

2017 BEATING THE ODDS ROADTRIP: REPORT OF FINDINGS

Becky L. Bobek, PhD | Joyce Yile Zhou, PhD



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Becky L. Bobek, PhD

Becky Bobek is director of the Learning, Assessment, and Navigation Experiences Research department, where she supports the scientific understanding of conditions and processes that influence people's education and work experiences. With a research and practitioner background, her work focuses on how people navigate their education and career transitions successfully – what individuals know about themselves and their environments, and how they use this information to make informed decisions, plan actions, and move along their different paths.

Joyce Yile Zhou, PhD

Yile (Joyce) Zhou is a research scientist I in the Learning, Assessment and Navigation Experiences team at ACT. Her research interests include K-12 learning experiences and young people's education/career navigation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017 Beating the Odds Roadtrip, initiated by Roadtrip Nation, provided three underserved students (roadtrippers) with an opportunity to travel across the U.S. and interview 16 inspiring professionals (leaders) about their lives, their challenges, and how they were able to achieve education and career success. Thematic qualitative analysis was conducted with the interview data from leaders and roadtrippers. This report shares findings and insights from the roadtrip.

The purpose of this report is 1) to draw attention to the conditions and obstacles that may influence the education and career trajectories of underserved youth, 2) to unpack the factors and actions that support beating the odds and navigating education and career paths effectively, and 3) to offer recommendations for important stakeholders who can help young people achieve their education and career goals.

Findings from the interviews are reported in four sections:

- **Common Conditions and Roadtripper Themes** – A wide range of challenges experienced by the leaders and roadtrippers are summarized, including negative events/environments, personal influences, the influence of others, and finances. Common themes that shed light on how the roadtrippers' backgrounds shaped them and their aspirations include Goals, Supports, Experiences, Self-Concept, Role Models, Interests/Passions, and System Influences.
- **Beating the Odds** – Based on the leaders' stories, multiple factors (Interests/Passions, Goals, Fit, Experiences, Role Models, Supports) contributed to their beating the odds. These are supplemented with specific behavioral or cognitive actions that the leaders initiated to help them navigate their education and career paths. These actions were grouped into the following categories: College & Career Planning, Coping Behaviors, Mindsets, and Building Self.
- **Roadtrip Insights** – Post-roadtrip interviews with roadtrippers revealed insights related to Attitude, Awareness, Expectations, Supports, Self-Concept, and Confidence. Connections between leaders' stories and roadtripper insights are highlighted.
- **Advice** – The leaders and the roadtrippers offer advice to young people about beating the odds and achieving education and career success.

This report also offers recommendations to different stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians, teachers/counselors/other educators and advisors, and policymakers) on how to support young people toward navigating their education and career paths successfully.




April 2019

For underserved students and their communities, college and career navigation is a critical step toward future success. In 2017, ACT's Center for Equity in Learning, with advisory support from Better Make Room, fueled the Roadtrip Nation Beating the Odds Roadtrip, which followed three young people as they journeyed across the country, speaking to leaders who overcame challenges and defined their own paths to success. This report takes a closer look at that experience, and details findings and insights from the 2017 Beating the Odds Roadtrip.

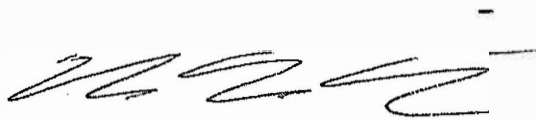
This partnership project supports our mutual goal to empower underserved youth in exploring and discovering personal education and career pathways that will help them achieve success. The data in this report indicate strong connections between the factors and actions leading to the leaders' success and the roadtrippers' insights related to their attitudes, awareness, expectations, supports, self-concept, and confidence. These connections suggest that the Beating the Odds Roadtrip was a positive influence on the roadtrippers.

These qualitative findings lay the groundwork for further understanding the factors and actions that support beating the odds in pursuit of education and career success. Insights collected from this work also highlight how parents and families, teachers, counselors, advisors, and policymakers can support young people in their efforts to navigate education and career paths.

Through this unique and innovative partnership between ACT's Center for Equity in Learning and Roadtrip Nation, and driven by our similar missions and values, we believe this research provides greater insights on what works in educating and addressing the needs of underserved students. And we hope it can be used to empower students as they encounter and surpass obstacles, and triumph on the path to college and career success.



Jim Larimore
Chief Officer
ACT's Center for Equity in Learning



Mike Marriner
President
Roadtrip Nation

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	1
BEATING THE ODDS ROADTRIP	2
LEADERS	2
ROADTRIPPERS	2
FINDINGS	3
PART 1. COMMON CONDITIONS AND ROADTRIPPER THEMES	3
PART 2. BEATING THE ODDS	14
PART 3. ROADTRIP INSIGHTS	28
PART 4. ADVICE	37
RECOMMENDATIONS	38
PARENTS/GUARDIANS	38
TEACHERS/COUNSELORS/OTHER EDUCATORS AND ADVISORS	38
POLICYMAKERS	39
APPENDIX	40
METHODOLOGY	40
NOTES	41

2017 Beating the Odds Roadtrip: Report of Findings

Becky L. Bobek, PhD | Joyce Yile Zhou, PhD

Introduction

This report describes findings and insights from the 2017 Beating the Odds Roadtrip, an opportunity for underserved students to meet and interview inspiring leaders across the United States who overcame challenges and defined their own paths to success. In partnership with Roadtrip Nation, ACT, and the Better Make Room advisory panel, this initiative supports the goal of empowering underserved youth to explore and discover personal education and career pathways that will help them achieve success.

Together, these qualitative findings lay the groundwork for further understanding the factors and actions that support beating the odds to achieve education and career success. Insights from this work also highlight how parents/guardians, teachers/counselors/other educators and advisors, and policymakers can support young people in their efforts to navigate education and career paths.

Background

Navigating education and career paths presents young people with many choices and challenges. Some make choices that result in satisfying lives and successful careers, while others struggle to set a course of action that allows them to fulfil their potential. Underserved youth are particularly vulnerable to the challenges that can interfere with navigating their paths effectively.¹ At the same time, individuals who struggle with overcoming obstacles and developing informed goals or action plans are able to succeed and realize the benefits. Elements that promote resilience and education and career navigation success among underserved youth include maintaining high educational aspirations, being hopeful and confident in one's abilities, obtaining adult support and encouragement, persevering, and staying motivated and optimistic.²

Individuals who develop the knowledge and skills to be successful at navigating their education and career paths can:



— Expand their education and career opportunities³



— Decide on education and career options that better fit them⁴



— Enhance their motivation to learn and achieve⁵



— Experience more positive school and work outcomes⁶

Opportunities to build knowledge and skills for navigational success include experiences that support 1) learning more about oneself and the environment, 2) using this information to make informed choices and plans, and 3) optimizing resources to help move along education and career paths.⁷

The Beating the Odds Roadtrip is a real-world opportunity to develop and refine some of these skills.

Beating the Odds Roadtrip

For nearly two decades, Roadtrip Nation initiatives have created inspirational learning opportunities for students. One such initiative involves identifying a particular theme and recruiting students who identify with that theme to participate in a road trip that includes interviews with leaders who exemplify the designated theme. Roadtrip Nation works with the selected students to plan their trip, coach them on interviews, and ride along to facilitate the experience.

In summer 2017, the theme was Beating the Odds, and three underserved youth (roadtrippers) began a journey that took them across the country from New York to California in an RV. Along the way, the roadtrippers interviewed inspiring professionals (leaders) who overcame past obstacles and achieved education and career success. The experiences of these roadtrippers and the stories of successful leaders are designed to help underserved young people 1) gain insights into how they can beat the odds, and 2) recognize that they too have the opportunity to achieve education and career success.

Leaders

The roadtrippers interviewed 16 leaders (eight male and eight female). All of the leaders held college degrees, and more than one-third (38%) went on to graduate school. The leaders worked in different industries such as media, education, and government. Nearly one-half (44%) worked in or collaborated with government, supporting the Obama administration and/or advancing policy. Over one-third (38%) founded organizations or programs in order to achieve their career goals. The life challenges experienced by these leaders motivated them to help others in similar situations. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the leaders actively advocated for minority or underserved groups, or mentored others towards achieving education and career success. During the leader interviews, the roadtrippers asked leaders a variety of questions they developed themselves, and participated in insightful conversations with this diverse group of inspiring professionals who shared life lessons and empowering experiences.

Roadtrippers

The three roadtrippers selected for the Beating the Odds Roadtrip were two females and one male from New York, Wisconsin, and West Virginia, respectively. They are in college or college-bound and pursuing studies in acting, political science, elementary education, and theater. Each of the roadtrippers experienced life challenges from an early age.



The roadtrippers were nervous and excited about the Roadtrip. There was trepidation around being with people they didn't know very well and living in the RV environment, along with the unknowns of the trip. At the same time, the roadtrippers were looking forward to what they would see, do, and learn, as well as the desire to be inspired by the leaders whose stories they were going to hear.

The roadtrippers were interviewed by Roadtrip Nation staff prior to the roadtrip about their backgrounds and perceptions, and after the roadtrip about how the experience influenced them and what they learned. The word cloud to the right highlights the wide range of topics identified during the pre- and post- interviews. For the pre-interviews, the roadtrippers emphasized the role of experience, the impact of environment, and the importance of shaping their identities (represented by larger words). Supports and barriers also received considerable attention. For the post-interviews, the roadtrippers focused extensively on what they learned and their expectations. These, and other topics, will be described in greater depth in the findings.



Findings

Part 1. Common Conditions and Roadtripper Themes

Common Conditions

The leaders and roadtrippers experienced a wide range of challenges that made it difficult to develop and move forward along their education and career pathways. There were a number of shared challenges among both leaders and roadtrippers. Leader challenges are summarized below, and the roadtrippers' points of view are captured through interview excerpts. There were four types of shared challenges, listed below.

Shared Leader & Roadtripper Challenges



The leaders experienced two or more of these challenges at the same time. Between 88 percent and 94 percent of leaders faced challenges involving negative events, personal or internal influences, and the influence of others. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the leaders dealt with financial issues. All three roadtrippers experienced these types of challenges.

Negative Events/Environments

Over two-thirds (69%) of leaders reported childhood adversities that negatively influenced them, resulting in pain, trauma, and hopelessness. Nearly two-thirds (63%) experienced absent parents due to abandonment, divorce, drugs, chronic lack of care and involvement, and other reasons. More than one-third (38%) of leaders reported being abused by family members or adults in foster care. Additional negative events reported by 63% of leaders were unpredictable, such as war and death of family members or friends, which led to strong emotions and greater instability. Compromising environments were also reported by 63% of leaders, including living in dangerous neighborhoods with gangs, drugs, and crime, and moving to new locations with markedly different cultures and lifestyles. These environments prompted feelings of insecurity and a lack of support.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Negative Events/Environments

Absent parents, abuse, parent death, and navigating compromising environments characterized some of the adversities experienced by the roadtrippers.

- Roadtripper 1 reported that his parents were “getting into drugs pretty bad.” His dad “was in and out of jail” and his mom “was arrested on my 15th birthday.” He went on to share that his dad “died from drug overdose complications” when he was 16.
- Roadtripper 2 indicated that her “biological parents are both drug addicts, drug dealers, alcoholics, and both of us dealt with physical abuse, and me sexual abuse...” She went on to say that “what we knew as family...is we get hit all the time like it's normal.”
- Roadtripper 3 reported that “mom would be working a lot, sometimes, she wouldn't even be home.” When entering a challenging school environment, this roadtripper tried to adapt by “...doing the things that they [students] were doing...and doing the same drugs and wearing the same things, and kind of thinking the same way.”

