

MC Forward Special Podcast
Ty Howard
Transcript

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MIKE

Welcome to this special episode of MC Forward, a podcast that focuses on Montgomery College individuals who are leading from where they are. I'm your host, Dr. Michael Mills. I'm excited today to have Ty Howard join me. Ty is a well-respected motivational business speaker and author. He spoke to MC employees in January about how leaders can help fight burnout through positive attitudes and engaging strategies. We continue that conversation today. Ty, this is a pleasure for me. Welcome.

TY

Welcome. Thank you, thank you, Michael, for having me. And I'm excited and looking forward to our...our interview and our time together. Thanks, again for having me.

MIKE

So, um, your background is...is an interesting one. I grew up in south Baltimore. I know the area well. I grew up in the Dundalk area [TY: Yes!] of Baltimore, so I'm well familiar with, um, where Cherry Hill is. Can you talk a little bit about your upbringing and the circumstances that you faced, and how that helped transform you to where you are today?

TY

Well, in the beginning, and when I say beginning, I'm taking you all the way back to the age of two, and in the beginning, I, um, like you said, I grew up in Cherry Hill; however, in the beginning, my brother and I, we were, you know, removed from my biological mother's home and put into foster care where we were awarded of the state of Maryland. So, we stayed at, uh, St. Vincent's and that was like a group home for young, at that time, young children, infant, toddlers, uh, that may have experienced some form of abuse or neglect. We stayed there for five years. Um, as the five years went on, you know, at certain intervals or certain points, my mother was allowed to come visit and we could spend time with her, you know, there, at St. Vincent's. And then towards the end of the five years, they would let us go I think once a month or once a quarter back to, you know, her home, and that was like starting the...the process of, you know, having us back at home. And...and then at the end of that, we were allowed to go back to Cherry Hill where we, you know, we were raised, you know, by my mother. And...and, you know, after that point, you know, we were back in Cherry Hill. My mother worked two and three jobs, you know, to...to help make ends meet. And, um, but she was a big, uh, believer. She would always, you know, tell us, and I know I can recall she would tell me education, education, education. She said once you put it here, meaning, you know, pointing at your

mind or your head, you know, no one can take it from you. So, even though I know I had my, you know, challenges in regards to being a young growing boy, you know, going, you know, to school in a, uh, tough community, the young black boys and Cherry Hill were...were often told only two things come out of Cherry Hill: criminals and jail time. But going back to my mother's, uh, mantra, you know, education, education, when, you know, when you put it here, no one can take it from you. So, that...that started, uh, me, I believe on my way to believing in, um, getting the most out of school, getting the most out of education. However, at the same time, because I was normally, I would say at least in the top five percentile, you know, of my class, and,, you know and sometimes at the top when you're growing through elementary, middle, and high school, you can become a little bored in the classroom. And those types of things would...would create, you know, mischief. And all of that stuff for me, because, you know, we didn't have a system in the schools when I, the schools I went through where, uh, you know, maybe if you were ahead, you finished early, you could help out others, you know. And so, that's when like I said mischief would come in. I could get myself in trouble, things like that. And, um, but the one thing, going back to my mom, was I didn't want her to get the phone calls. I didn't want to say, he's acting up or cutting up again, because she did, she worked very hard. Some people asked me, uh, well, how are you and your mom's relationship today? I say I mean we're...we...we speak every night, you know, on the phone. Um, I see her a couple times a week. She still lives in Baltimore. She lives over near the Morgan State, uh, University area. And so, we...we have a very close, you know, relationship. And I remember one time watching opera and she had Dr. Maya Angelou on....on her show and Oprah was talking about, um, how I guess upset and disappointed she was of her mom because of what she went through in her early upbringing and, you know, struggles with life. And Dr. Maya Angelou told Oprah at that time, she said, your mother did the best she could with what she knew at that time. And when she learned better, she did better. So, watching that particular episode and hearing those words for me helped to...to calm, you know, my repressed memories and...and things like that because I also had an absentee dad. You know, uh, you know, where, you know, I had struggles and challenges with that, so when you talk about how did this journey build me from a leadership perspective, first and foremost, resilience. And then, second, um believing in lifelong learning. I...I'm very big on observation, you know. When you look at leadership, looking at certain situations, looking at certain people, and...and bringing all of that together to find ways in a sense, you know, to...to lead. And I'll share another story with you. I went to Polytechnic Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, and I actually at the end of my 10th grade year, I was actually put out of Poly and when my mother and I was sitting in the principal's office because he was letting her know his decision, he told my mother he said your son he's gifted, he's a leader, he can get these kids to do whatever he wants them to do, but he's using those talents, those abilities in the wrong way. And that's why I'm sending him to his own school. He said, you know, he said your son, you know, Ty, he said it's like that light switch right there, he said when he wants to excel and be, you know, top of the class, he cuts it on, but when he wants to just check out, he'll cut it off. Now, how did the principal know? Because Mr. Morris, he was the Math teacher, and Mr. Morris had, he was ill for like, he was out for like I guess two

