcher, GoDaddy

Editor's note: Nancy Cox is the founder of Research Story Consulting and former CPG corporate researcher. Her work and play include words, sketchpads, cooking (not baking) and the occasional sock puppet.

Passions, hobbies, healthy distractions and even guilty pleasures – discover how the research community plays and how that plays out in their work life. In the Venn diagram of work and play, what happens when work and play overlap? Research colleagues share their work and play stories in this interview series by Nancy Cox.

Hello to Mireya Arteaga, lead customer researcher, GoDaddy

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I play drums. I started playing drums very late in life. I'm 44 and I've been playing a little over a year. I've always admired drummers, listened to drums and wanted to play. I think parents, especially mothers, tend to over-sacrifice their own interests and hobbies. Now is the time for something just for me. And who doesn't respond to a good drumbeat? The first instruments humans played were percussion. Drums get everyone up and dancing. It's amazing to play the drums and feel the music come through me.

My dad played guitar, and I played around on his guitar, but drums are my first instrument. Learning an instrument is tough. With drums, learning the limb independence has been so incredibly challenging. I'm learning on a full kit, so I'm using every single limb with a different expectation and a different measure of success for each limb. A friend of mine said it's like patting your head while rubbing your stomach – then trying to play hopscotch at the same time.

I didn't realize how difficult it would be to hold the sticks correctly – tight enough to play but loose enough to let them rebound – and it's also challenging to learn how the sticks move in your hands. You have to let your sticks pivot in your hands rather than hold them tight like holding an ice cream cone.

My first full year, I took lessons every few weeks. I'm taking a small break at the moment. I'm learning so much, I want to take a moment to make it beautiful, not just feel like I've learned it. I'm starting lessons again soon. An in-person teacher is important; I find it easier to watch what someone does with their hands and feet, then mimic that movement. I am learning to read music as my teacher connects playing- by-observing to playing-by-reading-music.

I play all types of music but primarily surf and rock. I also like alternative music. I enjoy jazz but with the caveat that I'm not a good enough student to appreciate it as much as I could. There's so much depth to jazz.

My number one drummer has always been Ringo ... forever. When I was 8, I wrote him a letter and I got an autographed picture which I have over my kit. I appreciate Neil Peart from Rush, and Dave Grohl is another influential drummer. There's also Murph – he's the drummer for Dinosaur Jr. The drummer for The Rare Occasions, Luke Imbusch, is such an exuberant drummer. Ringo is a fantastic drummer, but he is very subtle, not very visible and obvious. Luke is forefront in all the songs and so much fun to watch live.

How has your play influenced your research work?

I see the roles of a drummer and a researcher being similar. Drummers are very steady and reliable, carrying everybody along – but a bit less visible and flashy than guitarists. Ninety percent of being a drummer is carrying the beat. Without the beat, there's nothing for the other musicians to build on. Researchers are also the steady person on the team. Consistently the voice of reason. Foundational research may not be very flashy. A researcher laying down that knowledge foundation is like the drummer laying down the beat.

Big insight: carrying and holding a beat is definitely harder than dancing to the beat!

I approach learning new research skills in a similar way to learning the drums. I want to know the exact right way to do something. I don't care how hard it is, I want to know what I should be doing. Then I can iterate on that right way to find what works for me. I

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started research in quant and now I'm doing a lot more qual work. It has involved a ton of growing pains, but learning is wonderful. I've particularly enjoyed shadowing others to listen to them do interviews and hearing how they knock it out of the park. It makes me then rethink: How do I ask that way? How do I frame a question that way?

It's such a pleasure to learn from people who are great at their craft, whether it's a researcher or a musician. Every career step and every success that I've had has been through the grace of others' kindness – educating me, pointing out what I was not doing right and referring me to opportunities. On the flip side, I try to be that mentor for the people who are junior to me.

I can't wait to be a good enough drummer to play for a crowd with other musicians. My professional musician friends tell me that's the best way to make progress – play with musicians better than you. Figure out how to work together.

What would you tell readers who want to know more about your area of play?

Learning an instrument is so fun. So humbling. So difficult. That's a lesson that I'm teaching my kids, but especially my 5-year-old. She is learning many hard skills. She sees my struggles then my successes. Recently we enjoyed listening to a busker playing the guitar wonderfully. She said, "That must have taken a lot of work to play that." I was ecstatic – that's exactly the lesson! Success is never immediate.

You don't have to buy an instrument to start. I played for six months in lessons on my teacher's kit to determine my commitment. Then I bought a full acoustic, non-electric kit. I went acoustic as I wanted to experience the resistance, the different pressures. You can buy less expensive used kits. I've learned the classic drummer's advice is true: you can buy a less expensive kit, but invest in high-quality cymbals.

I drum daily in 10- to 15-minute breaks during the workday. On the weekends, I drum several hours. It adds up to about 10 hours or more a week. It is a commitment. Professional musicians – they practice all day every day.

Being a market researcher has given me a pretty thick skin. Sometimes things don't go well. Interviews go terribly. People calling you names in open ends! You learn to keep going despite what feels like failure. I carry that over as I learn to play something right. I laugh at myself. Plus, the drums are great – they never call you names!



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