

The Ultimate Guide To **TCK Living**

Understanding The World Around You



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(TCK ON A MISSION)

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Author's Note

If you are reading this book, chances are that you are a global nomad or third culture kid who has lived in multiple cities/countries/cultures. Home for you is a fluid concept that is constantly changing and the idea of you staying in one location might seem foreign to you.

But before I dive into all that, I want to introduce myself to you. My full name is Akintayo Abiola Rockson.

Wait what?!

How do I pronounce that?

What does it mean?

I am glad you asked!

Akintayo means 'a warrior has brought us joy'. Abiola means 'wealth has been born' and Rockson, I presume, means 'son of rock', I dunno.

See I am Nigerian (at least that's what my passport says anyway) but I grew up in five countries and on four different continents. I was born in Lagos, Nigeria, but my family soon made the move from Nigeria to Sweden.

Growing up, I constantly asked where I was from because I looked and sounded different, so much so that I felt like I lost my sense of identity and belonging. However, somewhere along the line I learned how to be comfortable in my own skin and with being a third culture kid. I am writing this book to help my fellow third culture kids and global citizens by sharing tips and stories about to succeed in this global environment of ours. Together let's hack new cultures.

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What Is A TCK?

TCK is an acronym for Third Culture Kid. Other variations for TCK are 3CK and TCI, which is short for Third Culture Individual. You will also sometimes hear TCKs referred to as global nomads but for the purpose of simplicity and, let us face it, your sanity, I will only use the term TCK in this book.

So what exactly is a TCK? A TCK is any individual who spent his or her formative years outside his/her parents' home country or culture. Anytime between the ages of 0-18 will usually qualify as a formative period.

They identify with parts of their home culture, parts of the cultures they grow up in and whatever unique mix comes out of their parents' culture as well as the ones that they have lived leading to the development of a 'Third Culture'.

John and Ruth Useem were the first ones to use the term 'third culture kid' in the 1950s.

In summarizing that which we had observed in our cross-cultural encounters, we began to use the term 'third culture' as a generic term to cover the styles of life created, shared, and learned by persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other. The term 'Third Culture Kids' (or TCKs) was coined in order to refer to the children who accompany their parents into another society.

—Ruth Hill Useem, [TCK World: The Official Home of Third Culture Kids](#)

FYI: TCKs SOMETIMES REFER TO THEIR HOME COUNTRY/PARENTS' COUNTRY AS THEIR PASSPORT COUNTRY.

The Different Types of TCKs

Now that you know whom TCKs are let's dive into the different types of TCKs: TCKs usually come about as a result of their parents' careers.

Missionary Kids

Missionary Kids, or MKs for short, usually spend the majority of their time in a foreign country before returning home for a furlough or a 'home assignment' for usually about a year before returning to the country they are stationed in. They usually are adept at interacting with the locals of the countries they are stationed in and often speak multiple languages including one or two of the tribal languages of the locals. As the name states, they are children of missionaries of people with religious affiliations sent abroad to spread the teachings of their religion

Reverse culture shock is pretty common amongst MKs as when they return to their passport countries, they usually feel out of touch or disconnected with the culture and norm.

Military Brats

Military brats are arguably the most mobile of all TCKs. They primarily are American and they don't spend as much time overseas, if they do it is for relatively shorter periods than MKs. They usually have lived in several states by the time they are in college and they tend to be more self-sufficient than other TCKs because the military culture promotes that. They tend to live near military bases as their parents are usually from the army, navy, air force and the marines.

Non-military government

This includes children of international businessmen, diplomats and world travelers. I happen to be part of this group. My father is a diplomat and this is who I am. My father is a diplomat and I have lived on four different continents and in five different countries. So it's safe to say that this group is fairly mobile and, unlike MKs, people in this group usually live in more than two countries depending on the assignment of their parents.

In the case of world travelers, it really depends on where they decide to go. World travelers are individuals who have decided to be global nomads and travel all around the world as a lifestyle.

Their involvement with locals and their passport countries is fairly high as they constantly go back and forth with different cultures.

Now that I have discussed that, let us get into some of the strengths that TCKs possess.

