

# Hiker

**Date:** March 9, 2018

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**Client:** Year Up

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**Project:** Prospect Student Key Messaging

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**Introduction:** This is a draft of Hiker's proposed key messaging to prospective Year Up students. The messaging we put forth is primarily for the purpose of top-of-the-funnel student recruiting. It isn't final copy - it's intended to be used to guide nurturing language across a range of executional needs.

In preparation for creating the new proposed messaging, Hiker conducted several hours of interviews with Year Up students and other organization stakeholders. We watched hours of existing video content and explored both Year Up marketing materials and competitor language. Because we want to imbue messaging with as much authentic language as possible, both the positioning and much of specific words and phrases we suggest were pulled directly from student quotes.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. OVERVIEW

II. AUDIENCE ASSESSMENT

1. THE CONTEXT
2. THE REASON
3. THE OBSTACLES
4. QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS

III. VALUE PROPOSITION REIMAGINED

IV. PROPOSED KEY MESSAGES (7 TOTAL)

V. FRESH TAKE ON STUDENT BENEFITS

## OVERVIEW

Year Up's existing messaging has some very strong ideas. We see a tension between mission-based communications and benefits-based communications. Our goal is to elevate the student's direct needs and create a stronger state of desire for the student from the beginning - tilt the scale away from mission towards benefits.

Year Up erves students, it doesn't just help them. The language surrounding that nuance is critical to attracting interest in Year Up and converting leads. Prospective students — those who don't yet know us — walk through a door of transaction first (i.e. They want to know what Year Up can do for them). We already know the orientation of a successful prospect — they are big thinkers, young adults with dreams for more — in need of a better plan. At the front-end of engagement, especially, our point of view needs to shift from telling a story about how we're helping to what we're offering.

Until prospective students come to trust and believe in the program, the language in our communications needs to be plain, straight-forward, and transactional. It needs to answer the fundamental question of **"Why Year Up?"** It will do that, in part, by answering: *What is this? ... How does it work? ... What's in it for me? ... Can I trust it?* By leading with transaction, we think we actually prime the pump for telling an even better aspiration story. Benefit-focused language addresses doubt. Once prospective students are convinced of the authenticity of Year Up's value proposition, our aspirational, mission-based stories can be heard and received more deeply.

We also need to take a much more intentional marketer's point of view in our use of language for students. We need to use the marketer's language of desire and tell a results-centered, outcome-focused story, especially in the early stages when the student is exploring the site and learning about Year Up and what it has to offer. *It's not about us (Year Up), it's about you (the student)*. That should be our mind set as we approach every communication: to our students, but also to our alumni, our staff, our instructors, our partners, and our donors. Mission language risks coming off as self-congratulatory (even if that's not our intent) unless we put the students in the driver seat. We want them to see us talking to prospective corporate partners and like how they look in that communication. Give prospective students as much control in their journey as possible.

That said, this is not about raw numbers. We want qualified leads, meaning we want students who will succeed. So, the better we tell our story (which is ultimately the student's story) the better we'll be at growing leads AND retaining interest that results in more students enrolling in Year Up. It's about long-term, sustainable acquisition of the most qualified applicants. The student's success is our primary concern all the way through the process and even after they graduate from the program.

We're proposing to answer the prospective student's question of "What's in it for me?" faster, and to inject a more transactional feel into messaging by:

- Elevating benefit-focused language (training, stipend, internship, college credits).
- Talking to wants and desires of students, which can be specific ("a good job") or broader and more aspirational ("to find my full potential").
- Putting students in the driver seat of the message journey.
- Using more facts and numbers and outcome-driven language earlier.

Facts have impact. We should use our good numbers to tell a better, results-focused story.

## AUDIENCE ASSESSEMENT

### THE CONTEXT

Based directly on student interviews and videos, here are some ways we might imagine a **prospective student's state of mind, mood, and temperament** the first time they see a Year Up ad, hear about our program, or visit our site.

These young people are cautious and wary because they can't afford to waste time and energy on a program that doesn't work.

They are ready for change, eager to get on with their dreams, but nervous a bad decision could delay achieving what they want even longer.

They are hard-working, often balancing two, even three jobs at a time.

