

Written by Patricia Turnier
Sunday, 29 March 2020 00:00



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Patrick Livingston Murphy Williams (named after an American psychiatrist of the 19th century) was born in Philadelphia on May 3rd, 1940. The name Patrick has a special etymology. It is Roman and the patricians were aristocrats, in other words they had privileges. Williams' parents were Jim and Ellen Williams. He grew up as the only boy in a family of 4 children. His love for sports started when he was about 3 years old. His father, Jim Williams, gave him his first baseball glove at that age. He saw his first major league game in 1947 with his sister and father. This was one of the happiest days of his life. Pat Williams managed to ignore everybody else's opinions, follow his heart and pursue his passion for sports. While growing up, Williams became a friend of Ruly Carpenter, son of Philadelphia Phillies owner Bob Carpenter, who would bring Williams to the team's Spring training in Clearwater, Florida.

Pat Williams graduated from his high school, Tower Hill, in 1958. He obtained a scholarship thanks to his interests in baseball. Thereafter, he got his bachelor's degree in physical education at Wake Forest University in 1962 while playing as a catcher on the Demon Deacons baseball team for four years. In June 1962, a very sad event happened in his life: his father was killed in a car accident. He loved his father deeply, and this surely helped him to cherish fatherhood later in his life. He recovered from the loss of his father and later earned his master's degree at Indiana University in physical education in 1964 and later a Ph.D. in Human Letters from Flagler College.

Pat Williams' parents always believed in him. During his childhood, they told him he would do great things in life (I strongly believe that it can make all the difference in the world in a child's trajectory when he/she is being raised with this mindset. For instance, when Vanessa Williams came into this world, her parents gave her a card with these words: "Here she is Miss America", and the rest is history). Williams describes his parents as type-A people, and he learned from a strong work ethic from them that served him well later in his career. He was exposed to many interesting thing during his youth: sports, arts, books, music, etc. which made a significant impact on his path.

In 1968, at the age 27, he became a born-again Christian. Hence, he shares his spiritual journey in his autobiography, as well as some Christian books that really inspired him. In 1967, he was named president of the Spartanburg Phillies. Williams became involved in basketball in 1968, by becoming the business manager for the Philadelphia 76ers. After this, the struggling Chicago Bulls hired Williams to become their general manager. In the late sixties, at the age of 29, he became the youngest general manager in professional sports with an annual salary of \$30,000 (from the Bulls' management in Chicago), which represented a lot at the time. Williams immediately reshaped the team's roster and capitalized on the promotion. The Bulls became strong in the league. In 1973, he took the role of general manager of the Atlanta Hawks. He spent one year in Atlanta and returned to the NBA in 1974. Williams stayed in Philadelphia for 12 years as their general manager, helping to shape the team that won the 1982–83 NBA

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season. In the late 80s, he went to Orlando to join Hewitt's investment group and created there a franchise of the NBA called the Orlando Magic, which debuted in 1989. Throughout the years, great athletes were drafted such as Shaquille O'Neal in 1995. The late Rich DeVos, a self-made billionaire, bought the Orlando Magic in 1991 for \$85 million. The Orlando Magic has circa an annual revenue of 223 million U.S. dollars.

Pat Williams is very generous with his knowledge. He has written more than 110 books. He still has many more books in him to write. Right now, Williams is working on his next book, *Who Coached the Coaches*

. People like Larry King have endorsed several of Williams' books. Pat Williams penned about several well-known people and one of the figures he admires the most is Walt Disney. His latest book,

Lead Like Walt

, is about the famous American entrepreneur. Through Williams' writing, readers will discover that Disney's mother taught him how to read before he began school. This put him ahead of many people for the rest of his life. I noticed that several people who learned how to read at the age 3 thrived in their fields:

[Oprah Winfrey](#)

,

[Toni Morrison](#)

,

[Johnnie Cochran](#)

,

[Dr. Omalu M.D.](#)

, etc.

Walt Disney was a self-made man who did not grow up with privilege. He believed in his dreams. He was a calculated risk-taker. Williams has been fascinated by him for a long time (without idealizing him or ignoring his flaws). There will always be something special and magic about Walt Disney. If a kid does not go to Disneyland, it is like something is missing in his childhood.

