

ROADMAP
TO
EMANCIPATION

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As equity warriors, we have a responsibility to lead and educate a generation of learners who must build skills to continue the transition to, and growth of, a socially just society. But that journey often runs into detours, roadblocks, and speedbumps designed to stifle and silence cultural awareness and diversity-oriented, anti-racism mindsets.

You need a roadmap to navigate the course:

- a way to structure conversations to shift mindsets
- a way to create systems that fulfill the promise of a free, appropriate, public education for every child.

The Roadmap to Emancipation gives you the tools to structure conversation in your organization, to create a culture where everyone's voice is heard, valued, and respected.

A path forward.

These twelve steps are checkpoints. Checkpoints where you gather the tool skills to get unstuck from muck and mire by not letting detractors control the narrative.

Using this roadmap, you'll structure your own mindset, and those of your learning or organizational community, to focus on positive change: not worrying about the things you cannot change, while changing the things you can no longer accept.

The intent is to go beyond talking. It is to develop cognitive humility, where we learn by being open to a free exchange of thoughts, ideas, values, and cultures. Where each of us learns more about each other's worlds, not through being talked at, but engaging in meaningful conversation, stretching to gather both knowledge and emotional intelligence.

So, get yourself a journal and work the tools at each checkpoint.



The Four Highways

Highway 1: Self

In focusing on self, we first work on understanding who we are as individuals. This foundational work is necessary so that we understand how to frame our own thoughts.

This work aids us in making connections from another's expression or a source document, to ourselves or our lived experience.

There are three checkpoints on Highway 1.



Checkpoint 1: Work on yourself first

At this checkpoint, we learn to recognize that we must first critique our own behavior and develop self-awareness about how we speak, listen, and behave. We must first understand that it is inappropriate to correct others' behaviors unless and until we are exemplars of the behavior. This is our first foray into the realm of cognitive humility. When we work on ourselves first, we can then be challenged to develop ourselves further.

At this first checkpoint along your journey, ask yourself:

- What do I really believe about race, racism, diversity, and equity in education?
- What do I think when I'm only accountable to myself for my thoughts?

Checkpoint 2: Master your story

Get your head right before you open your mouth. This tool skill helps us show restraint. Our untrained nature may have us lean toward responding before thinking. We must learn that an exchange of ideas should be thoughtful. We must allow ourselves to think through our language, our story, before we begin to exchange ideas. Think time cannot be rushed. It is important to recognize that thoughtful deliberation takes time. If you are a team leader, you must not only allow the time, but encourage yourself and others to use it.

At this checkpoint along your journey, ask yourself:

- Why do I believe as I do?
- How can I express my beliefs in a thoughtful manner when they are under attack?

Checkpoint 3: Focus on self, own, and immediate

There's an old saying that the only person you can change is the one who looks back at you in the mirror. This skill helps us to focus on the person looking back in the mirror. While it may seem intuitive, we must lead with intention for every person to learn to focus on self, in order to develop one's own self-awareness. We must work to focus on what is within our immediate sphere of influence: ourselves. Much like checkpoints one and two, checkpoint three is introspective, calling upon you to look inward first.

At this checkpoint along your journey, ask yourself:

- What are my responsibilities in leading for equity?
- What are my responsibilities to my child or children, my team, my peers, my community?

Highway 2: Engagement

The checkpoints along Highway 2 focus on participating wholly in conversation and debate. Now that you understand that you must be fully cognizant of yourself and your story first, you can focus on listening with intentionality and a desire to understand the shaped stories of others. You can begin to make connections between yourself and others, even when cultures and lived experiences might appear on the surface to differ dramatically. This is a toolskill. You'll catch more flies with this honey than with vinegar.

There are three checkpoints on Highway 2.



Checkpoint 4: Stay engaged, in dialogue

It is normal human emotion to fight or flee. For some of us, the desire to flee or withdraw from conversation that is challenging or contrary to our beliefs may be overwhelming.

For others of us, the impulse to fight, to argue without rationality, may be our instinct. At this checkpoint, you'll work on your skills to counter those impulses. Rather than fight or flee, Checkpoint 4 calls upon you to stay engaged in the dialogue. If you have honed your "self-skills" along Highway 1, this learning is simply the next level. When leading and drawing upon the tools at Checkpoint 4, we must ask ourselves and our teams to listen first. We must stay in the moment, no matter how challenging.