They are curious about opportunities and excited about new possibilities, but unsure what to do next.

They fear they are spinning their wheels, getting left behind.

Sometimes, they feel they are on their own, just holding it together. Many have enormous extra responsibilities for young children, parents or other family members.

They are financially burdened, stressed, and often overworked, yet determined to fulfill their dreams and achieve a better life.

They are resilient, tenacious, and know they have a lot to offer a company and their community if given the chance.

## **THE REASON**

We know students experience tremendous personal growth during their year at Year Up. While they evolve as professionals, their journey is actually driven by their own core character, which is surprisingly consistent. Our messaging needs to trust our understanding of our students.

### **Our Students are ...**

Young people who are resilient, resourceful, loyal, motivated, and smart. The kind of qualities businesses want and need. Though our students are often ready for big changes, the paths to the kind of corporate career success they dream of are too often limited.

### **As interns ...**

They are committed, curious, have insights to share and a point of view that can add positive, new dimension to business conversations. They are ready to engage with the world around them, are persistent and determined in seeing their dreams come true.

### **As employees ...**

Year Up trained young adults are tenacious, enthusiastic, full of grit and determination. They believe in their mission and will work hard to see it through. They carry with them the *Year Up way of doing things* which means they are open, honest, and respectful to others. They never stop learning or striving to be better. They go above and beyond to see a job is done right ... but also remember to have fun along the way.

## THE OBSTACLES (AND SOME NEW IDEAS)

WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY OF STUDENTS DECIDING TO ENROLL ...

### → **Worry about Being Able to Pay Bills**

*I'll have to quit my full-time job to do this. Will I have enough money to make ends meet? Is the stipend enough? Can I handle a part-time job, too? Why sacrifice a year if I need money now?*

Obstacle overcome by:

Off-setting STIPEND and long view of CAREER OPPORTUNITY.

In a nutshell:

Your "Year Up" will be challenging, but the goal is worth it. This is an opportunity to position yourself for long-term success — to jumpstart your whole career. We do all we can to support you in that effort, including providing you with the ability to earn a stipend. Where else can you earn while you learn? To be clear, the stipend won't replace a full-time job, but it can help offset *some* of your basic expenses, which we hope makes focusing on lessons just a bit easier.

### → **Concern it's a Scam**

*Is this for real? I don't pay anything? I can get all this training for nothing? I may get a job at the end?*

Obstacle overcome by:

Relatable GRADUATE STORIES, INTERNSHIP for qualified students, and transferable COLLEGE CREDIT or CREDIT RECOMMENDATIONS depending on Year Up location attended.

In a nutshell:

Our graduates are folks from your neighborhoods who had the same big dreams as you. We connected these hard-working young adults with our trusted corporate partners to provide them with real opportunity. Many now work at major corporations, but their path to success began at Year Up where they learned in-demand skills, made professional connections, earned college credits (or credit recommendations), and polished training in a hands-on internship.

➔ **Unsure They Can Do it — It's a Big Commitment**

*This may not fit my life. I have a lot of responsibilities to consider. Can I make it work in my life?*

Obstacle overcome by:

High expectations balanced by high SUPPORT and powerful CONNECTIONS.

In a nutshell:

The Year Up program is hard. But you *can* do it. And you won't be alone. That's because we support students both inside and outside the classroom. Whether you have concerns about finances or having enough time to complete everything that's required of you as student, a need for housing, day care or having no way to get to campus each day — our full-time social services team is prepared to support you with a plan to ensure your "Year Up" is a success. Everybody's story is different. But no matter what obstacles arise, together, we'll find a way to clear a path so that you are able to do your absolute best — in the classroom, in your internship, in life. Our students learn quickly that Year Up is a different kind of job training program. For them, the program is about more than just hitting the books, it's about making friends and partnering with a group of professionals who they know have their back. Not many schools or job training programs can say that. That's because giving students complete and ongoing support is at the heart of what makes our program succeed. We have daily group sessions and weekly individual feedback sessions where each student has an opportunity to be heard, share successes or concerns, receive guidance and support as they continue to sharpen and improve their professional skills. Our promise is to do all we can to set you up for success, in class and out. We do that with a dedicated team of advisors to assist, a professional mentor to guide you, a social services staff to support you, and a team of like-minded young adults who will join you in each step of your journey.