In *How to be like Walt*, a previous book written by Williams, it is interesting to learn that Disney had to ignore naysayers and believe in his dream. He knew he wanted to make a living by being an artist and his father did not encourage this journey. It is also interesting to discover in this book that Disney befriended a man who would create a company that makes many children's dreams around the world: Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's. They met in the army when Kroc lied about his age likewise for Disney.

Lead Like Walt is also available as an audiobook, which makes it accessible to a wider audience. Twin NBA star athletes Brook and Robin Lopez wrote the book's foreword. They of

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course wrote what Disneyland meant to them during their childhood. Williams co-wrote the book with Jim Denney.

Walter Disney came from a humble background. He was a farm boy. He started working at a very young age and this is how he got his excellent work ethic. It is interesting to discover in the book *Lead Like Walt* that his father, Elias, was Canadian. He was born in Ontario in 1859. Elias' grandfather had arrived in Canada in 1834. Disney was not scared of failure, in fact, it helped him thrive.

Williams' latest book exposes the key elements used by Walt Disney that made an effective leader. Many are related to emotional intelligence (or EQ), likewise for Pat Williams. Thus, it is noteworthy to learn in Williams' autobiography *Ahead of the Game* that he had to pass a five-hour psychological test to become a manager in professional basketball major leagues. It shows how social skills are taken very seriously to occupy these positions. Williams was probably assessed on his non-verbal communication skills (which is part of 80% of communication), the tone of his voice and his patience more than anything else. It is also riveting to learn in his autobiography that Williams almost ended up in my hometown Montreal in 1969 in the management of the National Major League season of the Expos expansion team. He would have been part of the front office but he had to refuse because he already accepted a similar position in basketball. It was not an easy decision given that baseball was his first love. However, it is riveting to observe in Williams' journey the importance of being open to new things and willing to adapt. In other words, it is essential to be flexible in our choices and decisions. Williams' professional journey reminds me of this famous Confucius quote: "When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the objectives, change the action steps".

Williams' new experience with basketball allowed him to become more versatile. For instance, he boldly used his marketing skills on many levels such as persuading in the late 1960s Motown stars Martha and the Vandellas (who made the first music video with their song "[Nowhere to Run](#)" in the sixties) in the late 60s to entertain the Philadelphia 76ers and the crowd. The Jackson 5, who were unknown in March 1970, performed for the Bulls when Williams was a general manager in Chicago. This event happened before the group exploded after their performance at the *Ed Sullivan Show*

. This shows Pat Williams' skills as an intuitive promoter and marketer. He is competent in many fields. When someone is playing the piano, the range is limitless and wide. This is how Pat Williams can be perceived as a man for whom the sky is the limit.

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What is worthy of note in Pat Williams' path is his ability to assess himself objectively. At some point when he was playing baseball, he realized that he was not contributing as much as he wanted to on the field, so he asked the Phillies' minor league director if he could be involved in the front office of the organization. This is how his professional transition began. He was willing to adapt to change and accept the loss of his original dream. In addition, he possesses transferable skills while extending himself and manages to never stagnate.

[Jackie Robinson](#) is another person who Williams admires greatly. He wrote a book entitled *How to Be Like Jackie Robinson*

. Pat Williams was born during the segregation era. Fortunately for him, he had very open-minded parents who instilled values in him like how to treat people equally. They were not solely about rhetoric; they showed integrity in their actions. For instance, in the 50s, when [Black athletes](#)

were not allowed to stay on campus, they were welcomed at their homes. Later, in the 60s, Pat Williams attended the famous 1963 March in Washington with his family. Readers will be interested to learn what the family members had to say about

[Jackie Robinson](#)

. This gives a unique insight into who the man was. Based on what they said, Robinson's public personality was the same as how he behaved at home; there was no façade, he was a man with integrity. Pat Williams describes his book as an oral biography of Robinson. It comprises many quotes from interviewees and others. Some knew personally Robinson as a co-worker, a friend and/or a family member. Others reveal what he represented to them. Some are celebrities in sport or in or in other fields. Many interesting people such as Dr. Dorothy Height, John Saunders, Dr. Maya Angelou and Jesse Jackson shared their thoughts about Robinson for the book. There are powerful quotes in the book such as this one from Professor Larry Hogan:

"What

[Jackie Robinson](#)

did was as important to this country as

Brown v. the Board of Education

".