months, and Principal Doller at the time came and he taught the Math class. So, he wasn't just speaking from hearsay. He was actually in the classroom with me and teaching me, so he...he knew my abilities, my character. He knew all of that, and...and at that time, I was really upset when he was saying all of this not because of what he was saying, but he was correct. I had worked hard because when I got to Poly, up until that point, like I said I was used to being the top five percent when it came to academic performance and achievement. Well, when you arrived at Poly, there were students in a sense, I mean, we're talking academic not sports, but you see this happen in sports a lot. When you show up somewhere and you realize that there are people better than you. People smarter than you, and they would get it faster, you know, in some...some subjects. And all so for me, it became a, you know, how they say every choice has a consequence. So, it was like, okay, how do I stand out when there are so many others [Laughing] excelling, you know, above me? So, that's when I started to make the choices where, well, okay, I'm gonna become popular. I'll focus on becoming popular and running the school. And...and that's where the poor choices, you know, as a leader, you know, in a sense, started, uh, to manifest itself. And then, it got me sent to Southern High School in south Baltimore in which now I'm sitting up in the 11th and 12th grade learning stuff that I received on the middle school level. I, kid you not, because I went to Hamilton Middle School. I didn't go to middle school in Cherry Hill, I went to Hamilton Middle School because of my academic abilities. And now, I'm sitting there observing, like I told you, and I'm like, wait up, you know. I...I saw, what did they say, the errors of my, you know, my ways or my choices. And I did make the best of it, um, I, you know, I...I excelled there. It was easy. I could personally do it with my eyes closed. And...and then, I knew I had to recover and rebound. So, listening to all of that, that's where, you know, leadership, self-awareness, you know, even struggles and failures. But then, how do you recover and bounce back? And that's where, like I said, resilience to me is, uh, a very important component of the foundation to my leadership development.

MIKE

The focus of the podcast series has been leading from where you are [TY: Yes], and as I'm listening to you, I'm intrigued by your journey. But I'm also intrigued by your mother's journey. [TY: Yes] Would you consider your mother a leader?

TY

Yes. When, you know, it's an age-old question, and they ask people, well, who are your heroes? Or who were your heroes and, when you were growing up, and I always tell people my mother, you know. She's in the top three. Mo--you know, I...I always tell them that because of her grit, her resilience. My mother worked at, have you ever been to Lexington Market?

MIKE

I have several.

TY

Okay. If you've ever been to Bailey's Seafood? My mother cooked crab cakes, you know, the...the—any, you know, you know, seafood. She...she did all of that for over 30 years, you know. And...and my mother would come home sometimes and my brother and me, we would have to rub Bengay and all on her legs and her knees just so she could get back up in the morning and go back to work because she was standing up all day, you know, cooking and preparing food for others. And...and another good thing I really respect and...and love about my mother is like we can go out like say to a restaurant Applebee's, or, you know, we can be at the mall in White Marsh or Arundel Mills and people recognize her and they talk to her like they're her best, you know, like their best friends because of the way she treated people. And also when you feed people, you know, to me, I think it takes it to a whole new level too because when you really have a love and enjoy for what you do and you use that to help people to feel better get better whatever it is that they need, nourishment wise, I looked at that as a, you know, a good example. So, I started to develop my work ethic by watching my mother and taking the lead and guide from her because she didn't complain. Like for us mom, you know, she couldn't get sick. She didn't get, I mean, I know it was days she probably went to work. She was ill, but she was taking care of four kids on her own, and that's where I got a lot of, uh, lead and guidance from her example. And that ties into my, uh, development in the beginning from...from leadership.

