IT’S NOT WHO YOU KNOW, IT’S WHO YOU ARE

Life Lessons from Winners

PAT WILLIAMS
with JIM DENNEY
To the late Bob Carpenter and his son, Ruly, my good friend, in gratitude for the opportunity they gave me as a young ballplayer and front office exec. They made all these stories possible.
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Foreword

A s a longtime sports executive and author, Pat Williams has met seemingly everybody. Not only has he met them but he has interacted with them on a meaningful level in one fascinating way or another. In this book, Pat has mined a lifetime of experiences to provide readers with a wide array of anecdotes and stories that are both immensely fun and wonderfully profound.

Pat has long possessed one of the greatest senses of humor in modern sport. For decades, sportswriters have relied on Pat’s insight, immense wit, and keen memory to bring their stories alive. It’s Not Who You Know, It’s Who You Are now brings that mother lode of his experiences and memories to his many readers.

Among the multitude of voices, there’s the great Bill Veeck, who mentored Pat in the art of sports promotions, and other sports figures such as Ted Williams, Dick Bavetta, Joe Namath and more. It’s the kind of volume that’s destined to become an instant classic. After all, it just doesn’t get any better than Pat Williams on sports and life.

And, as this impressive book clearly demonstrates, he has the memories and experiences to prove it.

Roland Lazenby, legendary sportswriter and author of Michael Jordan: The Life
Acknowledgments

With deep appreciation, I acknowledge the support and guidance of the following people who helped make this book possible.

Special thanks to Alex Martins, Dan DeVos, and Rich DeVos of the Orlando Magic.

Hats off to my associate Andrew Herdliska; my proofreader, Ken Hussar; and my ace typist, Fran Thomas.

Thanks also to my writing partner, Jim Denney, for his superb contributions in shaping this manuscript.

Hearty thanks also go to Andrea Doering, executive editor at Revell Books, and to the entire Revell team for their vision and insight and for believing we had something important to say in these pages.

And, finally, special thanks and appreciation go to my wife, Ruth, and to my wonderful and supportive family. They are truly the backbone of my life.
Introduction

“Keep Your Eyes and Ears Open”

In 1968, I left Minor League Baseball and took my first NBA job. As the business manager of the Philadelphia 76ers, I was in charge of promoting the team and packing people into the arena. The Phoenix Suns had just entered the league as an expansion team, and their ownership group included a number of famous people, including Henry Mancini and Andy Williams. I read that Andy Williams was performing at a supper club across the river in New Jersey, so I typed up some advertising copy and lugged my portable tape recorder to the club. I managed to fast-talk my way into Andy Williams’s dressing room. After the show, he walked into his dressing room—and there I was, waiting for him.

I introduced myself and told him what I wanted him to do. I set up the tape recorder and handed the advertising copy to him. Once the tape was rolling, Andy Williams, in that wonderful “Moon River” voice, recorded a season ticket blurb plus a promo for the Suns-76ers game later in the season.
Introduction

I had arrived without knowing if I would get within a hundred feet of Andy Williams, and I left with his voice captured on my tape recorder. He had been not only willing to help but also eager to help. His endorsement helped sell a lot of tickets and fill a lot of seats that season.

Later that fall, Martha and the Vandellas performed at that same supper club, and I was able to get Martha Reeves to record a voice-over that sounded fantastic with “Heat Wave” playing in the background.

What fun I had! I was all of twenty-eight years old, and I had my first big league job. I believed I could do anything, and I was absolutely fearless when I approached famous people for a favor.

I have nineteen children—four biological kids, fourteen by international adoption, and one by remarriage—and I have encouraged all of them to be bold, to speak up, to introduce themselves, and to ask questions. There have been times when my kids have said to me, “Hey, Dad, I saw Ken Griffey Jr. downtown today,” or, “I saw Monica Seles at the mall.” I would always say, “That’s great! What did you say? What did you ask? What advice did he or she give you?”

And almost always, my kids would reply, “I didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to intrude.”