The book *How to Be Like Jackie Robinson* is an homage to the legendary athlete. Among other themes, the book covers Robinson's time in the army. Even in those days, he had the courage to stand up for justice and equality. It is important to note that about 10 years before Rosa Parks, Robinson refused to sit in the back of the segregated army bus. It is noteworthy to learn also that when he was in the army he challenged the status quo with Joe Louis. Robinson received a court martial and was acquitted later. Jackie Robinson died the same date (but not the same year) as Rosa Parks. The author conducted more than 1,100 interviews for *How to Be Like Jackie Robinson* and he gathered many quotes from them, such as the powerful one aforementioned.

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Robinson's wife Rachel and daughter Sharon have praised the book, as well as illustrious people like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. This book was dedicated to Robinson's family: Rachel, Sharon and his son David. This paperback highlights the courage Jackie Robinson had to shatter the color barrier in his field which had an impact on America as a whole. In other words, the book reminds us that Robinson was a big symbol of bravery and grit that went way beyond sport by shaping the mindset of America. His number 42 is the only one retired from major league baseball and every year to honor him on April 15th (it was that date in 1947 when Robinson broke the color barrier) baseball players wear this number. Thanks to Robinson, the Dodgers won six titles in 1947, 1949, 1952, 1953, 1955 and 1956. Everything started for him in my hometown, Montreal, when he joined the Montreal Royals in 1946. Readers will discover in the book that after his retirement, he faced a glass ceiling, he could not be hired anywhere as a manager in sports. Bibliophiles will find in the book powerful quotes such as this one by civil-rights leader Andrew Young: "Jackie was to sports what [Martin Luther King](#) was to civil rights"

The broadcaster Dick Enberg mentioned something very deep in the book. He reminded us that Robinson's fights took him prematurely in his grave. In other words, his combat had a cost: he aged quickly. The same thing happened with Dr. MLK. When he died, the autopsy discovered that his heart was in the same condition that of a sixty-year-old man. Dr. King was only 39 at the time. Both men received death threats during their lives which deteriorated their health. It would have been interesting if the book mentioned whether the basis of Robinson's philanthropy and fortitude came from Christian faith like Dr. King. It is noteworthy to mention that it was on August 28th, 1945 (exactly 18 years before Dr. Martin Luther King's legendary "I Have a Dream" speech) that Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey agreed that his professional contract would be signed.

I have no interest in baseball, but if I had been alive in 1947, I would have run to see this gorgeous Black man Robinson who played in my hometown. Actually, Montrealers at the time ran after Robinson to cheer him. His daughter, Sharon Robinson, in her book *Stealing Home* described her father as a handsome man who could light up her world with a broad smile.



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Robinson is recognized as a national treasure and U.S. stamps have been made in his honor. There is a special statue of him in my hometown Montreal where his success started in 1947. The sculpture was created in 1987 to memorialize the 40th anniversary of the arrival of the first Black player in professional baseball. The statue is accompanied by the presence of two kids, one White and the other Black, who both admiringly attempt to catch the attention of their hero. Many people believe that music transcends everything and has no barriers. Sport can do the same thing and has a great capacity to represent a universal language. Robinson, through sport and beyond, showed the power of shattering boundaries.

No country is perfect. In spite of America's flaws, it is the [Western country](#) that has improved the most in terms of race-relations in the last decades and a system (ex. The Executive Order 11246 of President Johnson in 1965, the creation of an anti-discriminatory policy (strongly supported by [Steve](#) [nson](#)), in 1969, Nixon favored Black capitalism by creating the MBDA (Minority Business Development Agency) for the Department of Commerce (via the Executive Order 11458) which promotes growth and competitiveness of the United States' minority-owned businesses)) on state lending institutions adopted in Illinois

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, the first state which did this, affirmative action, EEOC founded after the existence of the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964, etc.) was created to favor meritocracy.