At this checkpoint along your journey, think about a time when you:

- Had a child come to you in tears because of the way they were diminished, devastated, or belittled while at school; or
- Felt trapped in a situation that was damaging to children and didn't know what to say, do, or how to act; or
- Been on the receiving end of a rant that promoted or defended harmful actions against the most marginalized of learners.

Reflect on that experience and ask and answer these questions

- Was I part of the conversation?
- How could I best handle it?
- What should I have said or done in the moment?
- What will I do the next time?

Checkpoint 5: Speak my truth persuasively, not abrasively

There's a difference between speaking "the truth" and speaking "your truth." It is important to refine this tool at Checkpoint 5. "Your truth" refers to your own lived experience. It is your perception and experience about your world. It is empowering for each of us to have voice, particularly those of us who – because of our race, ethnicity, religion, gender or gender identity, socioeconomic status, or some other marker – may be otherwise marginalized. It is not permission to speak lies where facts are known. "One's truth" may at times be at odds with "the truth" and it is in those moments that the skill you refine at Checkpoint 5 allows for a civil conversation – at least on your end.

In discussions centering on diversity, equity, and inclusion, many events require us to consider multiple viewpoints. When controversial issues are under discussion, those multiple viewpoints may invoke strong feelings. In no instance is it acceptable for any of us to be abrasive, rude, or demeaning. We must be grounded in the art of confrontation with guardrails. If you have fine-tuned your skills at Checkpoints 1 and 2, you'll be ready to pick up this tool and journey on.

At this checkpoint along your journey, go back to the reflection and journaling from Checkpoint 4.

- Review what you wrote and ask yourself, "In these responses, am I speaking my truth to engage?"

Checkpoint 6: Honor individuals' social constructs and multiple perspectives

Each person's lived experience occurs within a social construct that may or may not be accepted in all cultures. Checkpoint 6 challenges us to respect other people's truths. It may be difficult at first to master this tool when others do not speak their truths to engage. However, it is perfectly acceptable for various people to see the same event in a variety of ways, or through multiple perspectives. In a pluralistic society, there is often no one single right, wrong, or viewpoint. To shift mindsets, we cannot be the ones who are closed-minded. We must learn to let them know we hear them, and we understand that is their perspective; however, what is right for the welfare and education of every child is our goal. Not some children, all children.

At this checkpoint, go back to the reflection and journaling from Checkpoints 4 and 5.

- Think about the Checkpoint 4 situation again. What lived experiences or social constructs influenced that event?
- In your journaling at Checkpoints 4 and 5, were you respectful of diverse viewpoints? If not, how can you reframe your response in a manner that is respectful, but at the same time advocating for equity?

Highway 3: Cognitive Humility

Cognitive humility is the idea that we experience cognitive growth and development by being open to the ideas and concepts and experiences of others whose cultures and lived experiences may conflict with our own.

For some ideas, cognitive humility may be disturbing as we grapple with making sense of ways, ideas, or actions that are foreign to our own. Having sharpened our skills along Highways 1 and 2, we here can begin to develop a greater growth mindset and true cultural awareness.

There are three checkpoints along Highway 3.



Checkpoint 7: Experience discomfort

People may need encouragement to experience discomfort. Give it, so that your skills at Checkpoint 7 can be practiced effectively. It is important for us all to understand that feeling discomfort simply means that our brains are working hard to make sense of foreign ideas. That discomfort does not mean that anyone's expressions are wrong, just that conversation, learning, is required to help fuse these new ideas with our existing knowledge.

We must engage in conversation. We must exchange ideas. It is as equally unacceptable to become silent as it is to express violence. In the face of those who fight against us, we must show grace. We cannot have assurance of positive change if we are silent or violent.

At this checkpoint along your journey,

- Ask yourself, "How can I ensure that my and others' opinions are both authentic and informed?"
- Reflect on your previous journal entries.
- Who needs information?
- How can I provide it?
- What resources do I need? Where will I get them?

Checkpoint 8: Focus on the present and proximate

One form of escaping an uncomfortable conversation is to change the subject. The skill you develop at Checkpoint 8 is in redirecting the conversation if someone attempts to pull it off topic. The focus on the present is the present conversation. The focus on the proximate is about what is within our span of control – within our personal sphere of influence. When we encourage the focus on the proximate, we also make connections between ourselves, the lived experiences of ourselves and others, and the topic of the conversation.

At this checkpoint, think about some of the contentious conversations about race, diversity, and equity that you've had.