They didn’t want to intrude! Haven’t they ever seen ol’ Dad in action? Whenever I encounter accomplished people, I speak up. I ask questions. I’m always eager to have some of that person’s wisdom, insight, and success rub off on me. If I have time to ask a question or two, I grab my pen and a paper napkin and I fire away: “What’s the most important word of advice you ever got? Who were your role models when you were growing up? What can I do to be successful?”

Over the years, I’ve crossed paths with many famous people, and I’ve always seized the opportunity. Sure, I’ve been rebuffed
Introduction

a few times, but so what? I’ve also accumulated a vast treasure trove of insights—and I’ve filled this book with those insights.

If you encounter an accomplished, successful person, don’t be shy. Don’t squander the opportunity. Speak up! Introduce yourself! Ask questions!

I got my first job in professional sports from Bob Carpenter, the owner of the Philadelphia Phillies. He gave me a word of advice before sending me to the Phillies farm club in Miami: “Keep your eyes and ears open—on and off the field.”

I’ve never forgotten that advice. I have always kept my eyes and ears open. I have tried to learn something new every day. I have especially tried to learn life lessons from winners in every walk of life. In these pages, you’ll find life lessons I have learned from my encounters with presidents, civil rights leaders, business leaders, sports executives, athletes, religious leaders, entertainers, and more.

I hope you enjoy this book—and maybe find an inspiring insight or two. I also hope you’ll write to me and share your thoughts with me. My eyes and ears are wide open, and I’m eager to learn from you!
Part 1

Success
For thirteen years, I coordinated the Philadelphia Phillies chapel services in the clubhouse before the games. Usually the chapel was held in the morning before a one o’clock game, but on one occasion, before a six o’clock Sunday evening game, we had the chapel service at about 4:30. I had arranged for Dr. Stephen Olford to be our speaker. Olford was a preacher from England whom Billy Graham had once called “the man who most influenced my ministry.”

After Olford gave the message, he and legendary Phillies third baseman Mike Schmidt talked for a long time. Mike was a new Christian, and he and Olford seemed to hit it off.

At game time, the Phillies arranged for Olford and me to sit in the front row right next to the Phillies’ dugout. In the bottom of the first with two men on base, Mike Schmidt came up to bat. The next thing we knew, Mike hammered one far and deep into the left field seats. Fifty thousand Phillies fans went wild as Mike rounded the bases and headed for home.

While I watched all this, Olford leaped out of his seat and started climbing over the railing. For a moment, I was too shocked to move. There was the erudite Olford in his suit and...
tie and cuff links—and he was making a dive for the dugout! He was so caught up in the excitement that he wanted to go into the dugout and embrace his new best friend, Mike Schmidt!

The stadium security guards ran to Olford and pushed him back toward the stands, and I tried to grab him and pull him from behind. I shouted to him, “Dr. Olford! The fans aren’t allowed on the field! And they sure aren’t allowed to dive into the dugout!”

He shouted back in his clipped English accent, “I just wanted to congratulate my friend Mike!”

I said, “I’ll take you to the locker room after the game. That would probably be more appropriate.”

I managed to get Olford back into his seat. But for a few moments, I got to see a reputedly staid and reserved English clergyman go nuts at a Phillies game. No wonder even Billy Graham looked up to this “dugout diver” as a friend and mentor. Stephen Olford was a man who passionately, enthusiastically cheered the success and accomplishments of others.

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Ted Williams

A Passion to Be the Best

Each year after the Ted Williams Museum and Hitters Hall of Fame induction ceremonies, there is an activity for the attendees, such as a golf or fishing outing.
Success

One year, I elected to go fishing, and one of my companions in the bass boat was the great NBC sportscaster Curt Gowdy. Talk about intimidation! For years, Gowdy hosted *The American Sportsman* and took many sports and entertainment legends out on fishing and hunting expeditions. So I felt both honored and out of my league to be sitting in a boat on a lake in central Florida trying to catch a bass with Curt Gowdy.