MIKE

I'm sure I've crossed paths with her at Lexington Market whether it was Lex—Lexington Market or Cross Street Market or the Broadway Market. [TY: Yes!] I've been to all of them, [TY laughing] and they're all wonderful places. [TY: Yes!] A lot a lot of good hard-working people, uh, engage in...in those...those jobs at those markets and, you know, some good food comes out of all of those markets as well. And...and Baltimore is well-known for that. TY: Yes!] Um, talk to me a little bit about your time in the military and what that, uh, helped you learn from a leadership perspective.

TY

Okay, when I...I...I decided that I would join the Navy, and that was in the 12th grade, and the one thing about me because a lot of people were shocked. You going to--? They, trust me, it was...it...it wasn't something that people saw coming. However, by my 12th grade year, I was a teenage father. And I said to myself in my early teens that because I had an absentee dad that if I ever became a father, and no, I did not plan or intend to become a father in high school, it just happened, you know, based off of choices, you know, and...and what do you call it? Risk behaviors, right? And...and so I became a teenage father. I always said that if I ever became a father I would be a much better father than what I had, or at that time vaguely knew of. And so I decided to go into the Navy. So, when I went into the Navy, the one, this part of phase in my life, I...I labeled it, I...I label it discipline because the Navy, the military, gave me the structure and the discipline that I needed to...to one get that chip off of my shoulder. And what I mean by

chip, having grown up on the tough streets of Cherry Hill and Baltimore where you had to be more in a sense on guard or, you know, just a different level of awareness, the military helped to...to, in a sense, remove that. And it started to develop. Um, when you talk about teamwork, you talk about discipline focus. Here's a goal and all, and then when you go from boot camp into the actual on-boarder ship, they'll hand you a million dollar piece of equipment and say it's your job to keep it up. You better do the maintenance on it. It better not break down. So, having responsibility and accountability thrust on you in that way and learning through the principles of the Navy as well as the Department of Defense, that helped to really get me to grow up much sooner than what you would see most 20 to 25...27...27 year olds. And...and to be responsible and accountable, and then while in the Navy, before I went in the Navy, I took 14 people with me because, you know, here goes that leadership, right? That ability to influence and...and to get people to believe in a vision and a goal. I mean my recruiter loved me. Why? Because he, his office, would often get time...get calls from other officers saying, wait up, you all are in my school. You're not supposed to be in--, and his, uh, leader at his recruiting office would say, no, it's not him, trust me, you know. It's this guy, Ty Howard. He knows these people. He's talking to these, you know, these students, and they're signing up. And so, it's not, you know, it's not my, you know, my recruiter poaching, you know, at your school. It's this guy, you know, this...this young man talking to his friends, these other students, and they're signing up. And the reason why I did that, Michael, was because like I said, the military and me, people didn't see it coming. I didn't see it coming. I just saw it as a...as a vehicle to...to improving the quality of my life as well as for my daughter. And so, but I also had some trepidation. I'm not going by myself. Now, by the time we left for boot camp, it was only five with me because the other ones left earlier because of their, uh, schools, you know. The jobs that they were doing, so they left earlier to go and we left, I think, yeah, at the end of September. You know, aft--, in that graduating year. We graduated in June, but we left at the end of September. But I wasn't in boot camp alone, and so, you know, then I went through boot camp and my leadership showed up there and like I said, the discipline, from that discipline, I was able to do like Principal Doler was telling my mother at Poly when he was given the exit interview, he said, you know, once he learns that, and see, this is where all those experiences, they start to...you start to put a check by it like at the time, I was frustrated and upset with Principal Doler because I was running the school at that time, and now, all those things he had said made sense. And I took that into the military, and, you know, I did 10 years in the military. My last, uh, command was the Office of the Naval Inspector General. I had been on board two ships prior to that, and, but my last was the Office of the Naval Inspector General where I worked for three star admiral, an SES, ah, an SES-4. And I mean, we were very top-heavy and all. It was a very, um, uh, you know, it was a very important position to be in, you know, when you look at it from a achievement, a leadership point of view. So, like I said, having learned, had all those bumps and bruises early on, that started, you know,, um with that, the discipline, the focus and all.