➔ **Fear of “Wasting” a Year of Their Life**

*Is it worth it? What if I don't get a job? It seems like a big risk. What's the pay off?*

Obstacle overcome by:

Training in in-demand HARD SKILLS, meaningful ACCESS to respected corporations, and a proven PLAN FOR CAREER SUCCESS

In a nutshell:

One year is all it takes to put a plan for lifelong career success in motion. It's about seizing opportunity. The kind of opportunity most of our students have been denied prior to coming to Year Up. First, you will learn the technical skills hiring companies need. This makes your training more marketable, more in demand. Then, upon meeting all program expectations, you'll earn a hands-on internship and the opportunity to work with one of our trusted corporate partners to further develop your skills. They get a chance to see what you can do. You get a chance to deepen your knowledge and see if the kind of career they offer is right for you. It's a powerful way to learn while making the kind of important professional connections that can benefit your career for years to come. We can't promise you a job right after you graduate. But we can say, you'll be better prepared to make the most of whatever career opportunities come your way. You'll have training. You'll have connections. And you'll have the support of a network of Year Up graduates successfully pursuing their dreams. In fact, a full 90% of graduates are employed and/or enrolled in post-secondary education within four months of completing our program. Your “Year Up” is about gaining access, getting your foot in the door, and making connections that count. Of course, the transferable college credit and the biweekly stipend payment are nice, too.

## QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS:

### HOW SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS GET “OVER THE HURDLE” ...

1. Our students can articulate why they want Year Up. They possess a clear idea of where they are in relation to their dreams and understand the opportunity Year Up represents in advancing them toward fulfilling those dreams.
2. Our students are open to new things, willing to share ideas, and interested in hearing other points of view. These developing interpersonal awareness skills are nurtured further at Year Up allowing our students to genuinely connect with people from a variety of backgrounds. This allows them to give and receive feedback and to proactively initiate the changes they need to improve.
3. Our students are persistent in pursuit of what they want. They don't quit. They don't let short-term setbacks derail their vision. Once they set a goal, they keep pushing for it no matter what.
4. Our students have the observational skills that help them become critical thinkers who can break down information, experiences, and observations quickly and objectively in order to plan the next best course of action.

## VALUE PROPOSITION

OUR AUDIENCE AND WHAT WE OFFER THEM...

### **Current Year Up Value Proposition**

Year Up provides companies with a reliable pipeline of bright, motivated, and well-trained entry-level talent that is ready to fill the positions that organizations need. In doing so, we empower young adults to succeed in the workforce. It's good for students, good for companies, and good for the community. Year Up is a smart and proven solution.

REIMAGINED FROM A STUDENT-FIRST POINT OF VIEW

### **Year Up Value Proposition to students**

Year Up provides motivated young adults with real opportunity and a proven plan for career success by training them in the job-specific, in-demand skills hiring companies need. For corporate partners, we function as a vital and reliable source of bright, well-trained entry-level talent — young adults who are committed to bringing value to the companies who employ them. It's good for students, good for business, and good for the community. Year Up is a smart and proven solution.

## PROPOSED KEY MESSAGES

### Key Message 1 — TAKE ADVANTAGE OF REAL OPPORTUNITY

**For people who think big, Year Up provides access to life-changing opportunities.**

#### Key theme expanded:

With Year Up, you'll gain real-world access to major corporations in a way you may never thought possible. So, think big, and dream bigger. Our intensive, one-year program arms you with job-ready skills training, a 6-month internship, and expert, one-on-one coaching that provides the tips and guidance you need to succeed in business. Year Up is a bridge to where you want to go. It's the key that opens closed doors. It's the lever motivated young people use today to "crack open" opportunity and make for themselves the future they want. With Year Up, you are always in the driver seat. We provide a plan to achieve your dreams, a proven path to success. But it's up to *you* to make it happen.

### Key Message 2 — LEARN IN-DEMAND, JOB-READY SKILLS

**Because we train you in the exact, job-specific skills companies tell us they need, you have a better chance of getting a job quickly.**

#### Key theme expanded:

We both know you can't find a job where they aren't hiring. One huge benefit of the Year Up program is that we talk to hiring companies first — and then train you in the in-demand, industry-specific skills they need. That means when you graduate the program, you'll have very marketable career skills and a better chance of landing a job quickly. In fact, 90% of graduates are employed or enrolled in post-secondary education within four months of completing their "Year Up."