I was much more interested in talking to Gowdy than in fishing. Gowdy knew Ted Williams quite well, having been the voice of the Boston Red Sox for fifteen years (in fact, he made the call when Williams hit a home run on his final at bat in 1960). So I asked Gowdy how he would sum up Williams’s life and career. He said, “Ted Williams is the only man I’ve ever met who was the best at what he did in three different fields: the best hitter in baseball, the best at catching fish, and the best Navy combat pilot. Everything Ted Williams does he does with an intense passion to be the best.”

Jentezen Franklin

“Like a Heat-Seeking Missile”

I once had bestselling author Jentezen Franklin (*Right People, Right Place, Right Plan*) as a guest on my Orlando radio show, and he made a statement that stuck in my mind and that I have quoted often when speaking to audiences: “When you discover
your passion in life and pursue it relentlessly, you become like a heat-seeking missile.”

There’s so much truth packed into that one sentence. Think about it. A heat-seeking missile searches for a source of heat, locks onto it, then chases it with single-minded focus. If the heat source moves up, down, or sideways, the missile follows unerringly. When you are passionate about your goals and dreams, you move unerringly toward the target of your passion. That’s why passion is such a powerful ally of success.

It’s not enough simply to set some goals, then methodically plod toward them. You’ve got to get fired up and motivated. Never be content to dwell in the gray margins of life. Become a heat-seeking missile! Live passionately!

Ted Williams

_The Groove in the Handle_

I acquired my obsession with Ted Williams from my mother’s younger brother, Bill Parsons. Uncle Bill related everything—and I mean everything!—to the great Red Sox slugger. If I didn’t want to eat my brussels sprouts, Uncle Bill would say, “You know, Ted would have eaten his brussels sprouts. You think maybe that’s why he’s such a great hitter?”

When I was fourteen, my buddy Gil Yule and I would go to Philadelphia to watch the A’s play almost every weekend. I saw
Ted Williams in person at an A’s–Red Sox doubleheader. My team, the A’s, lost both games.

Afterward, Gil and I waited outside the park by the Red Sox bus, and there was Williams walking to the bus as fans called out to him and pulled at him. He climbed into the front seat of the bus with the window open while hordes of kids swarmed around him like mosquitoes in July, begging for his autograph. And I was one of those kids.

Williams stuck his head out the window and roared, “Everybody get in line or I’m not signing!” Well, we all lined up and quieted down, and Williams signed autographs for every kid in line, including young Pat Williams. The picture he signed for me that day is still in my collection.

Gil and I boarded the train to Wilmington, and Dad picked us up at the station. I came bounding into the house, and Mom, who had heard the games on the radio, said, “Oh, son, what a disappointing day! The A’s lost twice.”

I said, “It was great, Mom! I got Ted Williams’s autograph!”

When the Ted Williams Museum and Hitters Hall of Fame opened not far from Orlando, I saw Williams more often. When he entered the room, every conversation stopped and he was the center of attention.

At one induction dinner, a fan went to Williams and held out a bat. “Ted, I’ve had this bat for a long time,” he said. “I’m told that you used it in 1941, the season you hit .406.”

Williams took the bat and closed his eyes as he worked his hands around the grip. “Yep,” he said, “this is one of my bats. In 1940 and ’41, I’d cut a groove in the handle for my right index finger to nestle in. I can feel that groove. This is one of my bats all right.”

After sixty years, Williams still recalled the little things that contributed to his greatness.
After speaking at an event in Fayetteville, Arkansas, I walked to the back of the room and sat down next to a man dressed in khaki slacks and a golf shirt. He leaned toward me and whispered, “Nice job.”

“Thank you,” I said.

He extended his hand and said, “I’m Jim Walton.”

I was amazed. By chance, I had chosen to sit down next to billionaire James Carr Walton, the chairman of Arvest Bank and the youngest son of Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart. According to Forbes, he was then the twentieth richest individual on the planet.

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Walton,” I said.

“Call me Jim. Would you like to join me for lunch?”