Personal Influences

The leaders also experienced personal or internal difficulties. Half (50%) of the leaders reported low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and low self-expectations. Due to their negative life conditions, these leaders did not believe in themselves. They were not confident that they could reach their goals or that they deserved a bright future, and 44% of leaders indicated that they had insecurities. They felt unsafe about their environments, and it was difficult for them to trust others. Over one-third (38%) of leaders were confused or internally conflicted about their identities. Entering new environments with people from different cultures and ethnicities was commonly associated with their internal identity conflicts. More than two-thirds (69%) of leaders expressed feelings of inferiority, not being equal to others, or being different from others at school, work, and in their communities.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Personal Influences

The roadtrippers were confronted by personal influences related to self-esteem, confidence, and identity conflict.

- Roadtripper 1 stated that “being gay in West Virginia is a tough thing. And it’s tough to accept yourself and to deal with.” This was particularly difficult when he “started thinking about why I was so different” from those around him.
- Roadtripper 2 shared that starting in middle school she began “dealing with low self-esteem” and “...I was blaming on myself...” for what had happened in her past.
- Roadtripper 3 reported that “I was so unsure” and “What’s stopping me? ...myself, and my denial, and my insecurities,” when considering whether she could be successful pursuing her career.

Influence of Others

The leaders mentioned social pressure from other people around them as a negative influence. Over three-quarters (81%) experienced discrimination and prejudice from others because of their ethnicity, gender, religion, or disability. This occurred in many different environments interacting with people at school, in the workplace, and with the broader public. At times, discriminatory and prejudicial behaviors were not directed toward them, but to their families or friends. Leaders experienced a strong, negative influence as they witnessed the unfair treatment of others. In addition, the leaders’ abilities were underestimated due to their personal attributes. Half (50%) of the leaders reported that other people did not believe they were able to accomplish tasks at work or in school simply because they belonged to a particular ethnic or gender group. Further, more than a third (38%) of leaders received negative comments when they announced their education or career choices because others appeared to have biased expectations about their abilities.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Influence of Others

Others influenced roadtripper perceptions related to abilities, sexual identity, and race.

- Roadtripper 1 put it like this: “I mean, think about close-mindedness...hearing my cousins say things that are drilled into you from the time that you’re little...You having that negative reinforcement even from such a young age. You know your family doesn’t want you to be gay.”
- Roadtripper 2 reported that “my skin color was something that affected the way I was viewed, especially being at a predominantly white public school. I already had judgment thrown on me just by walking into the building.” She also pointed out how others tried to influence her perception of her abilities: “...people have told me a lot, ‘Oh, at this point it’s useless, or At this point you’re not going to graduate,’ or, ‘At this point there’s no way you’re going to catch up with the rest of the students.’”
- Roadtripper 3 stated that “there will be people who will tell you that you can’t or will tell you that you shouldn’t” when trying to pursue her goals.

Finances

Financial issues were a significant challenge for the leaders. Family poverty was common, stemming from parents' lack of education, immigration to new countries, or lack of work opportunities. Leaders reported that family poverty resulted in a lack of money for necessities such as shelter, water and food, as well as for education. Later in life, financial challenges revolved around having family responsibilities and parenthood, which introduced new financial burdens for some of the leaders. Some leaders worked and went to school at the same time so that they could earn enough money to support their family and to afford their education.

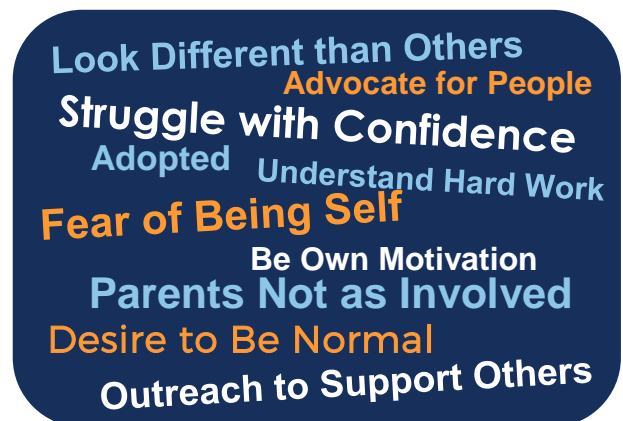
Roadtrippers' Points of View – Finances

The roadtrippers experienced financial issues related to basic necessities, college, and efforts to pursue interests.

- Roadtripper 1 acknowledged that, "We did not come from money. We were low income, and I didn't know if I was going to be able to get to college."
- Roadtripper 2 remarked that "...we were constantly moving place to place and never really staying in one area because we couldn't afford rent sometimes."
- Roadtripper 3 was limited in her ability to pursue her interests in dancing and playing the guitar because it was "inconvenient financially" and "I didn't have, you know, money for lessons." She also mentioned that "...things can get really hard, especially right now financially I have to pay for all of these loans that I took out from my one year at Pace [University]."

Important leader characteristics that roadtrippers relate to...

Efforts were taken to identify leaders with similarities to the roadtrippers. Characteristics that roadtrippers identified as particularly relevant to their own personal stories are highlighted in the word cloud. You will notice that some of these overlap with the leader challenges (e.g., struggle with confidence, look different than others). Other characteristics refer to shared expectations around advocating for and supporting others. Additionally, roadtrippers thought hard work and motivating oneself characterized themselves and the leaders.



Roadtripper Themes

Prior to the Beating the Odds Roadtrip, interviews with the roadtrippers revealed a number of common themes that further shed light on how their backgrounds shaped them and their aspirations. The seven themes described below were identified using thematic qualitative text analysis (see Appendix for additional information on methodology). In the following figure, the larger bubbles represent themes with higher frequencies of relevant text, and smaller bubbles represent themes with fewer relevant text segments. Goals, Supports, and Experiences are the most predominant themes, followed by Self-Concept. While Role Models, Interests/Passions, and System Influence are lesser themes, they are still important themes that reflect the roadtrippers. Each of these themes are summarized below and include the roadtrippers' points of view from interview excerpts.

Goals

The roadtrippers discussed both education and career goals during their interviews. They recognized the importance of college as a way to move beyond existing circumstances and achieve future aspirations. Being encouraged by their mothers, two of the roadtrippers had intended to go to college from an early age. The roadtrippers worked hard to be able to get to college and had clearly determined what they wanted to study. Their commitment to specific majors was also aligned with their aspiring career choices. Moreover, the roadtrippers communicated a broader purpose when talking about their education or career goals. These goals went beyond finding a job; they were viewed as a means by which to help others, advocate for others, and give back to the community. Each of the roadtrippers were actively taking steps (e.g., enrolled in online courses, changing schools) to turn their aspirational education and career thoughts into reality.



Roadtrippers' Points of View – Goals

- Roadtripper 1 shared that his mother told him, “College is the only way that you’re going to get out of this.” Later he commented that, “I wanted college more than anything in my life. And I got it, and it’s the best decision I’ve ever made.” He also stated, “...I want to get into politics...I would love to represent West Virginia as a Senator...I think that I would be able to fight for poor people, or people that are underrepresented. I feel that I could do that well...I’m going to have to be able to have a job that I respect myself for and feel that I’m making a difference.”

- Roadtripper 2 commented, “I have plans and I have goals and I have people that I want to change...” She indicated that she wanted to pursue “studies with elementary education and drama.” She saw herself “being a positive influence in a child’s life.” “I can just see myself doing really well with kids...an awesome elementary school teacher and I can see that.” “...I can maybe even be like an elementary school teacher and teach whatever grade that I can and during the summer time do community theater or help out at the public school’s theater.”
- Roadtripper 3 stated that, “I have to go to college [to study acting].” “I needed to be a performer. I needed to act so I pursued acting...If I had to work at a restaurant for the rest of my life while I had to pursue this [acting] I would be happy.” She also remarked that, “I would like to help people through art because art helped me...It gave me purpose, direction...[and] give students the chance to become artists who may not have that chance...”

Supports

The roadtrippers emphasized different people who provided emotional (e.g., positive reinforcement) and instrumental (e.g., specific knowledge or skills) support as they coped with their circumstances and discovered education and career pathways. Roadtrippers considered family, friends, and professionals (teachers, mental health providers) particularly helpful. In addition to providing for basic needs, family members provided encouragement and reinforced their pursuit of desired school and career-related activities. Family members also motivated the roadtrippers by expressing pride in their efforts, which subsequently led roadtrippers to want to make their families proud. Teachers and other professionals provided encouragement, opportunities for growth, and assistance with academic and personal issues.

Roadtrippers’ Points of View – Supports

- Roadtripper 1 remarked that, “My friends are going to be super supportive. I know because you choose your friends.” He was also motivated by family pride when he reflected that, “...my mom and my grandma, they get proud that I’m in college...”
- Roadtripper 2 extensively reported on the support of her family in that, “We were loved and nurtured. We were told that we were loved and cared about...and who’s willing to bring you in at your worst and keep you together, and make sure you’re on the right path to success.” “My siblings...are cheering me on.” “My parents keep me going. I wasn’t quite sure what was telling me that I can do it besides the fact that I had other people saying I could do it...” “...people that were able to tell me like you don’t have to deal with this necessarily on your own and you can use us as a resource or as your support system, which is super great.”
- Roadtripper 3 was encouraged by her family to go to college, “I’m going to go to school because that’s what she [mom] wants me to do. She wants me to do the things she’s never done.” Roadtripper 3 also reported on how a teacher supported her: “We [her and a friend] would perform at our middle school because of one of our really good teachers who helped us out and believed in us pretty much. One of the few teachers who did believe in us...”

Experiences

While the roadtrippers' experiences illuminate the challenges (e.g., death of parent, abusive conditions) identified earlier in this report, other experiences had a positive influence on the roadtrippers. Positive experiences helped to compensate for their negative experiences. Additionally, the roadtrippers' experiences encouraged them to cultivate adaptive behaviors (e.g., the ability to act differently in different places) and to be more thoughtful and reflective about what they had learned from their experiences. Furthermore, the roadtrippers' experiences allowed for opportunities to engage in activities that helped them to gain relevant knowledge and skills and reinforced their future career-related interests. These experiences helped to focus their education and career direction.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Experiences

- Roadtripper 1 remarked on his experiences, "I didn't have such a great home life, so I made school the best that it could possibly be...School was a way for me to get away from everything and keep myself focused and on track." "I was on homecoming court and I ended up getting prom king, and I was National Honor Society president and senior class president and captain of the geography ball." He also reflected that, "...one of the hardest things for me growing up here has been seeing a lot of the close-mindedness. Just some of the things people may say or believe...It just makes no sense to me... maybe if I pose a question differently or if I make people think about something, then we can break the close-mindedness. We can grow from that and move into a better direction."
- Roadtripper 2 reported on her career-related experiences since middle school, "I was cast for my very first professional show." "If I wanted to do this [theater] as a career...I should do online schooling, [so I did]." "I've been doing theater ever since seventh grade." She also commented on her experiences with teachers and children: "...a lot of where I am today is because of the elementary school teachers that I worked with individually that helped me overcome a lot of those learning disabilities and a lot of those barriers that I had. I want to be like that in a child's life, and that's the best way that I can do it. And then also having little siblings from various locations and lifestyles and knowing that no matter if they're here for a day or here for the rest of their life, I can still be some sort of light." "I just like being there for them [siblings]...I just make up all these games and they love it."
- Roadtripper 3 experienced an organization called Urban Art Beat and reported that, "...they get kids out of the streets, they get their anger, frustration, happiness, everything they're going through and feeling, and it gives them a place to get up there and turn it into poetry, and turn it into hip hop, and turn it into whatever it is. For me, it was singing and playing my guitar." She also remarked on early career-related experiences: "In middle school, though, that's when things started to like happen and I started to become who I am now. That's when that shift happened because I decided to learn how to play the guitar." "I would sing everywhere, and then I did choir and I actually learned how to read music...I loved singing in a group." During high school, "I performed...shows at my school, the coffee houses...I started auditioning for plays...I started helping out in the theater department."

