

Lu Le: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

■ By Na LEI

First Response Co-founder and CEO Lu Le (EMBA 2007) sees entrepreneurship as being very much like a risky voyage where team members must trust each other if they hope to survive. “There are no perfect individuals, only perfect teams,” he says. “When I am in command you can feel secure, and you can take charge of whatever I cannot see and control,” he says.

Lu has long enjoyed the challenges of outdoor sports; he took up underwater diving while studying navigation in Japan in the 1990s, where he earned that country’s first-level captain certificate. But it wasn’t until 2011, when he participated in the sixth Gobi Challenge (the annual event that tests the physical endurance of EMBA students from China and global business schools by having them retrace the arduous trek Monk Xuan Zang made through the Gobi Desert 1,300 years ago) that he decided to start a charity organisation (which later became

First Response, the company) to provide emergency response and first aid services at sporting events in China. During the Gobi competition he saw signs of an approaching sandstorm. After consulting with locals, he insisted to his teammates that they must change their original game plan and switch to emergency mode. They were not easily persuaded but he was persistent and, luckily, got the support of the team leader. When the violent sandstorm eventually struck, blowing away many of their tents, he and his teammates survived, thanks to Lu’s foresight.

In order to make sure that First Response’s services would meet or exceed international standards, Lu Le along with COO and Co-founder Lu Jun (MBA 2010) spent two years studying the emergency skills and training systems in Japan, the US and Europe, as well as

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Lu Le

Education:

1992-1997: Keio University, Japan. Majored in Public Policy and the Internet, received full scholarship.

2007-2009: CEIBS EMBA

Career:

1990-1992: Shanghai Development Research Institute, State Council Development Research Centre, Assistant to Director

1996-2000: Launched an Internet start-up in Japan which was eventually sold to Mitsui and Lotto.

2001-2010: BII Group Holdings, Vice President

2013: First Response (the company) launched

Volunteer Work:

Director, Pudong New Area First Response Volunteer Service Centre

Lecturer, CEIBS EMBA Survival and Leadership Session

Gobi Challenge Director-in-Chief for Emergency Care

Director, American Heart Association Emergency Training Centre



exploring the social aid system and industry structure in those places. They gradually began cooperating with some local governments and organising committees for marathons being held in China, putting into practice what they had learned abroad. During their first event they saved the life of a cardiac arrest patient. With each successive event they have built on their expertise. By the end of March this year, First Response had provided emergency response services for 112 major events, including recent marathons in Wuxi and Chongqing, and they have saved the lives of seven cardiac arrest patients. The company also provides corporate emergency response and first aid solutions for clients such as Shanghai Tower and Alibaba.com.

First Response now has more than 40 full-time employees and more than 3,000 registered volunteers – both groups include many CEIBS alumni. Half of the company's 12 co-founders are CEIBS alumni and Lu says one of its newest recruits will be MBA 2016

student Min Ko Han, who is currently doing an internship at the company and plans to join after completing her studies at CEIBS.

Lu's Gobi Challenge teammate, lawyer Qi Baoxin (EMBA 2010) helped First Response set up its legal team. Their work covers two areas, protecting the firm and its employees from liability issues and protecting the company's trademarks, patents, curriculum, Apps and other intellectual property.

First Response obtained the China Social Enterprise Certificate in September 2015, affirming its efforts to carefully balance business with providing services that benefit society. The company's offices are located in the Shanghai Social Welfare Park, amid lush green trees in a quiet yard. Most of the buildings are more than 100 years old, their bricks bear a stamp indicating that they were made during Qing Dynasty Emperor Xianfeng's reign. Lu said his company's current office building was once a Catholic church, and the

church's do-good spirit intermingles with the social welfare spirit of First Response. Entering the building, people can easily forget the hustle and bustle of city life and renew their faith in humanity.

COO Lu Jun attributes much of the company's success to the concepts the founders learned during their studies at CEIBS. "When we have to solve a problem, we don't just think about the particular problem in isolation, but try to develop a systematic solution that can be applied in the future to similar issues," he says. "I have seen various emergencies abroad, and I know that a proper system can raise the rescue success rate to as high as 80-90%. This kind of system operates on two levels; the first comprises individuals and small teams and is geared towards protecting one's self and others. The second is about the society, and requires various resources, including a well-thought-out plan that can be activated in an emergency in order to save lives."



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“Just imagine what a good thing it would be when we can go from rescuing dozens of people a year to saving hundreds or even thousands a year, ”

says Lu, with a determined look in his eyes, like a sea captain checking the direction of the wind before setting off for a voyage around the world.



Many people have no idea what to do in an emergency situation. Lu Le recalls the time he passed by the scene of an accident while driving from Shanghai to Wuxi. He saw a seriously injured victim lying in the middle of the road, a rescue vehicle parked beside him. Police were at the scene and there were also many drivers caught in the traffic jam caused by the accident, however no one was helping the injured man. Lu took his first aid kit from his car and ran over to him. "His injuries were so severe, I could not move him or he might suffer permanent damage to his spine. His skull was also fractured," he recalls. "I don't know if he was able to recover from such a severe head injury. The only thing I could do for him was to bandage his fractured skull and give him a little dignity. I hope he knows that at least there was someone who tried to help him."

First aid training is another line of business for First Response. Its first trainees were mostly marathon fans, some of whom had witnessed treatment of cardiac arrest cases during events, and hoped to acquire first aid skills themselves. Eventually the company developed different first aid courses for different groups such as young parents, teenagers and adolescents, travellers and companies as well as organisations.

"We want to teach every Chinese how to save themselves and rescue others,

and to raise awareness in society that rescuing others should be the norm in China," Lu Le says. Citing a quote from the father of social welfare in the UK Michael Norton, he says he is glad to be a leader in social innovation in China. "You give money, you do charity; you give time, you are a volunteer; you give wisdom, you are leading social innovation."

Lu also likes to reference an old Chinese saying, "Seek protection from within yourself", when discussing the importance of having first aid and emergency response training. He believes that when disaster strikes, people should try their best to save themselves and others and not wait for government rescue teams. "In Japan, when there are disasters like earthquakes, 98% of the survivors are rescued by neighbours and colleagues, and only 2% by government efforts," he says. "Research studies in the US indicate that after a natural disaster you may have to wait up to four days before government rescue services reach you. In Germany, the law requires you to try to save others in danger."

The CEIBS community has also benefited from Lu's passion for sharing his first aid knowledge. He was deeply affected by the news that a CEIBS alumnus had suffered a fatal heart attack during a Gobi Challenge qualifying contest in 2012. He explains that there is a "golden four-minute"

rule that shows there is a more than 60% recovery rate when cardiac arrest is treated within four minutes of onset. However this is difficult to do, and requires training. Therefore Lu, together with several CEIBS alumni, set up the First Response Charity organisation to promote basic emergency first aid knowledge.

Last year, Lu took his employees to Sanya in Hainan Province for team building. He wanted them to experience a dive under the water, something he enjoys very much. Several employees wanted to know what it would be like to experience a ship wreck, and they jumped into the water wearing life vests. A strong wind blew their sailboat away and despite their strong swimming skills, some members of the team began to panic. "We immediately went to their rescue in our boat and saved them," Lu says. "However, the terror and helplessness they experienced in those moments will remain in their memory, and they'll better understand what we are doing."

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