So we had lunch together. Over turkey on rye sandwiches, I asked him, “Tell me about your dad. What was Sam Walton’s greatest strength as a leader?”

“His greatest strength? It would have to be his passion. Dad was passionate about life and passionate about the merchandise. He loved to travel around and see the latest things he could sell in his stores. He was always trying to get the best price on the best merchandise so he could pass the savings on to his customers. Now, take that shirt you’re wearing.”

Jim pointed to my Hawaiian shirt.

“What about it?” I said.

“Dad would have been fascinated by that shirt. He would
have examined the fabric and asked you where it came from. He would have turned the sleeve inside out and looked at the stitching. He was curious about everything, constantly asking questions and reading up on every aspect of the retail business. That’s why he was so good at what he did, and that was his greatest strength as a leader.”

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### Jimmy Valvano

**Laugh, Think, and Cry**

One of the greatest role models of passionate living I’ve ever met is the late, great basketball coach Jimmy Valvano, aka “Jimmy V.” I knew Valvano when he was coaching the North Carolina State Wolfpack and broadcasting at ABC and ESPN. He was famed for his passionate, optimistic, enthusiastic way of speaking and living. Whenever I spoke to him, I always went away feeling emotionally uplifted.

In June 1992, Valvano was diagnosed with bone cancer—a grim diagnosis—yet he never surrendered his passion for living. On March 4, 1993, Valvano received the Arthur Ashe Courage and Humanitarian Award at the inaugural ESPY Awards event. In his acceptance speech, he talked about living with passion in spite of adversity.

“There are three things we all should do every day,” he said. “Number one is laugh. You should laugh every day. Number
two is think. You should spend some time in thought. Number three, you should have your emotions move you to tears. It could be happiness or joy. If you laugh, you think, and you cry, that’s a full day. That’s a heck of a day. You do that seven days a week and you’re going to have something special.”

Valvano died less than two months after saying those words. He had something special, something we all need. He had an intense, irrepressible passion for living—and that passion lives on after him, setting an example for you and me.

Fess Parker

Pay Your Dues

Once in an interview, Davy Crockett star Fess Parker recalled how giant radioactive ants helped him land the role of the legendary frontiersman from Tennessee.

“Walt Disney was searching for the right actor to play Davy Crockett,” Fess told me. “Just about every Hollywood action guy was considered for the role, including George Montgomery and Ronald Reagan. Somebody told Walt he should look at a sci-fi movie called Them! about radioactive giant ants attacking Los Angeles. The star of that film was Jim Arness, who would eventually become Marshal Dillon on Gunsmoke.

“Walt screened the picture to scout Jim Arness, but then he spotted me in the film. I had a small speaking part, so small
that if you looked away to put cream in your coffee you would have missed me altogether. But Walt said, ‘Who's that fella?’ Nobody knew. So Tom Blackburn, one of Walt’s producers, called Warner Brothers, and they gave him my name. Then Disney called me out to the studio for an interview and a screen test.

“I was twenty-nine at the time, and I fancied myself a singer and songwriter, so I brought my guitar with me. Walt and I talked for a while, and then he said, ‘Why don’t you play me a little tune?’ I had written a song called ‘Lonely’ about a guy who’s riding on a train after breaking up with his girl. I did the sound of a train whistle in the song. I didn't know it then, but Walt Disney had a real passion for railroads, so that little song didn’t hurt my chances.

“If I hadn’t had that bit part in a movie about giant ants, I might never have had the career I had. Walt spotted me, yanked me out of obscurity, and made me a star. He opened every door for me. I’ll always be grateful to Walt Disney.”

“So you paid your dues,” I said. “You took the bit part, and that's how you got to be ‘King of the Wild Frontier.’”

“Something like that.”

“Fess, would you indulge me? How about a chorus of ‘Davy Crockett’?”

He immediately obliged. I heard that deep, mellow voice sing, “Born on a mountaintop in Tennessee . . .”

I sang along. Fortunately, no tape recorder was running.