Self-Concept

The roadtrippers focused on the process of becoming, expressing, and understanding themselves during the interviews. While they described different aspects of the characteristics that defined each of them, they recognized that the Beating the Odds Roadtrip was an opportunity to learn even more about who they were and who they wanted to be. The roadtrippers sought to find and figure themselves out. The roadtrippers also connected knowing who you are to happiness, recognizing the importance of self for achieving desired positive states of emotion. Further, the roadtrippers were able to put into perspective where they were at the time of the interviews, acknowledging they were works in progress, and the need to keep moving forward in their journey toward being themselves.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Self-Concept

- Roadtripper 1 commented that the roadtrip was an "...opportunity [that] is making me face the things that could have went 10 years down the road being somebody else. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be somebody else. I want to be the best version of myself possible. And I want to be happy, and part of being happy is being comfortable with who I am, and being completely accepting of who I am..." "I'm not only getting to go across the country, I'm getting a chance to find myself in the process...I don't have to hide. I don't have to pretend."
- Roadtripper 2 remarked that she was, "Figuring out who I am and dealing with a lot of that trauma...and accepting all that stuff...I'm at this point where it's like that's just what it is and that's who you are..." "My skin color affected who I was and the way that I was viewed...that is just something I always have to deal with and not necessarily something I can avoid. But, everyday I'm learning to accept that..."
- Roadtripper 3 reported that, "...when I finally got an opportunity to express myself...that was kind of like my first, like dipping my toes into who I was and who I was as an artist and who I could be. Who I didn't know I could be until then." She also reflected on herself: "Like I said, in times of doubt, sit down with yourself, remind yourself of who you are, why you started...You know that slow progress of what really makes me happy."

Role Models

The roadtrippers looked to different people as role models for different reasons. The roadtrippers primarily identified family members as role models and sometimes students at school. Role models served two important functions for the roadtrippers—to reinforce ways in which the roadtrippers wanted to be in their own lives, and to help roadtrippers learn ways that they did not want to be going forward. The roadtrippers cited parental behaviors when describing positive role models. Two roadtrippers pointed to sibling behaviors that they wanted to avoid when referring to negative role models.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Role Models

- Roadtripper 1 saw his mother as a positive role model: "My mom, she ended up graduating high school even after she had me." "I couldn't be more proud of the steps she's taken. To see her from getting arrested on my 15th birthday to applying to be a recovery coach. That is something incredible." He also stated that, "I didn't want to do all the things that he [brother] wanted to do [break things]."
- Roadtripper 2 thought highly of her parents given their upbringing: "My mom had an abusive father and alcoholic parents, and that didn't end well for her, and here she is now opening her home to whoever may need. And my dad was poor, and did necessarily have all these things that we have, but they're just bringing the best out in each other in different ways, and it's awesome to see that."
- Roadtripper 3 conveyed appreciation for her mother's sacrifice and hard work in that, "She [mom] did the best with what she had...she made the best of it." She also commented, "I learned from him [brother as a thug] what I didn't want to be...I didn't want to be like that."

Interests/Passions

The roadtrippers referred to personal attributes, particularly interests and passions, that contributed to their thoughts, decisions, and behaviors. When describing school, kids, and acting, respectively, the roadtrippers were passionate about the subject and what it meant to them. They pointed out a "love" for their planned career directions. The roadtrippers expressed the desire to engage in activities that would allow them to pursue what they wanted to do. The roadtrippers' interests and passions not only propelled them forward, but kept them motivated during difficult times.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Interests/Passions

- Roadtripper 1 stated that, "I loved high school...I loved it." He also remarked, "I wanted to learn about something, be engaged in something, and be around people...I like being around people. I like having interactions."
- Roadtripper 2 commented that, "I'm taking two of my passions and putting them into one...I've always had a passion for kids, and I've always had a passion for theater." As an aspiring elementary school teacher, "I think my interest is definitely somewhere in an inner city school because I've noticed that that's where the need is."
- Roadtripper 3 reported, "I loved it [acting], I loved every second, but it was hard. And that's the thing, it's never going to stop being hard. You just have to do it and remember why you're doing it, and love it at the same time, you know. Once you stop loving it, you should just stop and do something else." "I found what I love, you know, and I want to do that for other people."

System Influence

The roadtrippers highlighted how systems can affect young people. The three roadtrippers described their interactions with the justice system, the foster care system, and the school system, respectively. The interactions between roadtrippers and these systems had a profound influence on their lives. Two roadtrippers recognized that jumping through hoops was part of the justice and foster care systems with their rules and bureaucratic structure, respectively. The roadtrippers also pointed out conditions across the three systems that compromised relationships, development, or learning. These included interacting with a parent through glass barriers, being moved from foster home to foster home without receiving appropriate care, and being in a system challenged by unmotivated students and uncaring teachers.

Roadtrippers' Points of View – System Influence

- Roadtripper 1 recalled, "I have a memory of going to visit him [dad] in jail and going through everything. There was such a hassle to get my birth certificate and my social security card because you have to have all these forms of ID to get into the jail." "I remember the first time you see him through the glass...and they look so different when they're behind the glass. It's not them." "...dad was in and out of jail...there was never a time that he was going to obey the law really." "I went and seen my dad multiple times." "It's rough."
- Roadtripper 2 commented, "And then there was some issue with paperwork, and they ended up having to restart the adoption process...we are back in the system and stuff like that." "...there's [also] people that believe you shouldn't be adopted by white parents." "There's not many positive outcomes that come with being in and out of the foster care system. A lot of times people age out of this system and then they don't end up having a forever home...Foster care is a hard system." "But I think it's important that people get the message of why foster care is important."
- Roadtripper 3 reported that in the school, there was "a lot of negativity and a lot of apathy from all directions...the majority was just people who didn't care about school...didn't really have ambition for anything to get good grades or to do well...there were a lot of people who were on their own." "And, it gets to a point where these teachers don't know what to do anymore, that they just stop caring, you know. It's overwhelming sometimes...sometimes I feel like they give up and don't care because they don't have any other choice."



Summary – Common Conditions & Roadtripper Themes

Both the leaders and the roadtrippers faced challenges as they navigated their education and career pathways, including negative events/environments, personal influences, the influence of others, and financial difficulties. It was a common phenomenon for the leaders and roadtrippers to experience and overcome a number of adversities. Drawing from interviews about their backgrounds and perceptions, all of the roadtrippers had education and career goals, were motivated by interests and passions, and seized the Beating the Odds Roadtrip as an opportunity to learn more about themselves. They emphasized the importance of supports, role models, and positive experiences. The roadtrippers also highlighted the challenges of interacting with different systems (the justice system, the foster care system, and the school system) during their lives.

Part 2. Beating the Odds

Roadtripper perceptions of beating the odds...

Prior to taking the Roadtrip, the roadtrippers were asked what it means to beat the odds. The word cloud to the right highlights their thoughts. You will note that the roadtrippers conveyed the idea of overcoming or dealing with obstacles multiple times. They also pointed out that having purpose, being able to do your best, and that you keep trying were signals for beating the odds.

Use Obstacles to Equip for Future
 Having Purpose
 Overcome What's in the Way
 Fighting Against Things
 Dealing with Obstacles
 Persisting or Keep Trying
 Not Being Stopped
 Doing Best with What You've Got

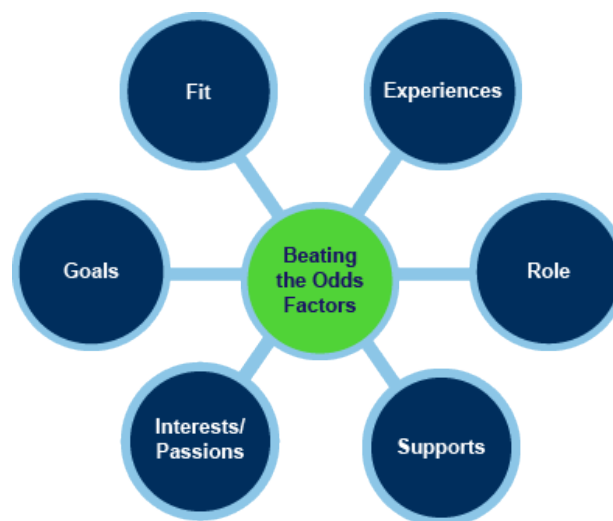
Leaders – Factors Contributing to Beating the Odds

Based on the leaders' stories of beating the odds, six thematic factors were identified: Interests & Passions, Goals, Fit, Experiences, Role Models, and Supports. These factors were important as the leaders progressed along their education and career pathways, and they contributed to their eventual success.

Interests & Passions

Interests and passions were a driving force for the leaders, influencing their choices and pursuit of education and career goals. Three-quarters (75%) of the leaders mentioned how important it was for them to realize their passions, which translated into intrinsic motivation for them to overcome struggles and keep moving forward. During difficult times, their passions gave them hope and reminded them of their expectations for the future. Additionally, the leaders used their education- and career-related opportunities to further reinforce their interests as they applied relevant skills and increased their confidence, which contributed to their success. Research has shown that interest in specific occupations is related to higher expectations for achieving later success.⁸

Beating the Odds Contributing Factors



"It's been a seven-year journey, and when I started out and over the past seven years, I cannot tell you how many times I thought that I would never get on that podium ... but I continued to follow my passion and continued to say, 'this is what I love to do. This is my dream.'"

"All my friends were trying to go to like the White House or go to Health and Human Services or go to the Department of Treasury ... I really would like to go to the Department of Education, I care about education, I have a master's, I was a teacher. And I think most people thought I was crazy, they were like, 'You worked so hard. Don't you want to go work at the White House?' And I said, 'Well, you know, I'm actually passionate about this.'"

Goals

Setting goals leads to better results. Research shows that having clear goals promotes career exploration and planning related to these goals.⁹ The closer the leaders got to their goals, the farther away they were from the influence of their negative conditions. Common education goals were related to whether to go to college, choice of major, and whether to go to graduate school. Common career goals were related to choice of occupation and whether to work for a specific organization or in a particular workplace. Most (93%) of the leaders also had goals inspired by purpose, such as advocating for minority or underrepresented groups, helping people in similar situations, and making a difference in the world. In addition to these education and career goals, there were leaders who had a performance goal orientation. They wanted to be respected, instill pride in others, or to prove others wrong through achieving their goals. These diverse goals guided leaders to be planful, and motivated them to engage in productive education and career-relevant activities.

"There was always a desire for me to get an education because no one in my family had gone to college."

"I had to turn my life around to do what I wanted to do. And what I wanted to do was be in this world of media. To me, that was always important."

"I have to prove them wrong... I wanted the respect from my acting teacher and my classmates."

Fit

Fit refers to the degree of similarity or compatibility between leaders' personal characteristics and environmental characteristics.⁶ Leaders' perceived fit with their environments and their work opportunities affected their attitudes, motivations, and subsequent persistence. When leaders perceived that they had a good fit job or a good fit organization, they typically had a more positive attitude towards work-related challenges. Greater fit was also associated with greater commitment, performance, and satisfaction. This is reinforced by research showing that better fit contributes to higher levels of organizational commitment, job performance, and job satisfaction.¹⁰ When leaders felt that they were not in good fit environments, or at a job that did not match their passion or potential, their reactions were more negative. It was less likely for leaders in situations lacking good fit to keep moving forward. Instead, they tended to find alternative ways to pursue their goals. Perceived fit then functioned as a guideline, providing feedback about whether leaders should stay on their existing paths or deviate and pursue options that would better support their education and career goals.

