John B. Herrington, Ph.D. (Chickasaw) was the first member of a federally recognized tribe to travel to space. Like many children in the 1960s, he dreamed of becoming an astronaut. Although Herrington held tight to his goal of flying in space, his path to the astronaut corps was far from what one might expect. A lack of motivation as a freshman in college, his interest in rock climbing instead captured his imagination and he was subsequently suspended from college with a 1.72 GPA.

Using his expertise as a rock climber, Herrington found work as a member of a survey crew in the Colorado mountains. Exposed to the practical application of real world mathematics, he found the passion for learning that had eluded him. Following the advice of the lead project engineer, Herrington returned to college and graduated with an engineering degree. He was also fortunate to meet a retired Navy captain who encouraged him to apply to the Navy, which led to a 22-year career as a Naval Aviator, test pilot, and astronaut.

His historic mission to the International Space Station (ISS) was the culmination of years of experience and training with men and women with diverse cultural and technical backgrounds, and provided Herrington with a unique perspective that he enjoys sharing with audiences worldwide. “From lift off to completing three space walks, mission STS-113 was more exciting and challenging than I could have imagined.” But Herrington's work didn't stop when he returned to earth. After a successful career as an astronaut, he ventured into the commercial space arena and eventually found a new passion.

Following a 4,300-mile bicycle ride across the United States, Herrington returned to university and earned a doctorate in Education. With humility and humor, John shares his stories of challenge, leadership, motivation, and mentorship with diverse audiences of all ages and occupations. His multimedia presentations inspire and entertain, and challenge people to seek out the best in themselves and in service to others.

Anyone who is interested in trying to find a new way to inspire themselves or their communities will find Commander Herrington’s stories of struggle, mentorship, and persistence a welcome reminder that our dreams and goals are gifts to pursue and enjoy with the world.