Areas of Strength Of TCKs

As a TCK you have some inherent strengths and they are as follows:

Open-Mindedness

TCKs usually have a good grasp of different worldviews and, as such, look at things from different perspectives. Although this mindset can be met with some resistance in their passport countries, due to how homogenous it can be, TCKs can use this opportunity to educate people. For example, when people find out that I am from Nigeria, a lot of people ask me why my English is so good or if I rode on elephants or lions growing up or if I lived in huts. Instead of getting offended, I simply tell them that English is the official language in Nigeria because we were colonized by England and, as far living in huts and riding animals goes, that is just a false stereotype used to apply to all of Africa which is indeed a big, big continent.

Adaptability

TCKs are sometimes likened to chameleons because of their ability to change depending on the environment they are in. This can be a great thing especially when it comes to working with teams at work or in group projects, simply because of their ability to interact with and read all sorts of people.

A Bridge between Cultures

TCKs are best equipped with cross-cultural skills. They are more open to new cultures and understand different societies better. They are more flexible, tolerant and more observant than persons born and bred in homogenous cultures. Often, global nomads are bilingual. As such, they are in a unique position to break the language barrier as globalization spreads and more cultures and languages come into contact.

Potential Challenges for TCKs

Life is not a bed of roses, as they tend to experience some challenges. I'll discuss a couple of them.

Identity Crisis

TCKs find it difficult to associate fully with a particular culture and forthwith develop an attachment, or a sense of belonging to it. Confusion sets in as they view themselves to be 'culturally homeless'. This is amplified in adolescents. Unless a smooth inter-transition and relation between the new cultures is achieved, this situation may be hazardous to their self-esteem. They consequently find challenges in transitioning into adulthood as they struggle with building themselves an identity.

Identifying with their Roots

TCKs can sometimes lack knowledge of their homeland, its culture, politics, and values, and consequently lack patriotism. They may feel like tourists when they visit their passport countries and this can cause reverse culture shock whereby things that should feel natural to them feel foreign. Even though these challenges may be experienced by a lot of TCKs, it is important to focus on the benefits that come out of this lifestyle and turn the negatives into positives. **Contrary to popular opinion, the world is flat! Yup very flat!**

Ok I don't mean literally flat. I am simply saying that we live in a digital age that allows us to keep in contact with friends in our passport countries. Things like Skype, Facebook, and Twitter allow us to connect with old friends and even see them.

Also I would recommend signing up for newsletters from your passport country that cover sports, local, and entertainment news. It won't substitute living in your home country but it at least will give you some knowledge of what is going on in your passport country.

Couple this with keeping in touch with friends via social media and reverse culture shock will not be as jarring.

Fitting In As A TCK

With a life that requires a lot of travel, fitting in does not only apply to one's passport countries so how can you fit in anywhere in the world? How will you make friends? I'll tell you in three words.

Geography, Sports, and Pop Culture *Geography*

When I was in 8th grade, my history and world affairs teacher, Ms. McDonald, decided that it was a good idea to have us learn all the countries, major cities, and major bodies of water in the world. On top of that, since I was in an American middle school I also needed to know all the states and capitals of the 50 states in the United States of America. It turns out her idea was a fantastic one. When I meet someone new (and in NYC this happens almost daily), I ask them where they are from. Once they tell me where they are from, I usually follow up with a

"Is that near..." or "I've been there" (if I have been there).

This usually causes them to crack an incredulous smile as if to say, "Wow, not many people know that."

SCORE! As you can imagine, the conversation usually flows better from then on. Take the time to know your surroundings and the world around you.

Sports

When I was in elementary school in Nigeria, the only sport I knew and loved was football, or soccer, depending on where you are from, but I quickly realized that this had to change especially when I moved to the aforementioned American international middle school in Burkina Faso as a 10-year-old. If I wanted to make friends, I had to learn about the sports they played, so off to the library I went. I checked out all the magazines and books on basketball to start with and then I moved on to tennis. Of course, now you can just use the Internet, which I used as well, but I just felt more comfortable, starting my research off with leather bound books.