"I was working for a refugee organization that resettles refugees in America, and my job was to tell their stories and I'm like, 'how perfect is this?' This is something that I really would want to do. So I was there for a few years, it even turned out that organization, I didn't even know, but it was the headquarters of a smaller organization that resettled me and my family to America. So I was like, oh, this is where I'm meant to be."

"Like I was doing very well financially...But at the same time, you feel like this is not your full potential. And so I couldn't be seen by legit casting directors or legit anybody- legit meaning theatre and television, and film."

Experiences

Although each leader had different experiences, there were still commonalities among them. A number of leaders engaged in counterproductive behaviors early in their lives, such as dropping out of school, fighting with others, and doing drugs. Others experienced failures in education or career. Additional experiences included moving to a new country or a new city, or entering new education systems. There were leaders who had life-altering experiences that suddenly changed their education and career pathways. No matter what the experiences, leaders stressed the critical role of having experiences to prepare for beating the odds. They viewed experiences as important learning tools. Experiences are very important for learning, as learning is a continuous process grounded in experience, and knowledge is derived from and tested out in these experiences.¹¹ As a result of their experiences, leaders gained knowledge, skills, and attitudes about education and work. They tested out different options in their experiences and figured out what they really wanted to do, as well as what was going to be the best fit for them. Leaders developed connections with others during their experiences and were able to cultivate support systems. Experiences also helped the leaders learn about themselves and shape their identities. They reflected on their experiences, which increased their understanding of who they were, what they could do, and what they could become.

"It was a long journey, but I-I would say it's a powerful one. It's one that I'm really leveraging a lot more today as I see a lot more challenges out there, when I'm engaging with people, it helps me to come from a place of understanding. I think more than what it would have if I didn't have those experiences."

"And when I say I wouldn't be who I am and where I am had that stuff not happened to me, I really mean that. That changed me."

Role Models

Three-quarters (75%) of the leaders mentioned that they had at least one role model during their education and career journey. These role models included family members, people who experienced similar circumstances as they did, professionals in their field, and celebrities. Role models tend to be selected based on their similarity to oneself and the desire to increase that similarity by behaving and being more like these models.¹² By observing role models, the leaders learned important skills needed for college and career planning, as well as behaviors to cope with challenges. Role models also helped the leaders to develop positive attitudes towards work and specific mindsets for overcoming obstacles. Further, the success of role models inspired hope and increased confidence among the leaders; the leaders thought they might also be able to succeed. It has been shown that observing role models succeed increases individual perceived self-efficacy.¹³

"I remember being a kid and seeing my mom clean, and my aunt and my grandmother clean home... and so, seeing them work so hard, I think instilled a lot of kind of a good work ethic in me."

"There are a number of positions I've held where I was the first woman, but I can't say I was the first wave. But I can say that I knew the first wave. I knew those women, and I really saw what they overcame, and I developed a great deal of respect for people who were able to pioneer for the rest of us."

Supports

Research indicates that supports empower individuals to overcome perceived barriers and lead to positive career outcomes.⁶ Contextual supports had a positive influence on the leaders' education and career pursuits. The leaders pointed out different types of supports. Family, peers, and friends were resources that the leaders could access when they needed help with education and career decisions, as well as for emotional support during their journey. Three-quarters (75%) of the leaders reported that family was their primary support. Mentors supported leaders by providing advice, guidance, and encouragement, which promoted their exploration and planning behaviors and increased their self-confidence. Perceptions of support help when translating interests into goals and goals into actions and promoting a variety of career and academic outcomes.¹⁴ Community organizations, programs, and schools supported leaders with limited family support by offering safe and inclusive places to be, which helped them be more positive about dealing with difficulties. The leaders also emphasized the importance of building up support systems for themselves. When supports were not immediately available, leaders actively sought out people who could function as safety nets, because they realized it was impossible for them to beat the odds alone.

"Growing up there, no running water, no electricity, it was about seven, eight of us in this little one room, shanty kind of house we had. But thankfully, though, my grandparents were living here in the States, so every now and then they would send us some food, which meant a lot to us."

"I confided in some really close friends that just knew, I guess, came from similar backgrounds...they could say, 'I'm here for you and you know I think that you need to understand that you're a good person--and you do wanna do good in this life.'...And at that lowest time in my life, it was those individuals that really helped me understand that I can be loved like I can love myself, and that's where it starts."

Leaders – Beating the Odds Actions

The leaders pointed to the factors described in the previous section as being influential in beating the odds, and they purposefully engaged in specific self-directed actions as they pursued their education and career goals. Four categories of actions were common among the leaders. These actions, either behavioral or cognitive, helped the leaders to beat the odds and achieve education and career success.

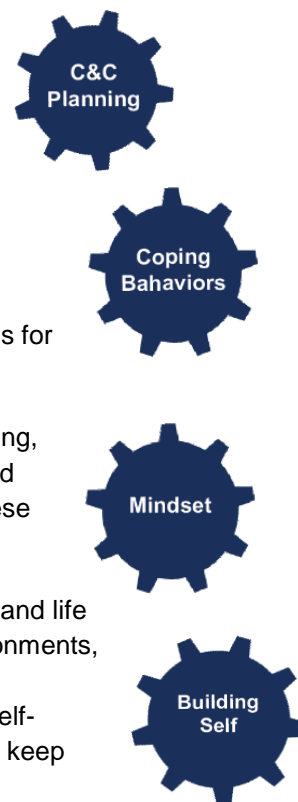


College & Career Planning – the leaders initiated actions to explore their goals, try out possible options, make plans to approach their goals, and seek admittance to educational institutions or career industries. Being clear about goals and finding alternative ways to reach them were core actions for beating the odds.

Coping Behaviors – the leaders invested effort in responding to negative situations and overcoming obstacles in diverse environments. They adjusted themselves to meet the needs of the environments, or they actively removed themselves from bad situations. They also actively developed support systems for the express purpose of countering difficult circumstances.

Mindsets – the leaders adopted ways of thinking that were supportive, affirming, and productive. They developed these mindsets through their experiences and applied them to subsequent challenges and counterproductive situations. These actions strengthened their volition and increased their chances of success.

Building Self – the leaders advanced building a strong sense of self to withstand life challenges. Based on their experiences and critical feedback from their environments, the leaders engaged in different activities to understand themselves, motivate themselves, accept themselves, and increase their self-confidence. Greater self-understanding and strong self-worth were internal forces that allowed them to keep moving forward.



College & Career Planning

Leaders initiated five actions that pertained to college and career planning. They explored different choices, specified the goals they wanted to pursue, figured out paths towards these goals, and took actions to make it happen.

College and Career Planning

Find direction and figure out goals

Try out different options

Identify steps to reach goals

Prepare for education opportunities

Seek job opportunities

Find Direction and Figure Out Goals

Leaders understood the importance of figuring out their goals in the context of their circumstances. They spent time exploring future education and career activities they would like to pursue and reflecting on how these activities might be accomplished given existing conditions. The information leaders had about themselves (their passions, interests, and skills) and about education and career options under consideration (e.g., availability of option in that location), were examined at length to narrow down their choices (what they wanted to do and what they didn't want to do) and to find directions that were feasible.

"Sometimes figuring out what you don't want to do is a really great way to start filtering out what you do want to do."

"After I graduated from college, I took a year off. I just worked at the Science Museum in Cleveland just to figure out what I wanted to do. And then decided I'm gonna go to journalism grad school and that's it. And I think that was like the best decision I made."

Try Out Different Options

When leaders were not totally sure what they wanted to do, they chose to explore and experience different options. They took advantage of opportunities to do this, even though they did not know what would happen. The leaders greatly valued all the opportunities they were provided. They treated these opportunities as a chance to collect information about the world of education and the world of work, as well as about themselves. The leaders also took actions to test out the career activities they wanted to pursue and obtain evidence that would either confirm or change the direction they had considered.

"I moved to Atlanta, Georgia and worked for W Hotels in, uh, a rotational program where I was doing front desk operations and finance accounting, where I was like, let me just get this last flavor of if I really want to be an accountant."

"If I can do it here, at least it represents what I'm trying to do another place and so, that's why I'd like to say you have to be open to accept the opportunities that you get."

Identify Steps to Reach Goals

As leaders developed clear college and career goals, they planned paths towards these goals. They thought about, and then specified, the steps they needed to take. The leaders did not just focus on planning around their immediate situations. Each step they planned was related to pursuing their future goals. Initially, the steps they came up with were not changeable. But, when situations arose that blocked their paths, they began to adjust their plans and looked for alternative ways to reach the goals. They tried to make the most of what they had throughout the process of pursuing their goals.

"I took that position in DC because while it wasn't quite at my goal, I knew I could leverage the connections and the opportunities and the experiences of working in DC to get me where I wanted."

"I was like, all right, I'm at this four-year plan. I'm gonna go to law school or I'm gonna go get a master's in it, I'm gonna go to law school...I wanna work in education policy."

Prepare For Education Opportunities

Leaders took direct actions to reach their education goals, despite situations that were not necessarily supportive of their efforts. Leaders transferred to schools that better prepared them for college. They

applied to different colleges to increase their chances of being accepted. They searched for programs of study that were directly and indirectly relevant to their goals. In addition, they searched for scholarship opportunities to help with their financial need to afford a college education.

"I figured out I kind of want to go to college...I assisted with my teachers. 'Can I really go be transferred to another school, so I can go to college at some point?' And they had this big board meeting about me. And they were like, 'Yep, you can.' So I was then I got transferred to this other school...they prepared you for college. And so, that's what I ended up doing. But it was at my own initiative."

"I applied to a bunch of schools that had 3/2 law programs. I was like, I wanna be a lawyer."

Seek Job Opportunities

Leaders stressed the need to be active when seeking job opportunities that help achieve career goals. They knew the industry or occupation they would like to be in, so they focused on job opportunities in these areas. They prepared materials in advance, and made sure that these materials did not suffer from poor grammar or spelling, which could interfere with them being fully considered for jobs. Whenever the leaders saw a job that they were interested in, they took action and applied. Even if there was nothing available in the job market, the leaders actively approached people in the industry to network and to ask for a chance to work.

"I made postcards and I listed that I speak Spanish and English. And here's my number. Next thing I know, I got like four calls from four major agencies in New York. And they sent me out on things. And I started booking commercials. And I became like a pretty successful commercial actor."

"I emailed the executive director, and I said, 'Hey, I'm interested, pretty much, what do you guys do? Are you hiring?' He said, 'Not right now but check back later.' I said, 'Okay.' I check back later and he said, 'Okay, come in for an interview.'"

Coping Behaviors

Because navigating education and career pathways can be challenging, the leaders actively responded to the challenges and obstacles in their environments. Five coping behaviors were prevalent among the leaders.

Coping Behaviors

Adapt to new environments

Remove self from bad situations

Find and use support systems

Control and redirect negative feelings

Reduce influence of others' negative comments

Adapt to New Environments

Unstable environments brought sudden changes to the leaders' circumstances. It was common for them to leave an environment they were familiar with and enter a new environment fraught with unknowns. The leaders adjusted to the new environments, and then adjusted themselves in order to keep pursuing their goals. They quickly learned the languages and cultures of new environments, started to build connections with people, and navigated the environment in ways that supported their goals.

"When you were put in that situation, like, in six months, all of us were fluent in German. Because that was just what we had to do, like you kind of had to learn."

"I was adaptable in the sense that my brother and I went out to really make friends with the German kids."

Remove Self from Bad Situations

When the situations around them were too detrimental to adjust to, the leaders took action to remove themselves from them. They understood that there was no chance for them to be productive and make progress in these negative environments. Sometimes, witnessing tragedies that happened to people around them also reminded the leaders that they needed to protect themselves. Thus, they took actions to withdraw from negative situations.