[Barack Obama](#)

's election with the former First Lady

[Michelle Obama](#)

represented the supreme symbol of this evolution. To ameliorate race relations further, people need to be educated about philanthropists (whatever their origins) who fought for equality. For instance, very few people know that the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau refused to pay taxes to protest the maltreatment of Natives and African-Americans. He ended up in

[prison](#)

for it. Einstein was not only being a scientist but denounced the mistreatment of Black people for example and was a member of the NAACP. John Brown was a WASP abolitionist of the 19th who advocated to overthrow the institution of slavery in America. He was executed by the ruling class. The part-owner of Sears Julius Rosenwald who was Jewish, like Einstein, widely funded the education of African-American children in the rural South of the country during the segregation era. In

How to be Like Jackie Robinson

, readers are educated by the contribution of the WASP Dodgers' manager Branch Rickey.

In April 2019, after a career that has extended over 56 years, including 30-plus years with the Magic and 51 years in the NBA, Pat Williams retired in 2018. However, he still holds a senior

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vice president title and operates as a front-office mentor. On a more personal level, he describes himself as a Christian man. He has 4 biological children and adopted 14 kids from four countries (two sisters and two boys from South Korea, four brothers from the Philippines, Romania and Brazil) between 1983 and 1993 with his first wife, Jill, who he met in Chicago. So, it was not necessarily important for the couple to have children who look like them or who share their culture. This was irrelevant to them. Instead, they embraced the differences. Josephine Baker wanted to showcase that children she adopted could be brothers and sisters even if they came from different parts of the world. She called them the rainbow tribe. Pat Williams did the same thing with his former spouse.

For one year, 16 of his children were all adolescents at the same time. The couple got married in 1973 and divorced in 1995. After 23 years when his first wife left Pat Williams, he had to parent his 18 children alone for a couple of years. Then, in 1997, Pat Williams married his current spouse Ruth, a consultant with FranklinCovey Co., who brought a child of her own to their home. His wife Ruth Williams studied in a Ph.D. program in organizational leadership. In addition, she is an authoress and a top public speaker. The couple has 18 grandchildren. According to the media, all of Williams' children chose a career based on their own choices and they are all doing well. Pat Williams and his family have been featured in many publications: *Sports Illustrated*, *Reader's Digest*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* including the major network and cable television news channels.

Williams is probably the man who has adopted the most children in the U.S. Fatherhood is very important and there are devastating effects when dads are not involved in their children's lives. For instance, in France, more than half of male prisoners did not have fathers present in their lives³. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu said that boys make babies and men take care of them which is the real definition of manhood. We would live in a much better world if people in a position to do it would take care and love children that need adult guidance.

Pat Williams was diagnosed with multiple myeloma (a cancer of the blood and bone marrow) in February 2011. He is now in remission. He is involved in several boards for different cancer groups throughout the U.S. such as the Board of Directors for the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation. It happens that he offers words of encouragement to people with cancer.

Pat Williams' journey can inspire so many people because he managed to overcome many difficulties: cancer, divorce, etc. He has a lot of resilience and found a way to make the best with what life had to offer. People can learn a lot from him in many spheres: fatherhood,

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management, authorship, etc. So many people work in a job they hate and they lack the courage to follow their true passion. Some end up in a gilded cage for decades and do not know how to break free. Pat Williams managed to follow his heart and achieve a rich lifestyle with his real love, sport. This path can also teach a person many things, especially when he succeeded to stay on top for decades, something not easy to accomplish in any field.

Overall, Pat Williams is boyish in the good sense of the word. He has to be because he has a lifelong passion for Walt Disney and he has adopted many children. It is important for him to live as a Christian and have an abundant life.

Pat Williams was in the United States Army for 7 years. He devoted 7 more years in the Philadelphia Phillies organization: 2 as a minor league catcher and 5 in the front office. In addition, he spent 3 years in the Minnesota Twins organization. Pat Williams has been involved in sports for over 50 years. For more than 40 years, he was in the NBA. He has also been honored with the John W. Bunn Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012 by the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and was introduced to the Magic's Hall of Fame as a member of its inaugural class in 2014.

Williams became part of the Wake Forest Sports Hall of Fame after catching for the Deacon baseball team, comprising the 1962 Atlantic Coast Conference Championship team. He was inducted into the Delaware Sports Hall of Fame in 2001. He is also part of six other halls of fame around the country.