The immediacy and accessibility of the Internet did draw me in more though and I started to spend hours in front of the computer screen

bookmarking sites and printing pages. My parents can confirm that I had hundreds of papers that I had printed off from the Internet stacked underneath my bed categorized in folders clearly marked with what sport they were associated with. What can I say? I fell in love with sports. It essentially was my first love.

Lucky for you, you don't have to do all that. A quick subscription to ESPN online or a quick change of the channel to ESPN for 20 minutes will give you all the pieces of information you need to know. If you don't want to do that, you can just download Bleacher Report on your smart phone and customize your news to get alerts on players and teams you want to follow.

Finito!

Now when you meet that person from that city that you recognized in geography class, you can ask him or her if he or she follows the team of that city. Get it?

Pop culture

You know, music, sports, TV shows, books, games etc. This might be the easiest of the three. You will be hard pressed to find anyone who doesn't at least do one of the following:

Watch something on TV/online,

Read books/magazines,

Listen to music, or

Play video games

If you find that one person then maybe that person just doesn't want to be connected with. You don't even have to buy tabloids to know what's going on. When you're waiting in line at the grocery store, just grab the nearest magazine or tabloid and flip through it (yes guys, it's ok for you to do so also), then drop it off when it is your turn to pay for your items. With movies, try to see at least two blockbusters a year and you will definitely get a conversation going just by saying how you feel about these films because everyone is a critic. With music, turn on the radio or go to vevo.com and you will see what is new. With books, read two to three bestsellers a year and you should be fine. There is no excuse

either because, even if you are a slow reader, 365 days is more than enough time to finish two or three books.

Geography, Sports, and Pop Culture people—if not all, at least try one and connect away!

How TCKs Can Thrive In The Workplace?

Third culture kids grow up facing a number of challenges both in school and in the labor market. However, they can thrive in the workplace because of certain skills they are able to possess.

Some of these qualities that give these third culture kids the needed edge include: ability to adapt easily to a new environment, the willingness to relocate, a sense of urgency and seriousness, independence and self-confidence, fluency in a number of languages, the big picture view, cross cultural skills, global network of contacts, etc.

These traits make TCKs very suitable for a good number of professions. Though they may face certain challenges in certain fields, their ability to speak different languages makes them eligible for jobs in international organizations and embassies of their native countries.

Third culture kids work well as language teachers where they teach the natives of the countries they live in who may be interested in learning certain foreign languages and need the necessary language tutorship.

Third culture kids equally work well with organizations that deal with international relations and cultures. These are not the only places third culture kids can work, they are found in virtually every industry in the countries where they live. The challenges they face while growing up make it easy for them to adjust to all kinds of challenges in every industry they find themselves in, and their ability to learn new things easily gives them an added advantage.

Another thing TCKs can become is to become a global leader.

How TCKs Can Become Global Leaders?

I was lucky enough to have been able to grow up in four different continents and five different countries and one of the things I have noticed as a Third Culture Kid is the unique lens with which I see things. These things could range from politics to business to even sports and It has dawned on me that my lens can actually be used as a force for good; a force that allows me to become a global leader. As a TCK do you know that you are a global leader? That's right! You are even more of a global leader than some members of the United Nations. Here are a few reasons why and how you can improve on those skills.

Become Astute With Your Surroundings

You know that there are more than one perspective that one can get from consuming news. For example by listening to Al Jazeera and BBC you will get a different perspective from when you listen to CNN, Fox News or MSNBC. My advice is that you listen to all of them anyway because you will gain an understanding and a perspective that is rich and unbiased. How does this help you become a global leader as a TCK? For starters, you will have more than one opinion to go off of when talking to people from different cultures especially when it comes to different issues and you won't appear naive. The same thing goes for sports, business and entertainment news. In order to accentuate these skills, I recommend using content aggregators like the [Breaking News App](#), [Bleacher Report](#), [LinkedIn Pulse](#).