"For some individuals that go through that, you're like that can be a little bit more hurting than more positive, but for me I needed to change my current environment. So, I moved to Atlanta."

"If two of your good friends get killed, and you doing the same stuff they was doing, then you need to move around. So basically I left the south side, thinking that I can reinvent myself."

Find and Use Support Systems

Having confronted many obstacles, the leaders realized that they could not accomplish their goals alone. They needed help, encouragement, and guidance. Therefore, they actively sought help from different sources and worked to build support systems. Some leaders looked for people who had similar experiences, or sought help from a professional organization, to get advice. Actively developing support systems was critical for them to get through the tough times.

"You need people. You need a support system. And if you're able to reach out and find that, that's what's going to help you get through some of these issues, just talking to someone asking for advice, asking for skills, asking for a new perspective."

"Find those groups or those organizations that are important to you and have resonate with you and follow that... They're out there, and you have to kind of put yourself out there a little bit to find them."

Control and Redirect Negative Feelings

Due to their challenges and struggles, it was common for the leaders to have negative feelings such as sadness, frustration, guilt, fear, hopelessness, shock, loneliness, and worry. To keep from being paralyzed by these negative emotions, and to keep pursuing their goals, the leaders learned to control and redirect their emotions. The leaders found activities that would help them to process these feelings and channel them in more constructive ways. They also learned how to manage emotions from the

experiences of others. The leaders learned that working through their emotions helped them be more productive and able to concentrate their efforts on reaching their education and career goals.

"I think, for me, I did a lot of mentoring and volunteering... It helped me process a lot of my mental health issues, a lot of my grief and sadness and anger and fear, but at the same time it was helping other people."

"I just watched him, and I knew that he found a way to deal with that pain. I couldn't accept that as a way I felt like there had to be another way... I just began to try and mitigate, if I'm not to do things that made me more fearful, with the hope that I could reach a place in my adulthood with those kinds of terrors I wouldn't have to deal with."

Reduce Influence of Others' Negative Comments

While the leaders heard negative comments about themselves and their education or career choices, they chose not to let others define them or stop them from pursuing their goals. They ignored these types of comments because they learned that it was not beneficial for them. They also engaged in positive self-talk about who they were. The leaders would not let themselves be stopped because of what others said, but rather used these comments as motivators to keep striving and being the best people that they could.

"I think that's part of it is you have to just sometimes ignore the horrific feedback. And there's been times I just don't even look. Like even like book reviews. I won't even read book reviews. That's how I deal with is I just don't engage."

"I've been in situations in talking to other mayors or members of Congress where they find out that I am gay and they're – I could see that does cause them some issues. But you know, it is what it is. I am who I am, so people who have a problem with it, that's their problem, it's not mine. I try to not focus on with the negative stuff."

Mindsets

To beat the odds, the leaders adopted certain mindsets and applied them throughout their experiences. These mindsets strengthened their resolve and motivated them when they faced challenges. This helped the leaders to survive and increased their chances of success.

Mindsets

Persist, never give up

Work hard, do your best

Interpret negative experiences in positive ways

Be willing to take risks

Use education to overcome obstacles

View experiences and mistakes as learning tools

Persist, Never Give Up

Persistence or perseverance was one of the keys to the leaders' success. While they confronted many obstacles that might have made them quit, the leaders were committed to moving forward no matter what happened in their environments. Quitting was not an option, and every time the leaders met with additional challenges, they reminded themselves that they would never be able to get out of their circumstance if they gave up. During the process of overcoming their difficulties, the leaders developed the determination to keep pursuing their goals.

"The only way you could be better is by keep on doing it, right. You can't just give up. I could have given up. Believe me, I wanted to, because I was afraid to be ridiculed and seen as less than, but I made it through."

"The perseverance, the resilience, the determination that I learned through sport, is what got me out of my shell and is what pushed me to succeed."

Work Hard, Do Your Best

The leaders saw others working hard to make the best of their situations. They knew their situations were not easy to navigate. Sometimes, they had no idea about what the future would look like, or they did not have a clear solution for a problem, but they always believed that working hard would help them to make progress. They also tried hard to make the best of what they had.

"I had to work really, really hard... I have to tell you, it was like- Because up to that point, it seemed like you just work hard, you know, you progress."

"The first 10 years I was here no one knew anything about anything. I was working hard just trying to figure out a way."

Interpret Negative Experiences in Positive Ways

It was critical for leaders to have a positive mindset in the face of adversity. They tended to interpret negative conditions in positive ways. They tried to identify any useful or beneficial features from their circumstances that could help them. Having a positive perspective, the leaders were able to better respond to challenges and rely on these ways of thinking as they approached their futures.

"The whole thing about life is getting a negative, and you all had a negative, and turning it around to be a positive. That's the big trick right there, making that negative a positive."

"Having this refugee experience is actually kind of an asset because people are interested in learning about it. Like, it's not something that I should be looking at as a negative experience. I mean it is a negative experience... But I'm making the most of it. So I'm looking at it more positively."

Be Willing To Take Risks

The leaders pointed out the necessity of being bold and brave, especially in the face of risks. They understood the risks associated with taking certain actions as they pursued their goals, but the key to their eventual success was that they were not afraid to take risks. Having the courage to make decisions and take actions without knowing the outcomes allowed the leaders to become more comfortable with risk. It also allowed them to keep moving successfully toward their education and career goals.

"Personally, you know, I've never shied away from doing something because I was afraid. I've definitely gone in with trepidation."

"Everyone's different. Right? There's no right answer. Some of it's about how comfortable you are with risk, and I think I learned that I was comfortable with risk."

Use Education to Overcome Obstacles

Education was extremely important to the leaders. They regarded education as a weapon to help transcend tough situations. The leaders believed that education could provide them with a chance to make a difference in their lives and help them to better resolve their challenges. They also viewed education as something that nobody could take away from them. The leaders regarded getting an education, especially going to college, as one of their best decisions.

"A lot of things will happen to all of us in our lives. The one thing that is unchangeable in your life is having a college degree. Once you achieve and get a college degree that cannot be taken from you."

"Education was extremely important to me, and education did make the difference between whether or not I was going to stay in that environment or leave."

View Experiences and Mistakes as Learning Tools

The leaders understood the importance of experiences in the process of achieving goals. They viewed experiences, including mistakes, as learning tools. They were willing to get involved in different experiences, and through reflecting on these experiences, they learned what made them succeed or fail. These were opportunities to learn behaviors that they wanted to repeat and how to avoid making certain mistakes again in the future. These were also opportunities to help the leaders become clearer about their goals and the paths to these goals.

"If you're gonna tackle the tough problems, you have to be prepared to fail once in a while. Not all the time. Don't make the same mistake twice. You should learn from your mistakes, and you should not consider them failures."

"You're going to make maybe some not the best choices...that is part of life, that's part of the world. It's okay, just learn from those things and next time you'll learn, hey, these are red flags. I'm not going down that path anymore."

Building Self

Building up self-concept and self-confidence was critical during the leaders' pursuit of their education and career goals. A strong sense of self was a necessary element for beating the odds. The leaders went through processes to develop self-understanding and to increase self-worth. These cognitive actions helped them overcome negative internal influences and motivated them along their journey.

Building Self

Know who you are

Reflect on and recognize accomplishments

Accept and express yourself

Encourage yourself to be confident

Know Who You Are

Leaders talked about the process they went through to develop self-understanding, answering the questions of “who am I?” and “what can I do?” They engaged in self-reflection about their experiences, sought and reviewed feedback from others, and compared themselves to others. These actions allowed the leaders to learn about their interests, passions, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and values. The leaders viewed themselves more realistically through these efforts.

“You have to ask yourself, ‘who am I truly? How do I— how do I show up every single day? And, what do people see of me?’”

“I’m still in pursuit of who am I going to be? And then, um, I would say that integrity is a strong piece of my foundation.”

“I think in some ways, I’m still figuring out who I am. That’s not a box that you just get to check at some point. So I don’t want you to aspire to be like, I want to know I’m still trying to figure out who I want to be when I grow up. But what I’ve seen and what I’ve learned is that I know what my core values are.”

Reflect On and Recognize Accomplishments

Leaders were able to motivate themselves by reflecting on what they had accomplished in the past. When they realized that life in the past had been more difficult than their current situation, and that they succeeded at getting through the tough times, the leaders had more confidence that they could overcome the challenges in front of them. Confidence, inspired by prior accomplishments, propelled the leaders forward to keep chasing their goals and keep beating the odds.

“It’s a constant challenge, and it’s a day-by-day endeavor. But at some point, you look back and you’re like, wow, look how far I’ve come. Look at what’s happening, and you don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. But just be ready to embrace it, because just because of who you are at your core and what your hearts are telling you your futures are going to be pretty amazing because you have already these fundamental skills.”

“Cause I used to have nothing, right. And that just reminds me that I overcame.”

“So, thinking back to that cold 10:50 in the night-time of Atlanta, when I was walking to work with holes in my shoes, couldn’t drive to work cause I had a busted tire, I didn’t have money to put gas in my car— I always think back to that moment, and seeing the progress that I’ve made, and seeing where I’ve come from, and always knowing that...that image is so vivid in my mind 10

years later, or like eight years later. It's so vivid...Think about those moments that you've gone through and that you've overcome, and see your progress."

Accept and Express Yourself

The leaders had to learn who they were, accept who they were, and express who they were as people. The leaders learned a great deal about themselves through their experiences. They reflected on these experiences (recognizing that labels were not going to define them) and engaged in positive self-talk (telling oneself that you are worthwhile, a good person, etc.). Leaders also verbalized who they were to others, affirming themselves and their value.

"It wasn't part of who I was anymore, you know. I know how it's easier to get bogged down by those kinds of things. And it's hard to take the labels off, the stereotypes off, but, if you're worthwhile as a person, that's what you have to do."

"Through saying those words, it was more enriching to me to be more comfortable with who I was, to be proud of who I was, and understand what it means to be Black in America, what it means to be gay in America."

Encourage Yourself to Be Confident

The leaders considered it essential to believe in their own ability to solve problems and accomplish tasks. They encouraged themselves through their own experiences as a way to increase their confidence. They also observed others and vicariously learned how to carry out tasks. When conditions fostered their success, they were able to develop positive conceptions of their abilities and believe in themselves. These actions promoted self-confidence and internally motivated the leaders to overcome new challenges.

"You have to understand and love yourself and be able to say, [Leader], you're freaking amazing. You're-you're smart enough, you're bright enough and damn it, you work hard."

"The Paralympics for me has been life-changing, getting involved in that, competing on the highest level of sport and realizing that even though I'm an athlete that has a disability, I can have such influence and power and, um, and can really motivate people to do, you know, huge things with their life."



