



PROFILE BY FILENE ZIMMERMAN

Scott Silverman



SCOTT SILVERMAN calls it divine intervention. Twenty-three years ago in a high-rise building in New York City, he inched onto a window ledge, intent on jumping. Silverman was in the city on a buying trip for his family's retail business and the night before had passed out drunk on the street; the police brought him back to his hotel.

"I had hit bottom," he recalls. Suffering from depression, he medicated himself with alcohol and drugs. But as he stood on that windowsill, a colleague walked in and yelled, "What the hell are you doing?" Silverman climbed down and called his wife.

It was the beginning of a new life.

After going through a rehabilitation program at Sharp, Silverman emerged drink- and drug-free. He decided not to return to his career in retail, because he didn't want to fall back into his old patterns. Instead, he volunteered at the treatment center and was later recognized by staff for putting in 4,000 hours of service. "I'm a firm believer that if you don't give it away, you can't keep it," he says of giving to others what was given to him—the ability to stay sober.

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Silverman also bought a duplex in southeastern San Diego and became a property manager. Most of his tenants were drug addicts. Seeing opportunity where others might have given up, he became an expert in "stabilizing properties"—going into buildings like his and getting rid of gangs and drugs. "I would get called by other property managers to negotiate with dealers to get them out of the rental. I had good communications skills, and I had been a drug dealer in the past, so I knew what these guys were like. I had a very high success rate."

A year later, he began volunteering with Temple Beth Israel's Hunger Project. On Sundays, he would help feed the homeless at St. Vincent de Paul. "I knew half the people in line," he says. Many he recognized from Alcoholics Anonymous meetings; others were dealers and users he knew from his work.

"A lot of these guys were out of jail and on probation and said, 'No one will hire me. I'm on parole, and I'm an ex-felon.' And I said, 'I can help you find a job if you are willing to do whatever it takes.'"

Silverman made the men shave, cut their hair and

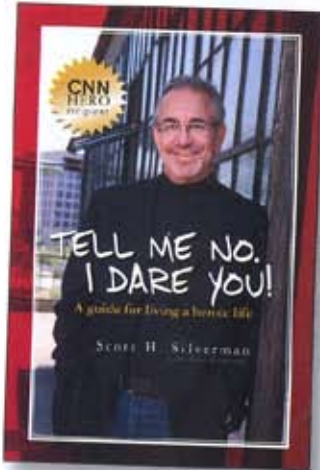
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cover their tattoos. He also taught them to change their attitude, from looking for a handout, he says, to "looking for a hand up. They needed to find a way to sell themselves. You can't look like you just got up from sleeping on the street and expect to get a job. I showed them how to interview, shake hands, smile, write a résumé." Soon, Silverman had upwards of 40 people a week coming to see him.

It was the start of what became Second Chance, a nonprofit organization on Imperial Avenue that provides job-readiness training, including drug- and alcohol-free places to live, assistance with things like basic health- and dental care, mental health services, even tattoo removal. Second Chance also loans program participants clothes for interviews.

Silverman expanded the organization's reach five years ago to include prison inmates. About 16 inmates from state prison and county jail each month participate in STRIVE (Support Training ResultS in Valuable Employees), a three-week job readiness program. Now 15 years old, Second Chance has served about 24,000 people, and 3,900 have graduated from STRIVE.

Silverman has been sober for 23 years.



He stayed married, raised two children and just wrote a book about his life, *Tell Me No, I Dare You!* (Book Surge, \$24.95 hardcover; \$14.95 cloth). One dollar of every sale is donated to Second Chance. Silverman hopes the book will be the start of the next phase of his life. He's a sucker for new beginnings. ■



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For more information please visit:

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