Speak a Foreign Language On Purpose

Having lived in multiple countries, chances are that you picked up a foreign language or two along the way. It is important that you don't lose this. When I lived in Burkina Faso, I picked up the French language but when I went back to live in Nigeria and subsequently the United States, I noticed that I was losing my French so I minored in it at college and started consuming news in French. It didn't feel natural at first but gradually I became more comfortable with it and I have been able to collaborate on multiple international projects because of my ability to speak some French. [Busuu](#) is a great resource to use when trying to learn multiple languages. As a global leader, speaking multiple languages is an invaluable tool to have as it often endears you to natives and makes negotiating business deals and mediating international disputes a lot

easier.

Take Vacations to Foreign Countries

Planning a vacation? Why not go to that country that you know nothing about in Europe and spend two weeks there. [EF Tours](#) is great at putting together such packages. I used them to go to Greece, Italy, and Turkey and it was one of the most educational experiences of my life as I learned about the culture, food, and traditions of each country. In addition, the camaraderie I built was long lasting. You cannot become a global leader without understanding as many cultures as you can. As an expat, TCK, and global nomad you already have the advantage of having done that for a big part of your life but learning never stops so continue to explore countries you know little about.

Volunteer Abroad

To be a great leader you have to be a great server. I am a firm believer in service leadership because it makes one more empathetic. Throughout my undergraduate years, I helped run two nonprofits aimed at raising awareness about orphans and HIV/AIDS in Sub Saharan Africa and some of the lessons I learned having to deal with limited finances and working with organizations that did not have basic amenities have helped me to become very resourceful. For opportunities to volunteer abroad, check out [Global Work & Travel Co.](#)

As world citizens, the possibilities for us are endless and becoming a global leader is one of them so why not explore that path and see how many lives you can touch.

Conclusion

As a TCK, there are many good things that can come out of your experience but it is important to realize them and embrace them.

One of my mentors likes to tell his clients to pick a superhero name that embodies who they are and their gifts because it creates a sense of symbolism and idea to live up to. Me? I'm *'The African Superman'*, clearly not the one you know from your TV sets or comic books but a type of superman nonetheless. Let me explain. I am a Nigerian who happens to have grown up everywhere and had to fit into different environments much like Clark Kent has to all the time.

Let's take a few seconds to examine the story of Superman. He was an alien who was sent to Earth by his parents so that he wouldn't perish with the rest of Krypton. He has to live among humans and go in and out of his two identities—Clark Kent and Superman. To the rest of the world, he appears human but he knows he is not and thus has to acquiesce to what is perceived as the norm.

Does this sound familiar to you Global Nomads or Third Culture Kids?

I never really understood why I was particularly partial to Superman until my junior year in college when one evening I found myself drawing parallelisms between myself and the illustrious Superman in an attempt to explain why I was frustrated by another Nigerian saying I was not being "Nigerian enough" to my American friend.

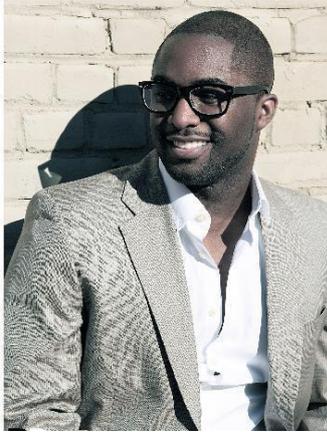
I said something to the effect of "This is why I relate so much to Clark Kent" without even thinking about what I was saying. Naturally, my statement was met with a confused look so I proceeded to explain some of the similarities and it made sense to her.

That, my friends, is the power of classification. So next time someone questions your identity just tell them you are a superhero. My name is Tayo Rockson and I am the African Superman. My super power is my ability to adapt to whatever environment i'm in and make myself comfortable. This allows me to build meaningful relationships with people of different cultures.

So, fellow nomads/TCKs, what is your superhero name and what is your

super power?

About The Author



Tayo Rockson is an author, podcaster, and digital marketer. Born in Nigeria and raised throughout Africa, Europe, North America and Asia. Tayo's upbringing as a global nomad and Third Culture Kid gave him a unique perspective on life and he has remained committed to building the next set of global leaders. To read more about Tayo and find out about his upcoming podcast and books, visit his blog at www.tayorockson.com, like his page on [facebook.com/tayoarockon](https://www.facebook.com/tayoarockon) and follow him on twitter at www.twitter.com/TayoRockson.