Summary – Leaders & Beating the Odds Actions

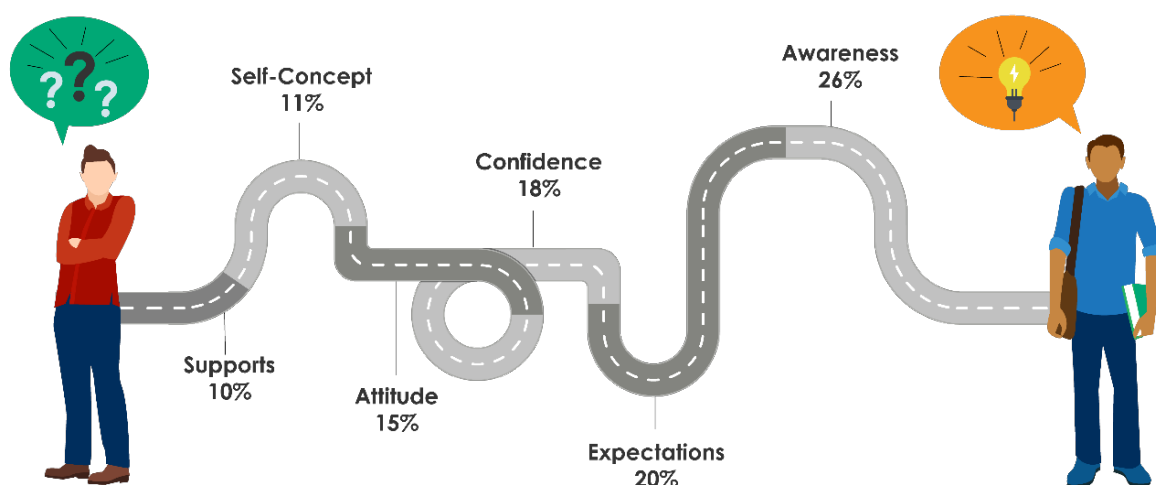
Based on the leaders' stories of beating the odds, six factors were found to contribute to their education and career navigation: interests and passions, goals, fit, experiences, role models, and supports. Under the influence of these six factors, the leaders initiated four categories of self-directed behavioral or cognitive actions to pursue their education and career success. They engaged in college and career planning, invested effort in coping with negative situations and obstacles, developed and applied positive mindsets, and advanced building a strong sense of self. The leaders explored different college and career choices, specified goals, and figured out paths towards their goals. Facing challenges and obstacles, they adjusted themselves to respond to negative situations, to actively find and use support systems, to control and redirect negative feelings, and to reduce the influence of negative comments. To beat the odds, the leaders adopted positive mindsets (persistence, hard work, willingness to take risks) and applied them throughout their experiences. They used education to overcome obstacles, viewed experiences and mistakes as learning tools, and advanced building a strong sense of self. All of these actions contributed to the leaders' education and career success.

Part 3. Roadtrip Insights

Roadtripper Insights

Shortly after their Beating the Odds Roadtrip, the roadtrippers were interviewed about their experience, which revealed a number of insights. These insights provide an understanding of what the roadtrippers learned about themselves and their perspectives on education and career pathways. Using qualitative text analysis, six predominant insight themes were identified. In the pie chart, the frequency of text segments assigned to each theme is represented as a percentage of the total number of text segments across these main themes. The insight themes include Attitude, Awareness, Expectations, Supports, Self-Concept, and Confidence. The insights are described below, along with the roadtrippers' viewpoints.

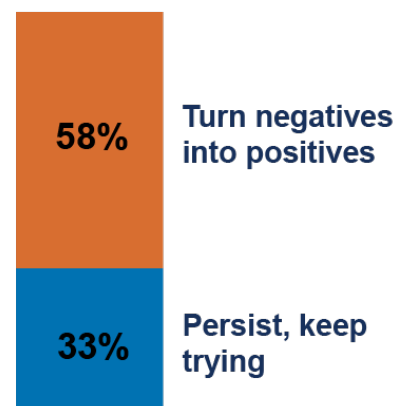
As shown in the figure below, the roadtrippers focused considerable attention on Awareness (26%) and Expectations (20%) during the post-roadtrip interviews. They concentrated somewhat less on Confidence (18%) and Attitude (15%), but text related to these insight themes were still referenced over two dozen times. The roadtrippers also emphasized Self-Concept (11%) and Supports (10%) during their interview discussions.



Attitude

The roadtrippers learned new ways of thinking or reinforced their beliefs during their roadtrip experience. The attitude most frequently cited by the roadtrippers was learning to turn negatives into positives (58%). They learned to find and see the good in situations, to be optimistic, and look for the positive aspects from their experiences. They considered this way of thinking to be healthy and energizing. Research shows that optimistic individuals report fewer health problems and better mental health.¹⁵ A second often-cited attitude (33%) was believing that they should persist no matter the obstacles. The idea was to keep trying, to keep pushing forward, pursuing, continuing, being resilient, and never giving up. This is supported by research showing that being resilient contributes to student success.¹⁶

Attitude



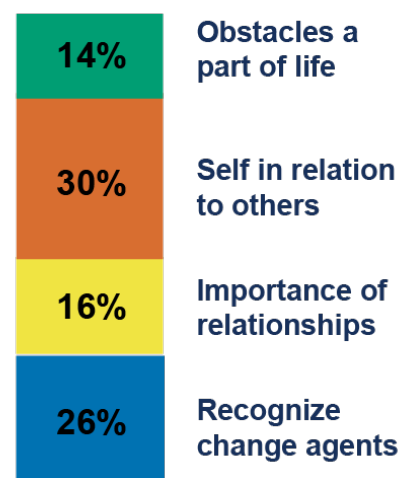
Roadtrippers' Points of View –Attitude

- Roadtripper 1 commented that, "It's not just about a single event or a single tragedy. It's about continuing, it's about pushing forward. And I don't think that I knew that going in..."
- Roadtripper 2 remarked, "I honestly know as a fact that I wouldn't be as positive, optimistic about my future if I just stayed at home."
- Roadtripper 3 shared, "Her [a leader] words are going to be ringing in my head when I feel like giving up...you have to remember to not even give in to that and that's something that really stood out to me." "I think I'm now trained to turn every negative thing into a positive and not feel like anything that happens to me, any obstacle or failure, is a bad thing."

Awareness

The roadtrippers emphasized having new perceptions or new understandings that they became aware of during the Beating the Odds Roadtrip. They learned that obstacles are a part of life (14%), and you have to prepare for them. They frequently mentioned understanding themselves in relation to others (30%). This involved perceptions such as recognizing that if others can do something, they can do it, or that people can relate to you if they are similar to you or have had similar experiences. Research supports the idea that awareness of individuals in relation to others is critical for understanding development.¹⁷ These young people also came to understand the importance of relationships (16%) for learning from others and for support. Additionally, the roadtrippers referred to change agents during their interviews (26%). They recognized people, places, and experiences as change agents, and that new people to interview and new environments to experience (e.g., the Grand Canyon) will alter their perspectives. By selecting and optimizing experiences, individual's career development pathways are influenced and changed.¹⁸

Awareness



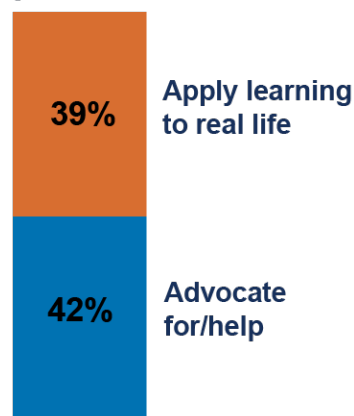
Roadtrippers' Points of View – Awareness

- Roadtripper 1 became aware that, "If you're not fully committed to who you are and your happiness, you can't make others happy."
- Roadtripper 2 learned that, "...everyone in some way, shape, or form has a beating the odds story. Whether that's big or small."
- Roadtripper 3 stated, "And I mean now on the trip I have learned that some things you can't do on your own. You need a team."

Expectations

The roadtrippers ended their roadtrip experience with strong expectations or beliefs for their futures. As suggested by research, foreseeable future events can be converted into current motivators and guide future actions.¹⁹ Two main expectations that were repeatedly cited by the roadtrippers included application (39%) and advocacy (42%). They expected to apply what they learned to their lives in the future. The roadtrippers wanted to remember what they learned, the advice they were given, and implement these perspectives. The roadtrippers also expected that they would advocate for people and give back to their communities as they moved forward with their lives. The roadtrippers wanted to share their stories and work to make the lives of others better by educating, listening, and finding resources that would help them. Research reinforces the importance of helping others as these experiences (e.g., volunteering) can provide academic, personal, and social benefits.²⁰

Expectations



Roadtrippers' Points of View – Expectations

- Roadtripper 1 remarked, “I want to help people. I want to make sure that they have the best lives. That’s all I want.” “I’ve got to continue with my education, but I’ve also got to continue with my advocacy.”
- Roadtripper 2 indicated, “I want to use my story to help other people.” “Making sure that I am reaching out to people that are at risk.” “I’m excited to move forward from here on out and use everything I’ve learned and apply into my real life now.”
- Roadtripper 3 commented, “I’m taking all of this advice, and I really want to apply it.”

Supports

The roadtrippers learned about the importance of support systems. While individuals provide important assistance, a network of people can help address different needs. The roadtrippers also understood that groups of people who have shared experiences or are like you can also be part of a support system. By identifying, accessing, and expanding support systems, students have been shown to cope with environmental conditions that are beyond their personal control.¹⁴ Additionally, the roadtrippers described the bond they developed with each other during the roadtrip, and that they would be friends and supports well after the experience. As research shows, individuals with strong supports in their lives (caring parents, teachers, and peers; financial supports; mentors) have better career and educational outcomes.²¹

Roadtrippers' Points of View – Supports

- Roadtripper 1 confirmed, "Having a support system, and having people around you that are going to accept you, that's so important and I now know that I have a support system."
- Roadtripper 2 stated, "This whole trip, it's been super helpful to have [support from the Roadtrippers], and now I have that support system when I get back."
- Roadtripper 3 shared, "So, finding more people...and establishing and cultivating those relationships, and finding my mentors, that's what I want to do. And I have already started on the road by emailing my old professors..."

Self-Concept

The roadtrippers learned about themselves during the Beating the Odds Roadtrip – what they believed, who they were, and what they could do. One roadtripper came away from the experience "owning" who he was as a person. They had greater clarity about what made them the people they were and how that could help them in the context of who they wanted to become. Identity development is a process of continual adjustments of oneself and one's environment, and during this process, the inconsistency between self-definitions and social information is gradually reduced.²² The roadtrippers mentioned having pride in themselves, recognized the need to be authentic, and acknowledged that they felt more developed as people as a result of this experience.

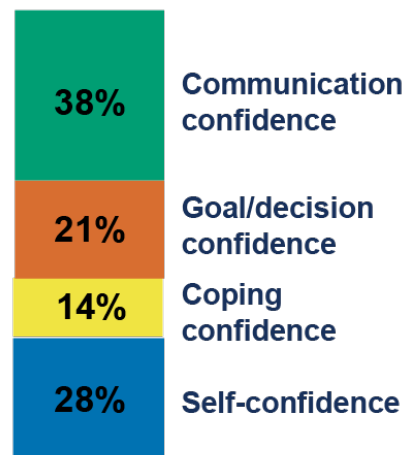
Roadtrippers' Points of View – Self-Concept

- Roadtripper 1 asserted, "I'm stronger. I have more courage. I do have a better perspective because I get the importance. Now I get why talking about it [being gay] is so important. I feel different."
- Roadtripper 2 recounted, "In the end, I ended up learning a lot about myself and who I want to be." "I don't need to feel like I'm odd or I'm like the weird one, because in the end this is what makes me, me...This trip has helped me see that a lot more and accept it."
- Roadtripper 3 remarked, "I think I got what I needed from this trip and I think my perspective has changed about my situation. Going back home, how I want to handle things in my life, what I want to do, who I want to be. Has made me more prepared."

Confidence

The roadtrippers believed in their abilities to do certain tasks and to be self-confident after their experience. They were confident about their ability to communicate (38%), having conducted interviews, asked good questions, and talked with people who could help them. Research shows that being successful in previous related actions leads to a stronger sense of belief in ability.¹³ The roadtrippers also had confidence in the decisions (21%) they made related to their school or program of study goals. The roadtrippers had confidence in their ability to cope (14%), citing better coping mechanisms and being able to cope with emotions such as anxiety during the trip. Research shows that coping confidence is critical given that individuals who are better able to cope with their problems are generally less stressed, more optimistic, and have better mental health.²³ Additionally, the roadtrippers saw themselves as worthwhile and valuable, with important stories to share, which heightened their self-confidence (28%).