Since 1968, Pat Williams has worked in the NBA as a general manager for teams in Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia—including the 1983 World Champion 76ers—and after this, the Orlando Magic, which he co-founded in 1987 and led to the NBA finals in 1995 and 2009. In 1996, Pat Williams was recognized as one of the 50 most influential people in NBA history by Beckett's, a national publication.

Pat Williams has never sat on his laurels. He loves to expand constantly. He has written more than 110 books, some with other people. The first paperback was published in October 1974. In the following interview, he will talk about his latest book *Lead Like Walt* among other subjects. Some of his books have been translated into Spanish and French.

It is not easy to transition successfully professionally. Pat Williams managed to be a pro athlete and after an administrator in sport. He was able to stay on top in sports for decades. This demonstrates how smart he is with his peripheral vision.

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Even if he retired a while back, he still plays many roles. For one thing, he delivers motivational speeches for Fortune 500 companies such as Coca-Cola, Disney, IBM, Nike and American Express, as well as national associations, universities and nonprofits—he gives more than 150 speeches per year. He also writes books, hosts a radio host, runs marathons (he participated in 58 marathons between the ages of 55 and 70), climbs, and lifts weights. Furthermore, he features in the basketball Hall of Fame and worked as the senior vice president of the Orlando Magic. Before becoming a member of the Central Florida pro basketball in 1986, Williams carried out the general manager role for the Philadelphia 76ers for 12 seasons. He took them to a World Championship title in 1983.

He wrote at least 10 books for the series *How to Be Like*. It would be interesting to create a version of these series for children to teach them about sports legends such as Jackie Robinson and Michael Jordan (the NBA star Grant Hill wrote the foreword of the book). At some point, he had a radio show called *The Pat Williams Show* where he interviewed many athletes and other people such as Dr. Billy Graham. He used to write a sports weekly column for the *Wilmington News-Journal*

Pat Williams' life is a unique American story and a film about it would be interesting. Many layers could be covered, such as whether some of his adopted children looked for their biological parents, how it was to raise kids from different cultures, whether they encouraged to learn their first language and maintain contact with their community, etc.

Pat Williams wrote his autobiography 20 years ago, *Ahead of the Game: The Pat Williams Story* which has a very nice cover and great pictures with people such as the late

[Og Mandino](#)

. This book can give hope to many people who are struggling with their own problems. Williams' story shows that it is possible to start your life over at any age with determination and Christian faith. This autobiography, penned in 1999, is candid, introspective and insightful.

Williams understood the importance of collaboration, one of the keys of his success. He has written at least one book with his wife and another one with one of his daughters, *The Takeaway* (it is rare that a mogul pens a book with a daughter and it shows how generous he is). He has also penned books with other writers such as Jim Denney for *Lead Like Walt*, he co-created the Orlando Magic. He wrote this book *How to Be Like Women of Influence* with his wife Ruth Williams and Michael Mink. Michael Jordan's mother, Deloris Jordan, wrote

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the beautiful foreword for this book. Given that the book is about honoring eminent women, it makes sense that the authors chose the mother of one of the biggest athletes of all time to preface the book. In addition, it demonstrates that it is important for Pat Williams to showcase the contributions of women from many fields in his writing. It is interesting to mention that in *How to Be Like Women of Influence* ; remarkable stories are narrated such as the one of Annie Johnson, the great-grandmother of Dr. Maya Angelou. It helps readers to understand and grasp how many successful women were inspired by their ancestors. Many of Williams' books focus on business, leadership and life lessons.