MIKE

Great example, Ty, of leading from where you were at the moment, not necessarily the...the...the admiral, not...not a...a huge, uh, title, but leading from where you are. Why do people struggle with the concept of leadership no matter where they are within an organization?

TY

One reason I feel people struggle with leadership no matter where they are within the organization, I believe it ties to confidence. It ties to confidence. You have some folks that are promoted to a position. You have some folks, like you said, that no matter where you are, they feel that they haven't been properly prepared enough, you know. So, what do I do? Or you have folks who are more interested in being friends with everybody, being liked, because being a leader sometimes doesn't make you as popular as some people think. When they say it's...it's...it's tough being a leader, you know, uh, you know, being at the top, being a leader, because everything falls back on you. And...and when I go into...now, when I go into, you know, organization, companies, you know, academic institutions and all, and I'm talking about leadership from wherever you are. A lot of folks, especially if they don't have the title, they say they don't want it. They don't want that responsibility. They don't want the title. They like, I come in, I do what I have to do. I keep my head low and I go home back to my family. I get paid, and we do that again and again until I say I'm going to retire, or enough is enough. And so, I think it ties into confidence as well as the education and developmental piece side of that. Um, you have people today that are hired into leadership roles and they haven't...they may know the trait, they may have the skill to do the task, but they don't have the leadership development. I...I used to love listening to, uh, Jack Walsh. And he would talk about how at GE, how they actually created a mentorship program for new hires. And the reason why they did that because he said, we would give people from, you know, different universities that had School of Businesses, you know, like Dolan. You know, like you have, uh, the Smith School and all, at the University of Maryland and all, and they would get them from top Business schools. And he said they could come in and assess and dissect the performance or lack of performance within his company, but he said soon as we ask them to manage human beings or lead human beings that's where they would unravel. That's where they would be exposed because they didn't learn the human being side of it. And you and I talked about leading from the heart, right? Treating people like people. And that's why I say it...it's those two things: confidence and the education, the developmental piece.

MIKE

Seems like it's a flaw of the organization not to develop leaders, not necessarily a flaw of the individual.

TY

Yes, yes. Well, some places, they tend to use a...a hands-off approach. They just assume that if this person, regardless, like you said, from where they are, they just assume that

somehow like a hands-off approach, naturally, they're going to just take ownership and accountability for their own development and not set a standard for this is what we do for you, because, you know, they...they talk about it all the time. Some companies, some organizations believe in training their people for leadership and, you know, things like that, even conflict resolution and all of that, you know, type of stuff. And then you have several that say, no, we'll let them figure that out on their own. And those who are hands-off, it backfires because a lot of companies believe that we spend extra time and money in those areas. Then, we're going to lose them to somebody else. But it backfires because they're losing out altogether because they're not really tapping into the full potential of those individuals. Because maybe if you did prepare them and develop them more, now they can feel that this is the place for me. Regardless if there are other organizations and opportunities out there promising me the world and...and some, I like this because this is what they do for me. And not only for me, they do this for me and my family. And that to me is what leadership is about. We're like...like you and I agree where you take the time, you know, to...to develop folks. And like, Jack Walsh said, it...it is, and you said, it's the organization's responsibility, you know, to initiate that because even if a person comes from another company from a similar position, you're like-- When you look at Montgomery College, you all have your own culture. So, somebody may come from a university or two or three other community colleges before they end up on your team. And now, it's like teaching them...them, you know, the MC...the MC way of leadership, taking them to the next level.

MIKE

You spend a lot of time crossing the country talking with elementary school students, middle school students. What's your message to them about leadership?

