

Marathon preparation helps Mo stay on top of his business career

Nicholas Ning

CHARLES Mo, aged 56, is planning to test his resolve in what most people of his age would deem mission impossible — running 21 kilometers on Shanghai's streets next month.

But it shouldn't be a big task for the vice chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai. He has run the Shanghai International Marathon for the past six years, with a record of two hours and 18 minutes — not bad for a non-professional athlete.

The former chief operating officer for Coca-Cola Shanghai, who turned around a loss-ridden beverage bottler into profitability, believes the endurance of long-distance running is a good way to build character and persistence.

"It takes determination to accomplish," said Mo, a Hong Kong-born American who went to school in Taiwan.

This resolve can be traced back nearly 30 years ago when Mo was called in to run with a team of 10 in a 64-kilometer relay race while working at Ernst & Young. Never having run more than 400 meters in his life, Mo spent three months training. He was then designated to run the anchor for the relay. He won.

"It taught me to be determined and to finish a task no matter how impossible it seems," said Mo, now general manager of his own consulting business, Charles Mo & Company, which helps overseas companies do business in China.

Started in 2005, Mo's business has around 20 customers including ELS American Education Center, Tyco Electronics and Nike China, mostly from the United States.

With connections and experience with Coca-Cola, Nike, and Polaroid in China over the past 12 years, Mo helps them apply for business licenses, select factory sites, find talents, build their financial systems and implement enter-



Biography

Charles Mo, general manager, Charles Mo & Co

- 2005 to date: General manager, Charles Mo & Co
- 1999 to 2005: Chief operating officer and chief financial officer, Coca-Cola Shanghai
- 1996 to 1999: Chief financial officer, Nike China

- 1995 to 1996: Chief financial officer, Polaroid China
- 1982 to 1994: Finance and audit manager, Wang Laboratories
- 1978 to 1982: Accountant and auditor, Ernst & Young
- 1976 to 1978: Administrative assistant, Bramel Truck Brokerage
- 1976: MBA graduate at California State University, Fullerton

prise program packages.

Mo's target is to develop 50 clients, and is busy visiting potential customers in China and the United States to sign up more one-stop solution deals.

A certified public accountant with 27 years' experience, Mo collected 52 rejection letters when he graduated.

But after he worked with a small CPA firm in Anaheim, California for two years, Ernst & Whinney (now Ernst & Young) was looking for experienced Chinese-speaking auditors to work in Hawaii.

Ernst & Young gave him solid and extensive experience as an auditor and tax accountant. Although he had to work 15 hours a day, it provided the transition ground for greater responsibility in big corporations.

Learning curve

Mo's next stop was his most cherished one, where he learned more than anywhere else. Talking about his days at Wang Laboratories brings back many good memories.

He spent 12 years there — his longest service at a single company — including four and a half years after it went into bankruptcy in 1990.

"If Dr Wang hadn't passed away, I would still be there," said Mo.

One of the toughest periods was when he had to fire all his staff at one district. He knew they had to leave in two weeks but he was not allowed to say a word.

"It was sad. So the next day I just told them. They would have been fired anyway, so why not help them prepare in advance? You have to be principled and clear with your conscience," said Mo.

During his last four years at Wang, Mo helped restructure the company and steer it through its re-emergence from bankruptcy. That process taught him a lot about business and managing employees.

Mo came to Shanghai in 1995 as

Polaroid China's CFO, a new chapter in his career. He then worked for three companies in four years, moving from Polaroid to Nike, and Coca-Cola in 1999.

At Coca-Cola Shanghai, Mo's career as a professional manager reached its peak, from being mainly a financial controller to chief operating covering manufacturing, logistics, human resources, marketing and sales.

He launched Coca-Cola's Sensation brand water in Shanghai and marketed it with the tactics learned from Nike to make it a big success.

"Nike has 800 new SKUs (stock keeping units) every quarter. Running shoes are their strong suit. Soccer is not, but they always put soccer first every year. The concept is that if you are in the business, either you are in it or you are not," he explained.

"For water, it's the same. You have to be in every category, from packaged water to the five-gallon jug."

Mo opened new production lines for making larger jugs of water and set up water stations for distribution to office buildings and factories. He believed that free drinking water in offices would get consumers to like the brand and eventually drink it at home.

Sales in the first year were five million cases — five times the target. By the time he left, the company sold 25 million cases of water a year and became profitable.

Asked why he left Coca-Cola, Mo revealed he had become disenchanted with corporate politics.

"I remember I had to swallow my pride and self-esteem, just to be safe with my position. It was humiliating at times," he wrote on his firm's BBS.

"In the real world, it is quite cold. You either make it or you don't. That is why I finally chose business over other professions. Even in business, you have to be really sharp and grow constantly. If you don't grow, you don't survive."



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