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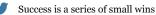# From Community College To NASA

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🐦 Outdream yourself daily.

🐦 Success is a series of small wins

Aisha Bowe, co-founder and CEO of STEMBoard

Outdream yourself daily. 🐦   That's the motto that Aisha Bowe lives by. Those words have helped to catapult her in a direction that years ago seemed unavailable. A high school guidance counselor recommended she become a cosmetologist. Today, Bowe is an aerospace engineer and co-founder, CEO of STEMBoard.

"I spent so long discounting myself," Bowe recalls. "If it wasn't for my dad pushing me to take that class, I never would have gotten to the point in life of wanting to challenge myself," said Bowe. Her dad, a former Ann-Arbor taxi cab driver, was having a regular day. At the end of his lunch break, he spotted a math book in the garbage and picked it up. His instinct led him to convince Aisha to take up a math class. Sounds like a plan, except for the fact she was already having trouble with her other community college classes.

She took her dad's advice. The result? A perfect score on her math test, and her instructor encouraging her to start thinking differently about her future. Since then, she hasn't stopped moving forward and upward and not by happenstance. To level up, it takes strategy, clarity, and execution.

Bowe made a list that reflected what her ideal life would look like, tacked it to the back of her bedroom door and went to work. "The whole idea of waking up every day to work on something that would go into space was exciting," she said. Working at NASA would be "badass". But like most women working in a white male-dominated field, there was a lack of representation and mentorship. "I had the list, but it was still abstract to me. I didn't know anybody that worked at NASA or that was an engineer. I didn't even know that many people that were at Michigan or in the engineering program that could guide me," she recalled. Instead, she focused on small goals like making all A's that semester, which

Bowe likes to call the snowball of accomplishments. " Success is a series of small wins 🐦 ," said Bowe.

Her strategy hasn't changed much since her days of wanting to work at NASA. The dreams have gotten bigger and leaps a bit scarier. " If you continue to dream bigger, you are only going to accomplish bigger things 🐦 ," she said. In 2013, she launched STEMBoard which develops software solutions for government and private entities. A company that is highly profitable and sustainable without the help of Silicon Valley. She remembered, "I was out in Silicon Valley talking to everyone at Philz coffee shop and trying to get a million dollars off of a PowerPoint presentation. I thought, why not me?" This thought crosses the minds of many creating startups. "I talked to a lot of people that didn't see my vision. Is that a bad thing? Not necessarily. Why would I want someone to invest in me that doesn't believe in my mission or business?" Bowe said. She encourages founders to really consider if they need an investor and what kind of investment. She added, "Does this money mean that you can run the kind of company you want to run? Maybe not."

As STEMBoard grows, Bowe has also created programs for underrepresented youth interested in technology innovation. When she's not running the show in the office, you may even catch her on stage in a fitness competition or climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, a goal she made in 2016. "It was something that I never thought I could do," she said regarding getting fit. "There were all these things in my life that I didn't do, because I thought I couldn't do them," said Bowe. Her lists now as a successful entrepreneur consists only of three things at a time. They must be meaningful and measurable, and they make her nervous. She explained, "I want to be better than I was yesterday."

Joresa Blount is an author, the host of The Comeback Series and creator of Brown Girls Innovate too which provides tools and connections for women in tech.