



Montel Williams

TALK SHOW ICON
Montel's Journey:

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS → NAVAL ACADEMY → EMMY AWARD WINNER

There are few words in the English language that have such important meaning as the word *determination*. Determination is smashing through the obstacles and the brick walls that often stand in your path. Determination is what separates the winners from the losers, and those that sit on the sideline from those that win the game.

At the time of our interview, Montel Williams shared that he was “in pain twenty-four hours a day.” You’d never know it—not even when you see this American media icon in person. He has been a public personality for over twenty years, best known for the long-running *Montel Williams Show*, for which he received a Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Talk Show Host in 1996.

The show received three more Emmy nominations before it was finally canceled in 2008. Montel went on to host a national radio program and serve as an infomercial spokesman for several products.

Montel’s constant pain comes from multiple sclerosis (MS). He was diagnosed with the degenerative disease in 1999, near the peak of his career. He explained how he lives with MS: “*Years ago, the doctor told me I would be in a wheelchair—and I am in pain 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, but I am determined to walk around this planet with positive thoughts. And I have no doubt that that attitude helps me deal with my MS.*”

I learned to become my own advocate—to take charge of my diet and exercise. I accept responsibility for my own overall health and wellness.”

Montel Williams proved to be one of the most inspiring, determined, and insightful people I have ever interviewed. Montel’s success journey started long before he achieved celebrity status—a fact that became more and more evident as I learned about his background and achievements.

Born in Baltimore, Montel showed himself to be a good student, athlete, and musician. His firefighter father became Baltimore’s first African-American fire chief in 1992.

Montel enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps directly out of high school in 1974. He distinguished himself almost immediately and got promoted to platoon guide while in basic training at boot camp on Parris Island, South Carolina.

He continued to impress his superiors and was eventually recommended for a career track in the U.S. Naval Academy. He entered the academy in 1976, where he studied Mandarin Chinese, engineering, and international security affairs. Montel is justifiably proud of his record: “*I became the first black, enlisted Marine to complete and graduate from both the Naval Academy Prep School and the U.S. Naval Academy.*”

A freak medical accident during his last year ruined Montel’s plans to return to the Marines after graduation. He was one of one hundred seniors who received the wrong dose of an immunization. His severe reaction landed him in the hospital for two and a half weeks and cost him the vision in his left eye.

He made a partial recovery and served as a naval intelligence officer, further specializing in foreign languages—eventually working with the National Security Agency. After three years aboard submarines, Montel, then a full lieutenant, was made supervising cryptologic officer with the Naval Security Fleet Support Division at Ft. Meade, Maryland.

While counseling the servicemen in his command, as well as their wives and families, he discovered his gift for public speaking. Soon he was invited to speak to different groups about the importance of leadership and how to overcome obstacles on the road to success. Montel enjoyed this new role, and it would pave his way to a career in motivational speaking.

He left the Navy with the rank of lieutenant after receiving the Navy Achievement Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, and the Navy Commendation Medal. Montel continued to excel at public speaking, and it eventually led to the *Montel Williams Show*, which first aired in 1991.

A 22-year military veteran, Montel remains a staunch advocate for veterans. In October 2014, he played a major role in bringing home Marine Sgt. Andrew Tahmooressi who spent 214 days in a Mexican prison. Tahmooressi served two tours of duty in Afghanistan and suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

When asked to reflect on his upbringing and identify what made him what he is today, Montel responded: *“There were two very powerful forces in my life—my parents and their insistence that education was the most important part of growing up. They made me read at the dinner table—and it paid off! I had a super vocabulary, and I could read and write by the time I was in the first grade. I was a product of ‘bussing’ every day from the ghetto where I lived to a school in an all-white neighborhood. Even some of the teachers were openly racist. One teacher actually said to me, ‘That is why you people will never get anywhere!’ I took the sting of that remark and made a promise to myself, that I will be the only person who defines me. Tell your readers: As far as I’m concerned, you need to be your own advocate. You alone have to own the definition of who you are!”*

He continued: *“You need knowledge. Knowledge is king—get it so you can help yourself. Learn everything you need to know, including whatever is stopping you from reaching your goals. Evaluate yourself constantly, but don’t stop believing in yourself. Every day, ask yourself: ‘What did I do today that’s worth talking about tomorrow?’ At the end of the day I write down three good things that happened that day. When I wake up in the morning, I read those three things again. It starts my day with positive thoughts and helps me better understand who I am. Surround yourself with good people, not people who tell you why you can’t do something. When someone points out your limitations, you must counter with an attitude that says, ‘How dare they try and define who I am!’ Recognize the fact that they are only describing themselves. People are held back by their own thoughts—that they can’t be successful. Don’t look back with critical regret. Look at the things you’ve done right, and learn from your mistakes.”*

Montel sums up his message of self-determination: **“Stop worrying about being ‘in the right place at the right time.’”** Instead, *always transform the place you’re in* so that it becomes the right place and the right time. You need to realize that genes and environment influence 60 percent of who you are—the other 40 percent is in *your* control.

As I listened to Montel, it was easy to understand why so many companies seek him out as a spokesperson. Montel’s mission is clear: “I want to encourage as many people as I can. With the right attitude, anything is possible.”

Determination. Simple as that. Montel has no give-up. He is dedicated to his goals and determined to overcome all that stands in his way. It is easy to give-in. It is unbelievably effortless and undemanding to simply throw in the towel. But to reach insurmountable levels of success, you have to be determined and dedicated to the mission, whatever it may be.

For Montel, he remains dedicated to his trade and his life's goals even in the face of an overbearing medical diagnosis and constant barriers in his path. It was not easy. It remains difficult. But Montel's attitude positions him to implement a dedicated force that drives him to overcome any and all obstacles along the way.

MONTEL'S EMPOWERING THOUGHT: *"You need knowledge. Knowledge is king—get it so you can help yourself. Learn everything you need to know, including whatever is stopping you from reaching your goals."*

DO IT DAILY:

- **Manifest Your Life.** At the end of the day, write down three good things that happened that day. Wake up in the morning and reread those three things to start your day with a mindset of positive thoughts to build momentum and set the tone for the rest of your day.
- **Don't Give Up.** Easy to say, hard to do. But if you subscribe to this integral mantra, you'll always remain ahead of the game. Implementing a no give-up attitude will position you for success. Sure, it takes more than just determination, but that's at least half of the battle.