Confidence



Roadtrippers' Points of View – Confidence

- Roadtripper 1 commented, "I do think that I'm a lot more confident, and I didn't plan to become more confident. It just happened." He also remarked that, "...now we have better coping mechanisms."
- Roadtripper 2 shared, "...having confidence in myself is important, standing up for what I believe in even when it's hard." In response to her program of study choice, she stated, "I feel much more confident about that and where I'm going with that."
- Roadtripper 3 remarked that, "...knowing that I am valuable, that I can do it, and remembering that every day, and continuing to learn new things." She went on to say, "Actually, anything feels more feasible, I feel like I can do and be anything now more than I ever have in my life."

Shifting Self-Concept and Confidence

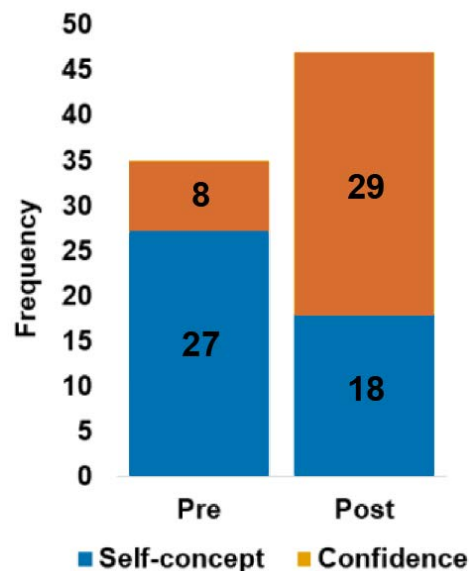
Due to the nature of the data (e.g., roadtrippers not providing responses to comparable questions), it was not possible to examine shifts in many constructs identified during the pre- and post- roadtrip interviews.

However, we were able to determine that there was a shift (based on the frequency of relevant text) in Self-Concept and Confidence that occurred from the time of the pre-roadtrip interviews to the post-roadtrip interviews.

The graph shows greater emphasis on Self-Concept during the pre-interview compared to the post. This may be related to the roadtrippers strong desire to better understand themselves prior to the roadtrip followed by the self-clarity they achieved after the experience, suggesting their need to focus on self-

concept was reduced. Research indicates that the experiences students encounter accumulate and help set the stage for identity formation and goal setting, which contribute to greater clarity.¹⁸

The graph also shows a considerable increase in Confidence from pre- to post-interview. While the roadtrippers primarily referred to being confident about certain tasks during the pre-interview, they spoke far more frequently about their confidence in a wider range of areas during the post-interview, suggesting that the roadtrip experience positively influenced these beliefs. Research indicates that increases in beliefs about one's ability may result from successful previous performance, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement by others, and positive emotional reactions during experiences.²⁴ The roadtrippers were subject to these self-efficacy determinants, which may have increased their confidence. Additional data would be needed to verify the reasons for shifts in Self-Concept and Confidence.

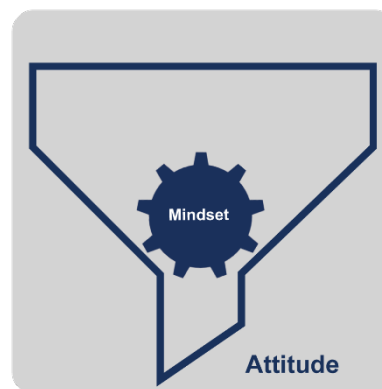


Leader – Roadtripper Insight Connections

Upon reviewing the factors and actions extracted from the leader interviews in relation to the roadtrippers' insights, it is possible to draw some connections between the two. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions about any causal relationships without a rigorous research design, it is still of value to examine consistencies between the leaders' stories and the roadtrippers' insights.

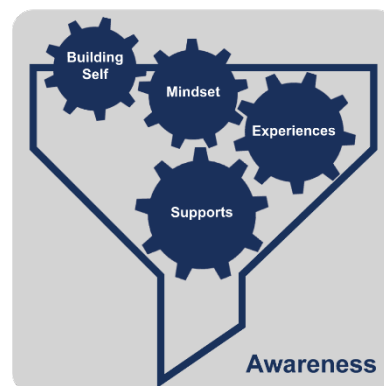
Attitude

The leaders' mindsets overlapped with the roadtrippers' attitude insights. In their journey towards beating the odds, the leaders developed certain mindsets, among which were persisting and interpreting negatives in a positive way. A positive attitude promotes resiliency,²⁵ the ability to cope with adversity and overcome challenges. Through listening to the leaders' stories, the roadtrippers reinforced their thinking about never giving up and interpreting challenges in more constructive ways. Perseverance and optimism have been found to be key characteristics that help students achieve academic success, despite the presence of stressful life events.²⁶



Awareness

The leaders described a wide range of negative experiences that they had to negotiate as they pursued their education and career goals. These experiences were construed as learning tools, an important mindset. The leaders also took advantage of their experiences to learn more about themselves. Throughout their journey, the leaders sought out and relied on supports from different sources. Consistent with the leaders, the roadtrippers realized that there were going to be challenges as they moved toward their goals. They recognized the importance of multiple supportive relationships. Strong and caring supports with more than one adult has been shown to help students during times of adversity.²⁷ The roadtrippers also understood that they were able to use their experiences to alter their perspectives.



Expectations

The roadtrippers' expectations were also consistent with the leaders' goals and experiences. Most of the leaders set career goals that involved advocating for different groups and helping others that had situations similar to their own. The leaders wanted to give back what they had received, using their skills to make a difference. They pursued these goals and succeeded in achieving them. During the interviews, the leaders also gave the roadtrippers relevant advice. They encouraged and reinforced the roadtrippers' ideas and plans about contributing to the well-being of others. This is important as encouragement influences how people develop in their careers.²⁸ We also observed a rather strong connection with the roadtrippers' expectations to pursue advocacy in their futures and implement the leaders' advice in their own lives. Vicarious reinforcement can occur when people formulate expectations about desirable actions by seeing the accomplishments of others.²⁹



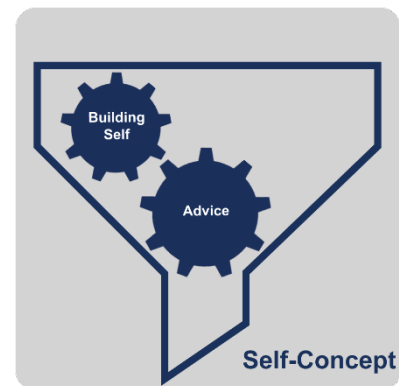
Supports

Supports were a significant factor in beating the odds. The leaders received supports from a variety of individuals and organizations/programs that helped them throughout their journey. When confronting different barriers, the leaders actively sought out support systems as one of their coping behaviors. Learning how the leaders cultivated and relied on support systems helped the roadtrippers think about their own network of supports, and reinforced their need to develop a wider range of supports to assist them along their education and career pathways. This is critical as supports can positively influence students' exploration, goal setting, and problem solving.³⁰



Self-Concept

A strong sense of self was also critical to beating the odds. The leaders reflected on their experiences as a way to build on their understanding of who they were and what they could do. They accepted and expressed themselves and reflected on their accomplishments, both of which added to their self-confidence. The leaders also offered advice to the roadtrippers about the value of experiences for learning about themselves. This is reinforced by research that supports the development of self-concept through interactions between the individual and the social context; even failure experiences lead to self-improvement.²² The leaders also encouraged the roadtrippers to be proud of themselves and to recognize their worth. Similar to the leaders, the roadtrippers saw the roadtrip experience as an opportunity to gain clarity about who they were, which allowed them to be more accepting of themselves and express themselves. The roadtrippers also gained more pride from their experiences.



Confidence

Leaders believed in their abilities to solve problems and accomplish tasks. They drew upon these abilities to be successful in their college and career planning. These experiences reinforced their own conceptions of what they could do and their confidence. The leaders also focused on positive feedback during their journeys and did not allow negative comments from others to distract them. Positive feedback also added to the leaders' confidence. This type of feedback is important given that verbal encouragement from others can increase belief in one's self competence.³¹ The leaders encouraged the roadtrippers to go confidently forward in pursuing their goals. Consistent with the leaders, the roadtrippers used their abilities to conduct interviews, and this allowed them to be more confident in their communication skills. Focusing on positive feedback and encouragement, the roadtrippers were also more confident about their coping skills and the goals they had set for themselves.





Summary – Roadtrip Insights

Based on the Beating the Odds Roadtrip, the roadtrippers gained a number of insights related to Attitude, Awareness, Expectations, Supports, Self-Concept, and Confidence. They learned new ways of thinking and reinforced existing beliefs. They built up positive attitudes about confronting challenges. They became aware of new perceptions about themselves in relation to others, of people, places, and experiences as change agents, and of obstacles being a part of life. They learned that support networks are essential and reinforced expectations about their futures. The roadtrippers gained clarity about who they were and what they could do and increased their confidence. There were strong connections between the factors and actions drawn from the leader interviews and the roadtrippers' insights, reinforcing the positive influence that the Beating the Odds Roadtrip had on these underserved youth.

Part 4. Advice

Below is advice that leaders and roadtrippers offered to others during the interviews.

Leader Advice

- Be a good person, practice kindness and compassion
- Be responsible for yourself, stand up for yourself
- Follow your passion
- Respect and recognize different viewpoints, learn from others
- Make connections and collaborate with others
- Seek out mentors
- Help others, educate others, make a difference
- Give back to community

Roadtripper Advice

- You are not alone
 - You are significant, you matter
 - Stay true to yourself
 - Your actions define you, keep moving forward
 - You are going to make a difference the world needs
 - Tears (emotions) do not make you weak
-

Recommendations

The following recommendations are an extension of the roadtrippers' insights. These suggested actions are designed to help young people navigate their education and career pathways successfully.

Parents/Guardians

- Build in experiences for children to learn about themselves and potential education and career options by interacting with others, exploring the world of work and school, and trying out different activities (e.g., college fairs, part-time jobs, internships, and volunteering).
- Provide confidence-building encouragement and positive reinforcement to your children for what they accomplish (e.g., for solving a problem, for learning a new skill).
- Coach your children to see setbacks and obstacles as temporary, and to focus their energy and attention on ways to keep moving forward and/or seek assistance and information from others when confronted by challenging situations.
- Expand options available to your children by encouraging them to avoid limited thinking about education and career choices (such as the belief that you can only get a good job with a four-year degree, or that certain careers are only appropriate for boys or girls) and to consider a wide range of education and career possibilities for the future.
- Encourage your children to be successful education and career navigators by learning how to define goals and make plans to achieve them. This does not happen automatically, but is a skill that can be learned through practice.

Teachers/Counselors/Other Educators and Advisors

- Meet students where they are at by understanding their backgrounds. Take an active role in seeking out opportunities to learn about students' lives outside of the classroom and school environment.
- Encourage students to seek out a variety of individuals who might function as mentors, advisors, or coaches; establish connections between students and potential supports who have similar characteristics. Help students learn how to approach someone to ask for advice and mentorship.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop and find out about their interests and passions (e.g., encourage participation in extracurricular activities, classroom learning activities).
- Encourage students to recognize that the entire range of education and career options available to them are worthwhile, and important for meeting diverse goals.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for college and career planning success (e.g., using feedback to evaluate fit between desired lifestyle and goals, building realistic plans based on goals, evaluating and using quality tools to gain self-knowledge and greater understanding of education and work).

Policymakers

- Support policies that will promote the conditions by which schools can foster more inclusive environments.
- Support legislation that ensures educators, counselors, advisors, and students have access to sufficient resources to support their teaching, counseling, advising, and learning needs.
- Support legislation that advances education and career navigation by encouraging greater coordination across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce to develop education and career paths that support the success of all students.
- Support policies that advance education and career navigation best practices in schools by making use of relevant data and research findings supportive of efficacious actions.
- Support policies that better assist and protect young people who interact with, or navigate their way through, various governmental systems to reduce their potential negative influences.

