

That progress has largely come about because the government espoused the team's recommendation of hiring private firms and not-for-profit organizations to design and run many of the country's reconstruction programs, guided by a cadre of outstanding Afghan government officials. In parallel, the government set in motion longer-term reforms of the civil service. Arriving at such a strategy usually takes years of debate between aid organizations and the governments being helped—and the strategy is rarely so clear and shared by key players.

When the team began its work, we found it was important to step back and take a moment to define our roles. We had to be selective in deciding who was going to produce what, as opposed to just rushing into action in many directions. Probably because of the pressure, team members needed little convincing to stay focused on true priorities. Clear accountability helped generate results.

Furthermore, high team performance didn't require micromanagement. To be effective, I had to step back from the details and play a support role that, in the end, proved crucial to the team's success. It was important, for example, to keep the teams linked with one another. The group focusing on the health sector needed to remain in contact with those focusing on water supply, for obvious reasons. As overall team leader, one of my roles was to ensure this communication took place.

Forming the right team was probably the single most important factor in our success. In choosing team members to lead each sector, we looked for people who had a reputation for making things happen. We needed to be sure that they had firsthand experience with getting a country rapidly on the path to reconstruction and development.

Forming the right team also meant letting go of the least productive team members. As work progressed, it became clear that familiarity with the country was less important than teaming up with Afghans who possessed deep knowledge of the way the country

operated. In fact, some expatriates who had been working in Afghanistan for years resisted the leadership of new outside experts by systematically critiquing their efforts. In the end, those who inhibited team performance by focusing solely on risks and failing to offer constructive strategies had to be sidelined in favor of strong outside technical expertise.

A compelling shared vision of a rebuilt and stable Afghanistan and the ur-

gency of the situation at hand helped to instill a focus on results and overcome the inertia that often pervades large organizations like ours. The Asian Development Bank, the UN, and the World Bank are not known for their speed, but in this case we were able to do away with much of the red tape during the critical stages of our project. Clear goals and accountability and close attention to team composition were other key success factors.

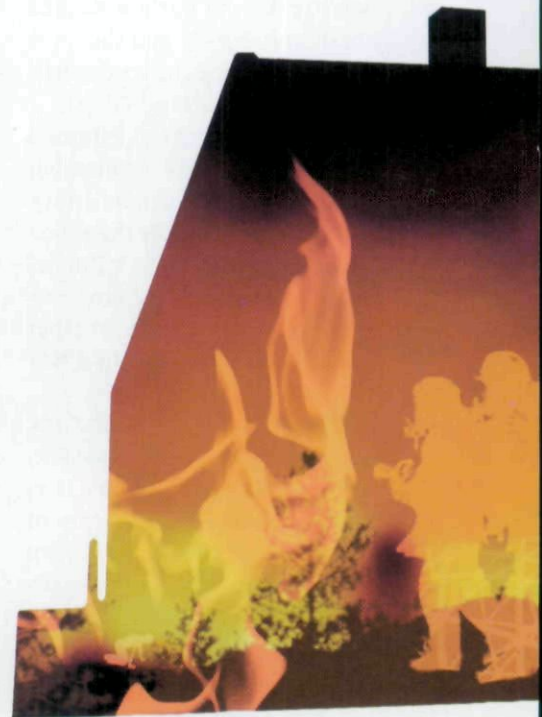
Performance Under Fire

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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN a team like the New England Patriots and a team of high-performing firefighters is the time pressure. In football, you can call a time-out. There's no time-out during a fire. You can't tell the fire to wait a minute while you consult somebody or look up the solution in a book. This is one business where you have to make very quick decisions on the basis of very little information.

Intuition is critical to high-performing firefighting teams—it can mean the difference between life and death. But our kind of intuition is learned. Through training, reading, responding to emergencies, and talking with veterans, we learn the cues and signals that indicate that certain things might occur. We have a vast mental data bank that is based on experience and training. If a fire is a certain color, we know the chances are pretty good that a particular product is burning. In a wildland fire, for example, you know that certain trees burn at a faster rate. And you know that a fire burns uphill more quickly than it does downhill. But your training has to be such that you recognize those cues immediately. You can't start pondering and planning and getting an official weather report before making decisions and taking action.

The fact that there is seldom chaos when firefighters go into a burning area can be summed up in one word: confidence—confidence in their skills and in one another. Confidence is contagious. If leaders are self-assured, capable, and knowledgeable, their people will respond with high performance. Being a leader in name only and driving and



intimidating your teams will reduce the effectiveness of any unit. People need to be guided and motivated. Even self-motivated individuals will lose their drive if you don't provide them with positive reinforcement. The trick for you as the leader is to make your team members believe that you believe they have worth.

Like most high-performing teams, firefighters need a mission. It's the mission that sets the priorities. If your mission is to stop the fire from getting to a certain place, all your actions and decisions will be targeted toward that outcome. Often the mission will force you to make very difficult decisions. You may have to anticipate letting houses burn that haven't even caught fire yet, because they're not defensible based on the type of roof they have or the fact that they're surrounded by highly flammable brush. You can't waste your resources if you're going to accomplish the greatest good for the greatest number. But it's hard trying to explain to home owners why you decided not to protect their homes.

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People who can't cope with that kind of pressure shouldn't be leading high-performing teams, and in my line of work, leaders who don't perform don't last long. On September 12, the day after the attack on the World Trade Center, the New York City Fire Department contacted the National Fire Academy to ask us if we could help them restore their command structure because they had lost so many of their top people. As part of that effort, I saw one of the team leaders struggling. He was a nice person, but he

really didn't have a good understanding of what needed to be done. His training and expertise in other areas did not equip him for the situation. As his inability to cope became more apparent, an unofficial leader emerged from among his crew who shepherded the project along. I've seen this happen many times on high-performance teams: If a leader is not up to the job, the top performers will step up to produce a leader who can carry the ball.

The Confidence Game

Mary Khosh was a **career coach for the Cleveland Browns** in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During that time, she advised players on work/life issues and was the only woman doing psychological coaching in the NFL. She is currently a consulting psychologist with the Leadership Development Institute at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida.

WHEN I WORKED WITH THE BROWNS, the coaches emphasized playing one game at a time—always focusing on the immediate play and the immediate goal, always focusing on high performance. The Browns' coaches pushed for team excellence—in life as well as in the game—player by player.

Coaching is a major factor in an athlete's success. Most of the players I worked with recognized this. They've been coached since they were first discovered in youth football leagues, and they've always believed in and trusted their coaches. In fact, sports players' reliance on coaches may explain why so many of them make mistakes in life and lose most of their money after their athletic careers are over. They are still looking for a coach, and there are many con artists happy to oblige.

Great coaches understand the way the minds of high performers work. Each player has his own needs. You can see this most clearly after the players lose a game. Some want the coach to come up to them and talk to them about it. Others want to be left completely alone; they want to deal with the loss in their own heads first.

During my time with the Cleveland Browns, I saw players working with several different coaches. The successful coaches kept the individual needs and interests of each player in mind.



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