### Key Message 3 — EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

**Year Up’s “earn-while-you-learn” approach is just one of the ways we show students that nothing matters more to us than you.**

#### **Key theme expanded:**

Year Up is a non-profit. That means unlike other job training programs or colleges, we aren’t in it for the money. We’re in it for you. So, rather than paying us, as a Year Up student, you actually have the ability to earn a bi-weekly stipend payment to help you off-set some of your day-to-day expenses. You can max out your stipend payment by consistently meeting expectations, and the stipend increases during the internship portion of the program. We make expectations very clear, and you’ll always know exactly what’s required of you to earn the maximum amount. This is a unique opportunity within a job training program to “earn while you learn.” While our stipend payments won’t replace the wages of a full-time job, we hope that when considered in combination with the training, internship, transferable college credits, networking, and other professional growth opportunities our students receive, you’ll agree the “opportunity cost” of investing a year of your life now to further the rest of your career is worth it.

### Key Message 4 — PURSUE BOTH CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL GOALS AT THE SAME TIME!

**With Year Up, you can fast track the professional career you want while at the same time complete courses good toward a college degree.**

#### **Key theme expanded:**

As a Year Up student, you’ll make professional connections and learn the in-demand skills hiring companies want, while *at the same time* put yourself a bit closer to a college degree. That’s a good way to double up the benefits of your coursework and invest in your future. With most colleges and training programs you either train for work or earn college credit. Our students are able to do both at once. Depending on where you live, while completing Year Up curriculum courses you’ll earn college credit at a local partner college (we can help you get financial aid or student loans if needed) or you’ll earn up to 31 college credit recommendations that are recognized at over 2000 higher education institutions nationwide. It’s a smart, flexible system that enables you to fast track your professional career while at the same time complete coursework that could put you on a path to earning a college degree even faster.

## Key Message 5 — MAKE CONNECTIONS THAT REALLY COUNTS

**The business connections you make during your “Year Up” will have a huge and lasting positive impact on your career.**

### Key theme expanded:

One truth of the business world is this — most people get a job because of *who* they know as much as *what* they know. They hear about an opening through a friend. They get a recommendation from a former co-worker. It’s about their connections. But what if you don’t have those business connections? How can you possibly prove your talent? Through hands-on training and a 6-month internship at a major corporation, Year Up enables you to “bridge the gap,” start building your own professional network, and make the kind of business connections that really matter.

## Key Message 6 — OUR PROVEN PLAN AND YOUR DETERMINATION MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

**We provide a proven plan for achieving career success, but it takes your grit, determination, and talent to make it work.**

### Key theme expanded:

Year Up is a proven tool in the hands of motivated young adults, a great first step toward the lasting success and the life you want for you and your family. It won’t be easy. But *you* can do it. You’ll do the hard work — because you’re committed, motivated, and determined. You just plain want it more. That’s why our high-expectation, high-support system will work for you. We expect a lot from you as a student. You should expect a lot from us. We’re partners in your success, with a proven plan for how to get you where you want to go. Your “Year Up” includes training in job-specific skills; a 6-month, hands-on, learning internship; the daily guidance and encouragement of coaches and community-based partners; a one-on-one professional mentor; instruction in valuable professional skills like *business communication*, *time management*, and *problem solving* and the dedicated support of our social services staff. For all of this we require only your best effort. So, put Year Up to work for you, and get on your path to *what’s next*.

## Key Message 7 — YOU KNOW YOU HAVE MORE TO GIVE

**You have untapped talent and potential, and it's our mission to help you see that talent doesn't go to waste.**

### Key theme expanded:

You have a lot to give. You're smart. Determined. Ready to leave your mark. You have things you want to prove ... to yourself, to you family, to your community, to the world. With effort and motivation, Year Up will be your platform for showcasing the value of your unique personality, talent, and perspective. As a student, you'll learn the job-ready skills hiring companies need. Then you'll start your 6-month, hands-on internship at a respected corporate partner. Given just one chance, you *will* make an impact. Your opportunity starts right now. Let's open closed doors. Let's set a path to success that starts by saying "YES I can commit to this because my dreams are worth it."

