

Speech from Learn From the Masters at the Diamond Club Inside Shea Stadium

Delivered by: [Billy McDermott](#)

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Imagine walking into your office, turning on your computer and it doesn't work. Your computer's memory is shot. Your hard drive is damaged. Poof! All is lost - never to return. You would be pretty upset. But over time you would get over it and move on. Now imagine your own self - waking up one morning and you have no mind. No memory! The cells in your brain are damaged, rendering you useless. Only you don't know it. Your family does.

Remember the last time you purchased an MTA Metro Card. I bought one in a rush last week. It has become so much a part of our routine that I doubt we even consider the steps we take to get one. Our Annual Report highlights the success of a very courageous woman. She can now proudly complete all the steps necessary to purchase her own card. She is a new person and her self-esteem has skyrocketed. We are so proud of her. She had to practice every day for six months before she was able to complete the transaction. This is what we try to accomplish. Every day!

My good friend at Farrell Fritz, Marketing Director Cecilia Alers, always wants to know who you are, not what you do. Another good friend, Steve Schwimmer of Bank of America Merchant Card Services, always reminds me with kindness and affection to talk about me. He always tells me: "We know you help Business Leaders. Now, we need to learn about you and your agency."

Ladies and Gentleman, my name is Billy McDermott and I proudly serve as the Director of Development and Public Affairs for Transitional Services for New York, a twenty-seven year old mental health agency serving the needs of over 2500 mentally ill adults. Many of the individuals at Transitional Services have stories that are neither glamorous nor extraordinary. Yet, I am blessed to be associated with some of the finest talent around. My wonderful boss, Executive Director Dr. Eve Hazel, whom you have already met, leads us. She and her staff of 250 have given me a platform to let me do what I do. I am their public face. They perform the magic - the miracles.

Mental Illness can affect anyone. Twenty-five percent of Americans suffer from some form of it. It affects more people than cancer, heart disease, diabetes or

multiple sclerosis. Realistically, more than seventy-five of us here today suffer from some form of this debilitating disease. Prozac is a best seller and Wellbutrin is advertised in mainstream magazines.

Anyone can lose the use of his or her mind. Yet, we are not willing to accept that idea. We are more likely to view those with a mental illness as “psychos” or “crazy.” We are inundated with the sensational ugliness - the Houston mother who drowned her five children, the ferryboat-slasher, and the woman defecating in the street and cursing at our children. This is how we have become conditioned to view the effects of mental illness.

My wife attended a client picnic with me a few months ago. She was unable to differentiate the clients from our parents and staff. As we left at the end of the day, she asked: “Isn’t Creedmore in Queens?” She had heard all the sensational stories about that place. I told her we were leaving it now.

Depression is a mental illness. One of its effects can be suicide. One occurs every forty seconds. The worldwide murder rate is one every minute. We fight crime, yet we do not fight suicide. We just do not understand. That is why we produce events like these. It is out-of-the-box thinking - bringing goodwill to businesses and helping match talented people’s needs. Over time, hopefully you will better appreciate this ugly disease. We do not expect it to happen overnight.

We operate a café in Jamaica. With the exception of our manager, our mentally ill patients, who are being re-trained in a vocational setting to once again become productive members of our society, staff it. What you may notice most is the line waiting to get in. It is usually out the door at lunchtime. It looks like a small diner – it literally blows you away. This is truly a picture worth a thousand words! Many friends in the audience have been there.

We had a homeless client who came to us almost five years ago. He just sat in a corner all day long. Our staff continually looked for ability in his disability. Two years ago, they asked him if he would like to be a dishwasher. He agreed. After six months, he became a waiter. Six months ago, he was not happy with the way the kitchen was serving his customers. He wanted to become the head cook. Today, as a graduate of our program, he is a full-time employee of TSI with benefits. You want to cry with joy when you see him. I asked him to come today, but he declined. Thursday is a busy day. He cares deeply.

I recently celebrated my first anniversary at TSI. I was previously the Chief Operating Officer of a Public Relations Agency in NYC that created partnerships and alliances. I also have a twenty-six year old son who is mentally retarded. He is truly my hero. It is because of him I started this life's work. He blessed me with an understanding of what it is like to be special. There is a difference between mentally ill and mentally retarded. Fifteen years ago, I started to raise money pro bono for his school. It was easy - mentally retarded kids! I would make you cry; you would write a check; and, you felt like you just completed God's work. It was so satisfying that I decided to make it my career. When I arrive at my present position, all I heard about mentally ill adults was to tell them to get a job and grow up. Tell them to get over it and stop wasting our tax dollars. I realized I had a challenge.

I started to reach out to businesses. I have always been a networker. I started to give out all I could and I expect nothing in return. I needed to establish goodwill. I joined American Business Associates in Queens. Because of ABA, this happened! I went to everywhere I could to meet people. In the past year I developed over 1600 contacts. I built a mail and fax list. Many of you are on it. We brought new meaning to the phrase "Viral Networking." Events like these will be commonplace in 2003.

Innovation is something TSI excels at. We have introduced four new programs over the last twelve months. Most write proposals and beg for funding, only to discover that they are not prepared to operate their programs. Our reputation for honesty, integrity, and sound fiscal management, along with our cutting edge treatment, seems to have been noticed over the years. So when we suggest, attentive ears are listening. Positive results always follow!

We, at Transitional Services, are the last stop, or the first re-entry point. Without us, generally the word "HOMELESS" is used.

With us, we talk recovery.

Many of our recipients attend multiple programs. I believe it is an advantage to offer a continuum of service. In 1996 a gentleman was referred to a social club we operate at our clinic. When he first came to the club he was very shy. We could hardly get him to say two words. He joined our food service group and worked three to four days a week. We realized that this afforded him some social interaction in a safe and limited context. We also noticed that he seemed interested in another female member. When we had our next party, we

encouraged him to ask her to dance. She accepted and from that point on they were inseparable.

They began to participate in club trips. His club case manager referred him to a Specialist Training Center. He graduated and was hired at Elmhurst Hospital where he currently works part-time. He is now searching for an independent apartment. Today, he is employed, in a loving relationship, in search of an independent living arrangement and able to render assistance to others. It is amazing to think that just a few short years ago he was an unemployed, withdrawn, socially isolated adult with few friends. We feel this recovering citizen models what can happen when proper treatment and rehabilitation services are provided. We are happy for his happiness.

I have thousands of ways we can work together - all in a win-win situation! Today, I strongly urge you to consider taking a raffle for \$10.or three for \$25. They are being sold outside. Chances are on your tables. We have 20 prizes worth \$2500.to award to the winners. Twenty chances to win. Maybe you just wish to donate. Whatever you consider, we will love you for it. We accept IOU's, checks, credit cards, and good old reliable cash. Our prizes include jewelry, palm pilots, and other items. A sheet highlighting the items is on your table. Please do not dismiss the idea of taking a chance because you already have a palm, or your not interested in the prizes. Because I need a Palm and Christmas is coming up!

Thank you all for being so attentive and I trust we have all found many new friends and partners today. I am here to help you in any way I can.

[Billy McDermott](#) is a business networking expert. He is a speaker on the subject of [blogging](#) and writes many advertorials using viral marketing techniques.

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