

# F S B

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Giving Back

BY WILFRIED ECKL-DORNA

## Schoolyard CEO

*An entrepreneur teaches inner-city kids the job skills they don't get anywhere else.*

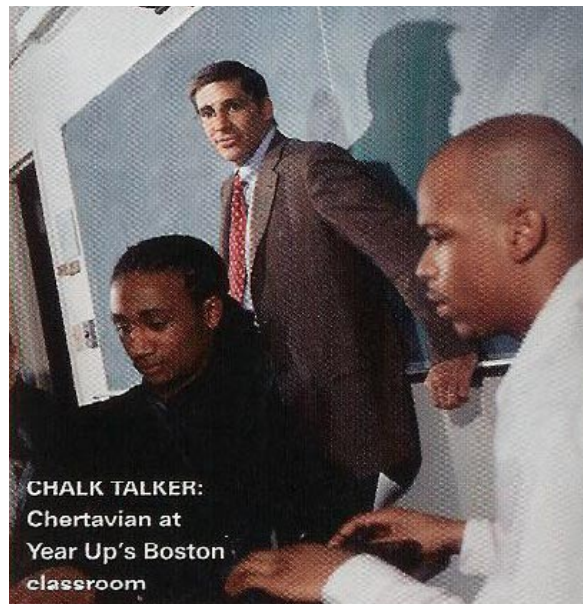
**G**ERALD CHERTAVIAN'S LIFE STORY is the very definition of "fast track": Former Wall Street hot-shot graduates with honors from Harvard Business School, founds a successful Internet consultancy, and sells it at the height of the dot-com boom, walking away with millions. Since then Chertavian, now 39, has turned his entrepreneurial energy toward offering education and job training for inner-city kids in Boston and Providence. "We provide opportunity, nothing else," Chertavian says.

After selling Conduit Communications, the software firm he co-founded with two others, Chertavian used \$650,000 of his profits to launch Year Up, which since 2000 has grown to a \$5.5 million annual budget and 23 staffers. Year Up targets low-income youths ages 18-24 who already have a high school diploma or GED, and helps them get the job skills they need for entry-level positions at companies such as Comcast, Gillette, and Putnam Investments. Half of the training is what Chertavian calls ABC: attitude, behavior, and communications. Young adults from poor neighborhoods often lack the ability to express themselves clearly, he says. In workshops, Year Up students learn how to communicate via e-mail, how to take notes in a meeting, and how to make small talk. Chertavian teaches some of the classes.

The rest of the training is technical - mostly computer skills. Classes run five days a week, with a debit-point system for misbehaving or turning work in late. "It sets clear, fair, and consistent standards, and it shifts responsibility for behavior onto the student," says Chertavian. Stu-

dents in the program receive college credits and a stipend of as much as \$180 a week. This year it will graduate 200 students. About 85% will get job offers.

Before Year Up, "all I had was a high school diploma," says Sherley Torres, 23. "I was at home raising my kids, and I would have done that forever." The single mother of two tried working as a hotel



phone operator, but she couldn't accommodate the odd hours. She completed Year Up last July and turned an internship into a full-time position at the help desk of ChildrenFirst, a Boston-based company that provides backup child care to corporations. "It changed my life," she says.

One habit Chertavian carried over from his business career is that of expansion: He plans to open Year Up sites in New York City and Washington D.C., in 2006.