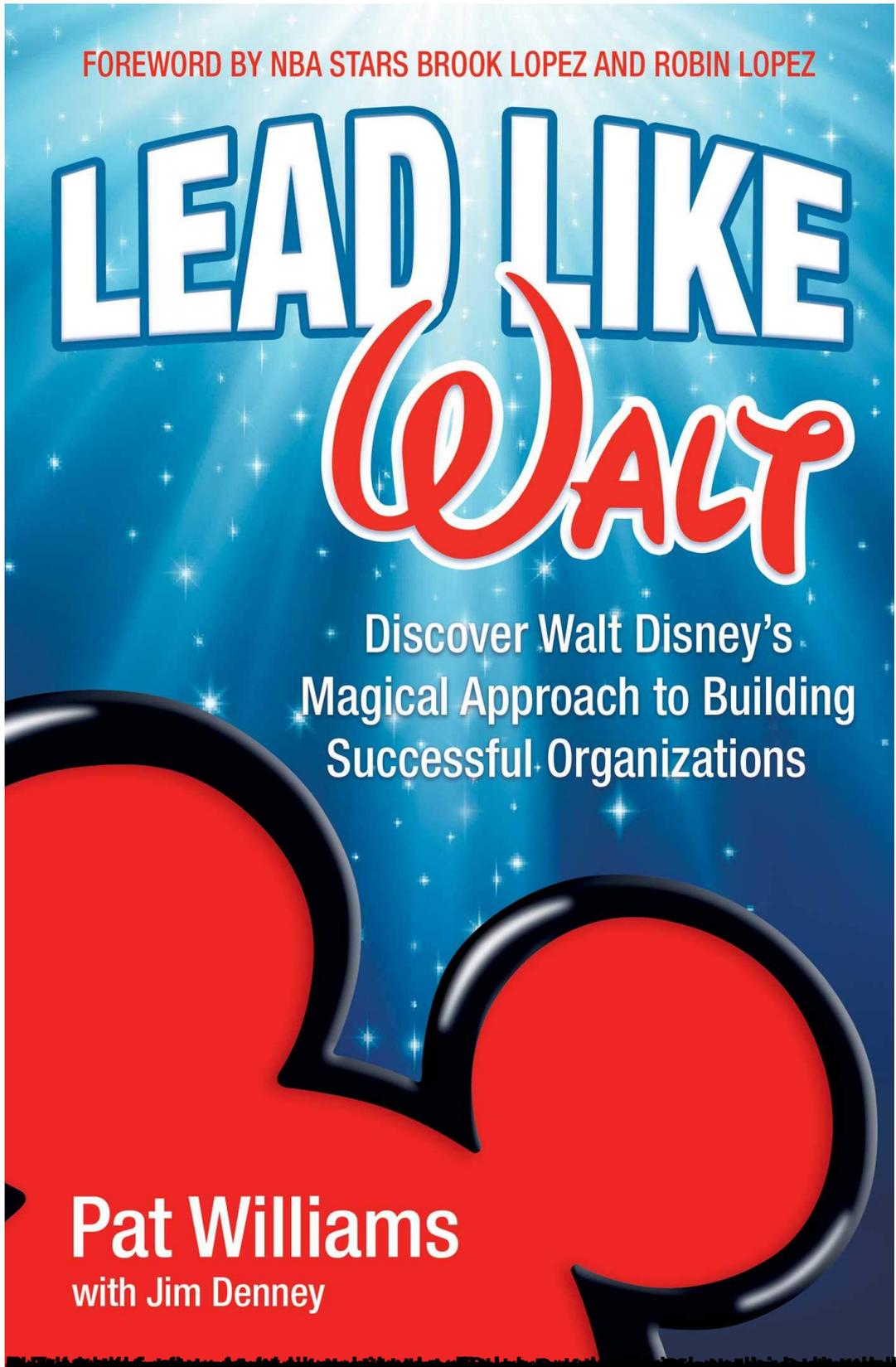
Pat Williams is a non-conformist. If he wants to do something, he will, regardless of naysayers. For instance, he commenced to run marathons in his fifties. He also tried to climb mountains at 56. His fearlessness allowed him to push many barriers and accomplish a lot of stuff. He does not limit himself on many levels. The word can't probably isn't part of his vocabulary.

Williams is the kind of man who does not have an entourage and who answers his own calls. We are proud to mention that the conversation below is Pat Williams' first in-depth Canadian interview which occurred at the end of last year. I felt I was talking with a real life [Phillip Drummond](#)

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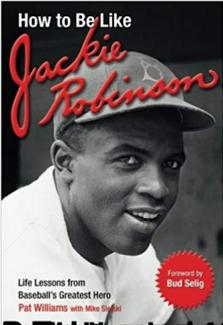


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Pat Williams is a former NBA player and coach, and the co-founder of the Orlando Magic. He is a successful entrepreneur and author of several books on leadership and business. In this interview, he shares his insights on building successful organizations and the importance of leadership.

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<https://www.fox.com/author/sports-tycoon-and-co-founder-of-the-orlando-magic-dr-pat-williams-503643>