- Did anyone try to pull them off track, put up roadblocks, or create detours?
- What happened? How was it handled?
- How can we feature the 'better angels of our nature,' going beyond what comes easily or naturally, while honoring diverse ideas and disagreeing with arguments that are in oppositions with our own?

Checkpoint 9: Expect & accept non-closure

Just because we disagree on ideas does not mean that we cannot find areas of agreement or maintain friendships, thus closing the door to further exchange. We must expect that there will be times that we will not come to a resolution. And we must understand that the lack of closure is okay. It is perfectly acceptable to agree to disagree, and when progress can no longer be made, that the topic is tabled with the understanding that a diversity of ideas exists and that is part of the beauty of diversity.

At this checkpoint, reflect on this question

- How can people be respectful friends across opposing views of principles and values?

Highway 4: Humanism and Acceptance

Humanism is a perspective that emphasizes human freedom. Along this highway, we develop the ability to not only accept, but respect the equal and inherent dignity of every human being. Having mastered the tool skills along Highways 1 and 2, we develop more empathy for people of diverse backgrounds. We understand the lived experiences that have shaped their lives, their thoughts, their arguments. We do not have to agree, but cultural awareness allows us to understand.

There are three checkpoints along Highway 4.



Checkpoint 10: Use working definitions for demographics

The English language constantly evolves. When it comes to naming groups of peoples, particularly with demographic labels, the names given by governmental agencies may not reflect those preferred or accepted within the named group. It was once acceptable to call Black Americans *colored* or *negro*. That is no longer the case. Just as it was once acceptable to call the Indigenous Peoples of North America *Indians*, rather than by their tribal affiliation.

We must engage in conversations with people of various groups to understand what is and is not acceptable, relying on the named groups, the community, to identify themselves. We must create working definitions that are clear and make sure that we understand why it is important to respect the preferences of peoples with regard to them naming themselves.

At this checkpoint, reflect on the various groups of culturally and linguistically diverse people in your community.

- What are the named groups in your community? Where did the labels come from?
- Consider the terms Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, and Central/South American.
- Which one/s should be used? Why?
- Who has the power to make changes in our communities?

Checkpoint 11: Isolate race and identity

Conversations on the topics of race, ethnicity, culture, identity, racism, sexism, prejudice, and bigotry are critical in creating equitable and inclusive school communities. It is important that we can approach the topics with knowledge and respect of who groups of people are and how both groups and individuals identify themselves. We must demonstrate understanding so that we can examine our own thoughts and language. We must engage with accuracy, with respect, and without offense.

At this checkpoint, continue to reflect on the various groups of culturally and linguistically diverse people in your community.

- What are the various layers of your own identity? What groups do you identify with?
- What groups are in your classroom, school, office, or department?
- How do you know they are part of the group you've assigned them to?

Checkpoint 12: Examine assimilation

The practice of linguistic and cultural assimilation in the United States and many other nations has been both forced by governmental agencies and voluntarily practiced by indigenous and immigrant groups throughout history. At some point in each of our lives, we may have engaged in thoughts or behaviors, or used language that would place us in a different group than that of an equity warrior.

Ibram X. Kendi named three groups: segregationists, assimilationists, and anti-racists. Segregationists blame people of color for the racial disparities, the inequities they experience. Anti-racists identify and call out the disparities, the inequities. And assimilationists keep a foot in both camps, believing that people of color and racism are to blame, and that if people of color would just be more like the white mainstream, racism wouldn't be an issue.

It is assimilationist beliefs that cause people of color to chemically or surgically alter their appearance to fit a white mainstream ideal of beauty. It supports the oppression and inequity we see in our school's choice of white, Eurocentric narratives in instructional materials, which result in the assessment outcomes we see for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

It is in opposition to celebrating diversity and creating systems of equity.

How you use the tools you've sharpened at each checkpoint across all four highways should help you to determine which of the three you are, and how you will engage in discussion with others. Look back at your journaling from Checkpoint 1. Review and reflect on your thoughts at each checkpoint.

At this point along your journey, at this final checkpoint, ask yourself

- What am I? A segregationist, assimilationist, or anti-racist?
- How do I know?
- Am I where I wish to be? If not how will I get there?
- How do I now challenge the assimilationism in my school, or work community?

The Road Doesn't End Here

If you've engaged in the work along the four highways, you have some new tools. The path forward is to put them to use. Continue to refine them. Sharpen them. Fine-tune them.

Use them for effecting change for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Use them to promote equity.