Appendix

Methodology

Thematic qualitative data analysis procedures were used with the roadtripper and the leader interviews. After audio interview data were collected by Roadtrip Nation staff, the interviews were transcribed. The qualitative analysis process began with in-depth study of all interviews to gain a sense of the lived experiences of each of the leaders and each of the roadtrippers. Two researchers conducted the qualitative analysis, with one researcher focusing on the leader interviews and another researcher focusing on the roadtripper interviews. For each interview, meaningful segments of text (phrases, sentences, paragraphs) were identified and then compared. All interviews were analyzed individually and then compared across groups for patterns. Through critical reflection, and using the Education & Career Navigation domain of the ACT Holistic Framework as a guide, common themes were identified across the three roadtrippers. Similarly, common themes were discovered across the 16 leaders. The researchers verified each other's identified themes. To ensure fidelity to the original information, this was an iterative process that required checking themes against the interview data and re-classifying text segments across themes as needed. The process also involved comparing identified roadtripper themes to leader themes to ascertain commonalities.

A critical part of the analysis process was identifying meaningful text segments. The use of Excel and qualitative text analysis software (QDA-miner) aided this process. Initially, researchers made notations and assigned codes (words or short phrases that describe each text segment) to each interview transcript. Selected first cycle and second cycle coding processes were considered appropriate for analyzing the interviews.³² During first cycle coding, a combination of descriptive, process, emotion, concept, and structural coding were applied to the qualitative data.

- Descriptive coding was used to summarize the basic topics in interview transcripts using words or short phrases.
- Process coding was used to search for actions and interactions that occur as individuals are thinking and behaving. For example, relevant actions about “beating the odds” were recorded using active “-ing” words.
- Emotion coding was used to label the emotions and feelings recalled by the leaders and the roadtrippers when they talked about their experiences.
- Concept coding was used to assign macro levels of meaning to the interview data, trying to capture bigger picture ideas beyond the tangible and apparent words and phrases in the interview transcripts.
- Structural coding was used to analyze segments of data that related to specific questions such as “what does beating the odds mean to you?”

During second cycle coding, codes extracted from the leader interviews in the first cycle were analyzed together, and those extracted from the roadtripper interviews were analyzed together. Pattern coding was used as the method to search for rules and explanations that were grouped into more meaningful categories. Descriptive statistics for each category were calculated. Connections between the categories were then identified to generate subsequent themes.

Notes

1. Kimberly A. S. Howard, Stephanie L. Budge, Belinda Gutierrez, Amy D. Owen, Nicholas Lemke, Janice E. Jones, and Kory Higgins, "Future Plans of Urban Youth: Influences, Perceived Barriers, and Coping Strategies," *Journal of Career Development* 37, no. 4 (2010): 655-676.
2. Javier Cavazos Jr., Michael B. Johnson, Cheryl Fielding, Alyssa G. Cavazos, Veronica Castro, and Luti Vela, "A Qualitative Study of Resilient Latina/o College Students," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 9, no. 3 (2010): 172-188; Caren Floyd, "Achieving Despite the Odds: A Study of Resilience Among a Group of African American High School Seniors," *Journal of Negro Education* 65, no. 2 (1996): 181-189; Javier C. Vela, Ming-Tsan P. Lu, A. Stephen Lenz, and Karina Hinojosa, "Positive Psychology and Familial Factors as Predictors of Latina/o Students' Psychological Grit," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 37, no. 3 (2015): 287-303.
3. Jelena Zikica and Ute-Christine Klehe, "Job Loss as a Blessing in Disguise: The Role of Career Exploration and Career Planning in Predicting Reemployment Quality," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 69, no. 3 (2006): 391-409.
4. Andreas Hirschi, "Career-Choice Readiness in Adolescence: Developmental Trajectories and Individual Differences," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 79, no. 2 (2011): 340-348; Orit Tsabari, Aharon Tziner, and Elchanan I. Meir, "Updated Meta-analysis on the Relationship between Congruence and Satisfaction," *Journal of Career Assessment* 13, no. 2 (2005): 216-232.
5. Denise F. Bartley and Christine Robitschek, "Career Exploration: A Multivariate Analysis of Predictors," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 56, no. 1 (2000): 63-81.
6. Janet I. Greenwood, "Validation of a Multivariate Career and Educational Counseling Intervention Model Using Long-term Follow-up," *The Career Development Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2008): 353-361; Steve Herman, "Career HOPES: An Internet-delivered Career Development Intervention," *Computers in Human Behavior* 26, no. 3 (2010): 339-344; Andreas Krapp, Ulrich Schiefele, and Adolf Winteler, "Interest as a Predictor of Academic Achievement: A Meta-analysis of Research," in *The Role of Interest in Learning and Development*, ed. K. Ann Renninger, Suzanne Hidi, and Andreas Krapp (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992), 183-212.
7. Becky L. Bobek and Ran Zhao, "Education and Career Navigation," in *Beyond Academics: A Holistic Framework for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success*, ed. Wayne Camara, Ryan O'Connor, Krista Mattern, and Mary Ann Hanson (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2015), 39-51.
8. Jung, Jae Yup and John McCormick, "Occupational Decision-Related Processes for Amotivated Adolescents: Confirmation of a Model," *Journal of Career Development* 38, no. 4 (2011): 275-292.
9. Mary E. Rogers and Peter A. Creed, "A Longitudinal Examination of Adolescent Career Planning and Exploration Using a Social Cognitive Career Theory Framework," *Journal of Adolescence* 34, no. 1 (2011): 163-172.

10. Amy L. Kristof-Brown, Ryan D. Zimmerman, and Erin C. Johnson, "Consequences of Individuals' Fit at Work: A Meta-analysis of Person-job, Person-organization, Person-group, and Person-supervisor Fit," *Personnel Psychology* 58, no. 2 (2005): 281 – 342.
11. David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).
12. Donald E. Gibson, "Role Models in Career Development: New Directions for Theory and Research," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 65, no. 1 (2004): 134-156.
13. Albert Bandura, "Regulative Function of Perceived Self-efficacy," in *Personnel Selection and Classification*, ed. Michael G. Rumsey, Clinton B. Walker, and James H. Harris (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994): 261-271.
14. Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett, "Contextual Supports and Barriers to Career Choice: A Social Cognitive Analysis," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2000): 36-49.
15. Mary E. Pritchard, Gregory S. Wilson, and Ben Yamnitz, "What Predicts Adjustment Among College Students? A Longitudinal Panel Study," *Journal of American College Health* 56, no. 1 (2007): 15–21.
16. Nimisha Beri and Deepak Kumar, "Predictors of Academic Resilience among Students: A Meta-analysis," *Journal on Educational Psychology* 11, no. 4 (2018): 37–44.
17. David L. Blustein, "Extending the Reach of Vocational Psychology: Toward an Inclusive and Integrative Psychology of Working," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 59, no. 2 (2001): 171-182.
18. Jeylan T. Mortimer and Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, "Adolescent Paid Work and Career Development," in *Career Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Vladimir B. Skorikov and Wendy Patton (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2007): 255-275.
19. Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective," *Annual Review of Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 1-26.
20. Anne van Goethem, Anne van Hoof, Bram Orobio de Castro, Marcel Van Aken, and Daniel Hart, "The Role of Reflection in the Effects of Community Service on Adolescent Development: A Meta-analysis," *Child Development* 85, no. 6 (2014): 2114–2130.
21. Steven D. Brown, Meghan Roche, Matthew Abrams, Kristen Lamp, Kyle Telander, Plamena Daskalova, Alexander Tatum, and Michael Massingale, "Relationships among Supports and Barriers in Career and Educational Outcomes: A Meta-analytic Investigation," *Journal of Career Assessment* 26, no. 3 (2018): 395-412.
22. Richard M. Lerner, Alexandra M. Freund, Imma De Stefanis, and Tilmann Habermas, "Understanding Developmental Regulation in Adolescence: The Use of the Selection, Optimization, and Compensation Model," *Human Development* 44, no.1 (2001): 29-50; Jennifer L. Kerpelman, Joe F. Pittman, and Leanne K. Lamke, "Toward a Microprocess Perspective on Adolescent Identity Development: An Identity Control Theory Approach," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 12, no. 3 (1997): 325-346.

-
23. Shelley E. Taylor and Annette L. Stanton, "Coping Resources, Coping Processes, and Mental Health," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 3 (2007): 377–401.
 24. Jacquelynne S. Eccles, Allan Wigfield, and Ulrich Schiefele, "Motivation to Succeed," in *Handbook of Child Psychology: Social, Emotional, and Personality Development*, ed. William Damon and Nancy Eisenberg (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 1017-1095.
 25. James H. McMillan and Daisy F. Reed, "At-risk Students and Resiliency: Factors Contributing to Academic Success," *The Clearing House* 67, no. 3 (1994): 137-140.
 26. Caren Floyd, "Achieving Despite the Odds: A Study of Resilience Among a Group of Africa American High School Seniors," *Journal of Negro Education* 65, no. 2 (1996): 181-189.
 27. Mark Hassinger and Lee A. Plourde. "'Beating the Odds': How Bi-Lingual Hispanic Youth Work through Adversity to Become High Achieving Students," *Education* 126, no. 2 (2005): 316.
 28. Steven L. Anderson and Nancy E. Betz, "Sources of Self-efficacy Expectations: Their Measurement and Relation to Career Development," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 58 (2001): 98-117.
 29. Jonathan R. Brauer and Charles R. Tittle, "Social Learning Theory and Human Reinforcement," *Sociological Spectrum* 32, no. 2 (2012): 157-177.
 30. Veronica M. Friht, "Supportive Others in the Lives of College Students and Their Relevance to Hope," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 17, no. 1 (2015): 64–87.
 31. Dale H. Schunk and Judith L. Meece, "Self-efficacy Development in Adolescence," *Self-efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents* 5 (2006): 71-96.
 32. Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. (London: Sage Publications, 2016).

About ACT Research

ACT Research leads the field with authority and high-quality scientific evidence in support of education and workforce practices, solutions, and services. Our mission-driven team comprises a variety of backgrounds and disciplines, and offers a wide spectrum of knowledge and skills, enabling us to deliver quality, high-impact products and services aligned to ACT's strategy and mission. Together, our research teams provide policymakers, educators, parents, and learners with research-based insights to inform their decision-making, and deliver educators and workforce development professionals with tools and services needed for education and career navigation.

About ACT's Center for Equity in Learning

ACT's Center for Equity in Learning focuses on closing gaps in equity, opportunity and achievement for underserved populations and working learners. Through purposeful investments, employee engagement, and thoughtful advocacy efforts, the Center supports innovative partnerships, actionable research, initiatives, campaigns, and programs to further ACT's mission of helping people achieve education and workplace success.

About Roadtrip Nation

Roadtrip Nation, a nonprofit organization, is working to change the way people approach choosing a career by creating content, products, and experiences that guide individuals in exploring what's possible when they follow their interests. They took their first road trip in 2001, and have driven over half a million miles and made more than 30 documentaries — broadcast over 100,000 times on public television — sharing the stories and advice of inspiring leaders in all kinds of careers. Roadtrip Nation's career discovery resources are fueled by an online archive of thousands of video interviews and stories, with personalized career exploration, educational programs for middle school through college that are accessible to millions of students, plus live tours and events all around the country. They're the authors of four books, including the New York Times best-selling career guide, "Roadmap." Along the way, Roadtrip Nation has benefited from world-class partnerships with great companies and foundations that have supported their mission to empower people to define their own roads in life.