TY

My message to them about leadership, first and foremost, is to...to build their mindsets to, uh, for a higher level of acceptance. Get...get that to be first. And then I...I...I...I challenge them in the making right choices. I...I have a session that I do, Making Right Choices Over Many Challenges and Voices, so getting them to...to understand that as well. And I also speak to, you know, college and university students about the...the same thing. But going back to the elementary and middle school level, and what I love about that, working with those young minds is because, believe it or not, they...they remember you when they get to college and even in the workforce, they remember you. Through elementary middle and high school, growing up in Baltimore, there's only one motivational speaker that I remember coming through the school system: Montel Williams. Montel Williams came through. I was in the fifth grade in elementary school, and Montel Williams had a message: Mountain, get out of my way. And I remember that message like yesterday because he had made such an impression. One, who comes into a school where you have all these rowdy elementary school kids in an auditorium and right after he's introduced, he politely asked all the teachers, administrators, he asked all of them to leave. Now, we're looking at, you know, we're about to, you know, flip out in here because it's no one that's going to check us, but he had such a command

and a clear message where you could hear students telling other students be quiet because I'm listening. And that's the same effect that I get. It doesn't matter if I'm speaking here in Maryland. It doesn't matter if I'm in Iowa, if I'm in Florida, Texas, Oklahoma. I've been to Wyoming, and as I'm speaking and young people are listening, I can hear them shushing other students because, like they say, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And so, when I make that connection, and like we did in the beginning, when I tell my life story, my journey, because I let students know all the time we all have a story. We all have a story. And they say, what is that? Life is, um, um, what is that? 90 percent, what happens to you, you know what I mean? Um, and then 10 percent, you know, on...on...on how you respond. And I...I get them to...to understand that, you know. How are they responding to life? And if they're in a certain situation or predicament that may not be the most favorable or pleasing, you know. Understand at a certain point in your life you will then have the steering wheel. You'll then have control. What are you going to do? Are you preparing for that now? And I also learned because I have a daughter, you know, she's in her 30s now, but I also learn how young people can say all the right things to adults, you know, like do you have goals? Are you going to college? And they'll say all of this stuff. But then I'm able to connect with young people and get them to clearly understand that saying it is one thing, doing it and taking action creating a plan is another. So, I have parents that email me and call me from, you know, different places throughout the nation that say, Mr. Howard, I wasn't there when you were speaking, but you said something and, you know, now, he's cleaning his room. He's really serious about grades and...and things like that. And...and I thank them for taking the time to call me and share that because they don't have to do that, but it happens. And so, when I look at that, like I said, I...I talk to them about acceptance. I talk to them about, um, building confidence and believe in who they are. I let young people know, you know, um, it's okay to be unique, you know, different you because that's what a lot of young people struggle. And it doesn't matter if they're the star athlete, the head cheerleader, or that quiet student that sits off by him or herself in the cafeteria. They all go through it, and that's what to me is very important being a leader. You have to be willing to look back, give back, you know, in a sense to pay it forward to help others coming after you so that, personally, I want them to be ten times better than who I am, where I am, or what have you, where there are a lot of leaders today that fear that. Some leaders, they treat people like chess pieces, they want you to stay in a certain spot and you can't move until after I'm gone. Whereas for me, I want to develop people, you know, like I talk about to become a part of the extraordinary future. So, I want people to excel and be extraordinary in what they do and does...if that means they excel and achieve things far greater than I have, then I've fulfilled my assignment given to me at birth.

MIKE

When did you know that you had this gift of leadership?

TY

In the military, because, remember, I told you in the beginning [Laughing], I mean I knew

at a young age I had some power of influence, but trust me, I'm not going to sit here and tell you that I knew what that all meant or entailed, you know. I knew I could like, I'll give another example. We were playing football. I played high school football, and one time, I ordered these bells, right? I found these little jingle bell things and I had all my teammates. I said, we're going to tie these bells on our cleat string so they can hear us coming behind them and it would intimidate them, right? Well, the referee started to hear all this jingling and he looked down at our feet. We spent 20 minutes removing these bells from our strings and it was actually two penalties behind that because of the time delay. You...you get what I'm saying? So, like, that's why I say when I was young, I saw glimpses of it, but I really didn't know how to manage it. I really didn't know what to do with it. So, the military was what really made it click for me. And with the discipline part, I...I learned, you know, new ways of leading and getting the most, not look, not only out of myself, but out of other people. You know? And that—

MIKE

Not...not only...not only did you did you learn that trait, but you took that trait and moved it towards a good goal. [TY: Yes.] And not necessarily to bat, right? You and I have talked before about our...our childhood circumstances, and I shared with you [TY: Yes.] only by the grace of god [TY: Yes.] did I go one path and some friends of mine went another path. So, it's...it's not just understanding, I don't think. The...the power of influence or the leadership, but how to use that leadership for the right purpose.