## Key Message 8 — BE PART OF SOMETHING SPECIAL

**We surround you with a community of supporters who are all committed to seeing you succeed.**

### Key theme expanded:

Being part of Year Up means never going it alone. From day one, you'll have a network of support — fellow students, instructors, mentors, alumni, staff, and community partners — all pulling for your success. We have interactive classes with lots of group activities and one-on-one conversations. *That means stronger bonds*. Deeper commitments. It also means when you're feeling down or miss a class, people notice. They check in on you. Lift you up and encourage you to keep going. That sense of community and connection is a big part of why our young adults succeed.

## Key Message 9 — FOLLOW YOUR INTERESTS, DISCOVER A CAREER

**Year Up helps you find a career track you'll love — based on your interests and fine-tuned by our industry-specific training.**

### **Key theme expanded:**

Did you know that *what you like* is often the best indicator of *the kind of job you'll enjoy* and be good at? It makes sense. If you like something, you're more likely to stick with it. The numbers bear this out, too. Year Up students who train in specialties that interest them do better in the program and earn higher wages when hired for those specialties. You may not know you want to go into Helpdesk Support, but if you love problem solving, that's a good indicator that Helpdesk could be a career where you'd do well. Or Information Technology could be a good fit if you enjoy hands-on problem solving and love to learn and master the latest technology. Whether you know exactly the career you want or you're still searching — learn what interests *you*. As a Year Up student, you can train in one of five popular technical skills tracks: Information Technology, Business Operations, Financial Operations, Sales & Customer Support, and Software Development. Reach out to a Year Up admissions career expert. Where your interests lead may surprise you.

## STUDENT BENEFITS — WHAT YEAR UP OFFERS

### OPENS DOORS TO REAL OPPORTUNITY

Get real-world access to major corporations in a way you never thought possible. This intensive one-year training program is a proven pathway to career success, a step-by-step plan of action for achieving your dreams.

### JOB-READY SKILLS TRAINING – includes stipend payments

Learn the exact technical skills hiring companies in our area tell us they need right now. Plus, earn stipend payments along the way.

### 6-MONTH CORPORATE INTERNSHIP – includes stipend payments

Gain valuable, hands-on experience working at a major corporation. Develop your skills and maximize your learning through professional feedback. Benefit from the one-to-one career advice of your own experienced professional mentor. Plus, your stipend is increased during your internship.

### TRAINING COURSES ELIGIBLE FOR COLLEGE CREDIT

Depending on where you attend, by completing Year Up skills training courses you can earn college credit at one of our college partners OR up to 31 college credit recommendations recognized at more than 2000 higher education institutions nationwide. So, while you fast track your career by acquiring the technical and professional skills hiring companies need, you'll also put yourself a little closer to a college degree. That's a smart way to invest in your future.

### EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

Year Up is a non-profit. That means unlike other job training programs we aren't in this to make money. We're in it for you. So, rather than paying, our students actually earn a stipend during the program (both while training and in the internship). There is no better way to "earn while you learn."

## CONNECTIONS, COMMUNITY, SUPPORT

We provide a critical network of support, surrounding you with the practical services, coaching, advice, feedback, and encouragement you need to succeed. Our dedicated staff, coaches, alumni, experienced professional mentors, and community-based partners are there for you every step of the way. But the real personal growth and greatest reward comes through the support you give and receive each day as you deepen friendships and strengthen ties with other students in your “Year Up” class.

## VALUABLE PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

In addition to in-demand technical skills, we teach our students the valuable professional skills that our corporate partners tell us set our graduates apart. As a student, you’ll learn and practice effective business communication, time management techniques, problem solving, and host of other “soft” skills that will help you prosper in whatever career you choose. With the technical skills you learn at Year Up, you’ll be able to contribute on day one of your employment. But what’s really going to get you noticed by your manager and others as someone special is your upbeat, positive outlook. The way you treat and talk to others. How you manage your time. Your ability to recognize when a co-worker is struggling and step in to help. These are the vital professional skills for which our graduates are known and hired.