
Year Up Interns Find Success at WilmerHale

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Jaffrey Romain gripped the podium and surveyed the faces of family, friends and graduation well-wishers assembled in the hotel ballroom on a warm August evening in Boston. “Almost a year ago today, I was fired from Best Buy,” he began. “I had been there almost three years, but I stopped putting in the effort. I was a college dropout, and I didn’t have a next step... I was out of school, out of work, out of hope.”

Romain held the crowd in thrall as he told the [story of his journey](#) from desperation to success as a graduate of the one-year intensive career development program run by nonprofit Year Up—the brainchild of WilmerHale client and social entrepreneur Gerald Chertavian. Looking on were WilmerHale Partner [Jennifer Snyder](#), Public Service Manager Anne Bowie, and members of the IS Department’s workplace support team Kenrick Dixon, Joseph Hilario and Yves Casseus, who served as colleagues and mentors to Romain throughout his six-month internship with the firm.

“This is a real success story,” says Snyder, who was Chertavian’s first point of contact with the firm and the person he came to when, fresh from the 1999 sale of his company—London-based Conduit Communications—he sought help with the incorporation of a nonprofit organization intended to forge a path for urban young adults to enter the corporate workplace.

Year Up opened its doors in Boston in 2000, with a class of 22 students. Nearly 11 years later, it is a thriving organization that serves more than 1,000 students per year in nine cities, with a highly effective training program that sees 84% of its graduates employed or in college full-time within four months of graduation. Lauded by everyone from President Obama to *The New York Times*, Year Up—where Co-Managing Partner [Bill Lee](#)’s daughter Catie Lee Smith, a Harvard Business School and Kennedy School graduate, works as director of influence projects—pairs a six-month curriculum of skills training in IT or investment operations with a six-month internship that immerses students in the professional culture of some of the most successful companies in the United States.

Several factors account for the efficacy of Year Up, says Snyder: “The program puts an emphasis not just on technical skills, but on professional behavior and presentation; holds its students accountable for their choices; attracts a great roster of top employers as corporate partners; and has a business model that works.” Participating companies pay a fee to Year Up for each internship, which covers approximately half of its operating costs, with the rest coming from

philanthropy. Students earn an educational stipend for the year that they are in the program, and, after they graduate, earn an average of \$15 per hour or \$30,000 per year in their first positions.

WilmerHale, which has provided [pro bono legal services](#) to Year Up since its founding, took on Romain as an intern earlier this year. Under the guidance of Boston-based Deskside Support Supervisor Kenrick Dixon, Romain had the opportunity to work on everything from computer support and hardware repair to AV videoconferencing set-up and testing.

“Jaffrey was amazing,” says Dixon. “When I first learned that we were getting an intern, I was concerned that the work would be too advanced for him. But he took notes and asked a lot of questions, and as time went on I saw his confidence level rising and he just knocked out everything we gave him.”

“Because Jaffrey, as an ambassador of Year Up, performed so well, it compelled us to expand the program,” adds Director of Workplace Support Gerrick Rodrigues.

On August 1, a new crop of three Year Up students—Louis Garcia in Boston, Brandon Teel in Washington DC and Jillian Rivera in New York—began six-month internships, during which they will assist with the WorkSite rollout and help set up computers and BlackBerrys for the incoming associate class. To do justice to their capabilities, and to give them a realistic taste of the corporate world, the students are not treated like interns, says DC-based Deskside Support Manager Bruce Laufer, but are held to the same standard of professionalism as any full-time member of the firm. “We treat them as regular employees from day one,” he says.