TY

Yes, yes, because on any given day, a leader who has some influence, okay, can get people to do things that are completely wrong, inappropriate, you know. Things that you question when it comes to integrity, but the leader, with the right mindset and know-how and discipline and all and character, you know. John Wooden says character is that thing you'll do in the dark. If you feel that no one's watching and that's so important to say, if you truly believe that, yeah, we could cut this corner. But no, we're not going to do that because I'm not in the business of hurting or harming people, animals, or what have you. And so, going back to talking to young people, I explain to young people too, if you want to stand out, don't be reckless, be outstanding. If you want to stand out, don't be reckless, be outstanding, why do I share that? Because I did it that other way. And remember the reason, what...what ignited that was because I felt intimidated because there were a few more people in, you know, in the building, in the school that...that, you know, that...that excelled academically, you know, uh, uh, you know, better than I did. And, but then, when I look at college and universities today where they've evolved, we're, colleges and universities, that they say no, we want more well-rounded, you know, people. So, we don't only want the academic, we don't only want the high SAT and ACT scores. We need people who are well-rounded. They, you know, diversity acceptance all of that stuff. We want people like that on our campus because that's, you know, who we are, and...and that's where we're going. So, those are the things from a leadership perspective that I try to make clear to both not only kids and college, you know, but even adults, even professionals, because sometimes you have to remind, uh, people

and...and...and get them to look introspectively on, yeah, how am I doing? How am I living each and every day based off of values and standards and things like that? And when you talk, I've talked to adult groups and you talk to them about values. Some of them look at you with a blank face because remember like I told you that education piece, some people have never really sat down and talked about, you know, values. Talked about, uh, what makes you unique as somebody in their 30s, 40, 50, 60, what makes you unique? They will shy away and not really want to give you an answer because they don't think-- They're like, Ty, I'm thinking about bills. I got to get a new furnace, I got, you know, what I mean? I'm talking, I'm thinking about real life stuff, but what makes you unique, I believe that ties into leading from wherever you are. Knowing that, you know, knowing those, you know, those value-added attributes, I think are equally important because I've talked to middle school kids and, hi, what makes you unique and their hands go up? And they can tell you, now, an adult may say, Ty, I just heard you say that, but they haven't really lived in the real world yet. Ad that may be true, but I tell them to hold on to that because it's going to be important, you know, as they continue to go and grow through life.

MIKE

Ty, as we wrap up this podcast, one final question. Have you been back to Cherry Hill? Have you talked to students in Cherry Hill about your experience? Have you become Montel Williams in Cherry Hill?

TY

I am...we're...we're confirming a date to go back to the high school next month, that's March 2022. We're working on confirming a date now. Ever since I've been back, every...every...since I've been back in the Maryland/DC area, I had gone to the schools there. I, you know, I, hey, can I come back and speak? Or what have you. And I spoke at the elementary school. This was some years ago, but I've been trying to get-- I'm telling you, for...for over almost two decades, to speak at this, at the high school there. It's called New Era Academy. And I finally I got contacted last year in October, and like I said, we're at that last step of confirming a date in March. And so, I will be going back in 2022 to speak to the students there. And I'm speaking to the 9th and 10th grade class first, and then, I'm speaking to the 11th and 12th grade class second. For the 9th and 10th grade class, it's...it's Making Right Choices Over Many Challenges and Voices. For the 11th and 12th grade classes, You Were Born To Be Great. And I have, um, different, you know, uh, principles and different, uh, points that I make in each one of those sessions. But I'm really looking forward to it because I feel I can definitely make an impact and...and help a young person.

MIKE

Well, I have no doubt that they will come away, uh, with a...a memory of that conversation. And, um, I just appreciate your taking time out of your busy schedule to have this conversation with me. It's...it's always a pleasure for me to talk with you. [TY: Yeah]. Uh, you know, and it's, uh, I just hope we can do it again sometime.

TY

Yes, yes, just...just invite me. Send me an email, text me, call me. I am open to it and here for you Michael. And I want to wish you, you know, continued growth and success with your leadership podcast. Thank you for having me as a guest.

MIKE

If you know someone who you think would be a great fit for this podcast, have them reach out to me at michael.mills@montgomerycollege.edu. Meanwhile, keep moving MC Forward.