

## Dogs and deals

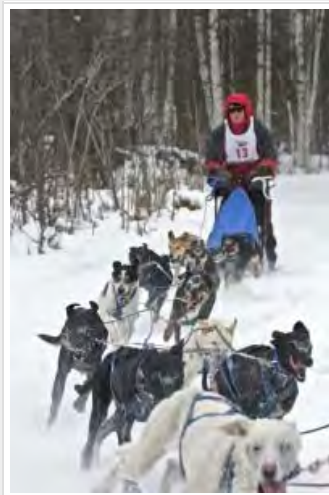
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By Katherine Fawcett

Successful leadership requires passion, consistent hard work, a supportive team, a sense of adventure, commitment, natural ability and boundless energy. For Iris and Ivy, it also requires a daily diet of ground beef fat, liver, poultry, kibble, corn oil, psyllium husk powder, egg powder, bone meal and pro-biotics.

And regular belly scratches too.

Iris and Ivy are Alaskan racing huskies, two of Mark Hartum's strongest leaders, and members of a kennel that has won dogsled races at provincial, national and international levels. They live with Hartum, his family, and approximately 50 other elite sled dogs on an 80-acre property adjacent to Elk Island Park and Blackfoot/Cooking Lake Provincial Recreation Area near Edmonton. The Hartum kennel is now recognized as one of the top in the sport.



Mark Hartum and his team. (Photo: Dave Partee)

Hartum's wife Brooke and their children Mya, 8, Elle, 7 and Noah, 4 are also avidly involved in running, racing and caring for the dogs. It's a sport, a hobby, a passion and a lifestyle that Hartum says has enabled him to forge ahead in his demanding commercial real estate career.

As one of [Avison Young's](#) principals based in Edmonton, Hartum is a key figure in the city's thriving real estate landscape. Hartum joined Avison Young three years ago, but has been in the industry for more than 15 years. His specialty is large downtown and suburban office buildings, representing both landlords and tenants, advising clients on substantial transactions and negotiating complex leases and agreements. Clients have included General Electric, Kraft Foods, PricewaterhouseCoopers, EBA Engineering, Maxaam Analytics and all three levels of government.

"We've experienced tremendous growth in the past few years," says Hartum. "We're a privately owned principal company with zero debt. It puts us in a good position to expand and add key talent to our organization."


Although the local market softened during the past two years, Hartum says "Edmonton has been relatively stable. The fundamentals are still relatively strong. It's still a balanced market. We're certainly not experiencing the pain some of the other key markets in Canada are."

While they may seem worlds apart, Hartum feels strongly that his career and his sport inspire each other. Here are the elements Hartum says dogsledding and commercial real estate have in common:

\* "Both are adventurous. There's

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always variety. Just as no two deals or no two dogs are the same, you never know quite what to expect in dogsledding and in real estate. You have to be prepared.



Mark Hartum

\* "There are no short cuts. For example, the market (in Edmonton) was extremely hot – red hot – in the last five years, and those who took their foot off the gas pedal a little are now paying the price. Now that the market has softened a bit, they're finding they've lost momentum and can't keep up. It's like that with the dogs. You can have all the raw talent and the right breeding, but if you slack off, skip out on training runs, nutrition and vet care, you won't be able to keep up. You can't fake the results. It takes consistency, discipline and commitment.

\* "To be successful at both you have to have some innate natural ability, some psychology skills, the ability to work long and hard and the determination to see something through to the end. You have to be a competitive but patient person. Things don't happen overnight. Complex deals may take six to 18 months to come to fruition. It's a lot of risk for a lot of reward, similar to trying to put a successful race team together."

\* Whether it's dogs or real estate, it's critical to surround yourself with a great team. "With dogsledding, my family is a tremendous support. Mya, Elle, Noah, Brooke, everyone contributes, from doing chores around the kennel to training, racing and travel," says Hartum.

\* You have to be able to handle complexity. "In a racing kennel, I'm the owner, general manager, coach and player. I'm responsible for the breeding program, the farm team and yearling development. I'm the equipment specialist, caretaker, nutritionist and veterinarian," he says. "In real estate you need a high level of competency in finance, marketing, forecasting and negotiating. You've got to be able to handle non-stop high pressure."

\* Passion. You have to enjoy what you do and be truly passionate about it, otherwise you're not going to achieve the highest levels of happiness and success. "With real estate, I've always loved driving around looking at buildings, interesting architecture and new concepts in real estate development. I find it fascinating. It's the same with working with dogs. I enjoy visiting other kennels, studying pedigree books and experimenting with new ideas and concepts."

Hartum's biggest challenge today is that his real estate company continues to expand and require more attention at the same time as he wants to continue competing at an elite level in the most challenging unlimited class sled dog races in the world.

"I try to keep it all in perspective," says Hartum. "At work we have really talented employees. A great team. Even if I'm in another part of the world running dogs, I do have a Blackberry, laptop and a cell phone so I'm always accessible." He says that because many of his clients are not based in Edmonton, much of his communication is done electronically anyhow.

At the time of our interview, Hartum was preparing his 20 fastest, strongest and most experienced dogs for three days of racing at the Laconia World Championship Sled Dog Derby in New Hampshire in February. After that, he

is planning to attend races in southern B.C. and the Northwest Territories, and finally the Open North American Championships in Alaska in March.

Hartum had returned from a training run on the trails behind his home just before we spoke.

"I got home from work today at 5 pm, hooked up an 18-dog team and took off. It was absolutely flawless. A perfect run. No tangles, they took all the turns perfectly." He said it was "one of the most peaceful runs I've ever had."

"It's such a great stress relief. You've got to be so focused on it. There's a lot of moving parts. Your leaders are 100 feet out in front of you. You have to be right there, in the moment. You don't think of anything else."

He finished the run and gave each of the dogs their post-run treats, belly-rubs and behind-the-ear scratches.

"Life is good," he said as three puppies chased his kids around the yard. "Life is good."



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