

“Skimpies?? What the heck are Skimpies??”

This question, along with many other much more pertinent and industry relevant ones, were asked and answered at the recent New Leaders Conference 2006, Kalgoorlie WA. The conference is an AUSIMM organized event aimed at new graduates, or soon to be graduates, in the mining and metallurgy related industries. It is a chance to hear presentations on; technical papers, career paths, mentoring, current industry positions and trends, new technologies, environmental and political policy changes, existing and developing mines, and blowing up HUGE amounts of rock in 50



milliseconds. Of equal importance is the chance to meet and network with the like-minded individuals who at some time in the future will be guiding and leading our industry.

The NZ branch of AUSIMM decided to give two kiwis the amazing opportunity to get to Kalgoorlie for this 2-day event, and keep an eye on what the aussies are up to. In return one of us was to write a more seriously toned page on the details of the conference material, while the other would produce a more light heartened account of some of the experiences inevitably encountered in an outback mining town. Upon discussion we decided that to our respective bosses this would make one of us look like the early to bed/early to rise/ met no-one but took great notes individual, and the other the diligent after hours “networker”/didn’t quite make every conference session individual. As such we asked permission for a co-written article that should hopefully cover equally the informative content of the conference and the more entertaining moments.



Kalgoorlie feels like something of a Mecca to an Australasian mining engineer. That place you just have to visit, or work out of, at least once if you are to call mining your chosen profession. With a school of mines that dates back more than a 100 years, a super pit that looks not dissimilar to the grand canyon, and a transient population that a cabbie reliably informed us was between 20 and 40 thousand (depending on how many were on their rostered leave from the many surrounding fly in/fly out mines that Kalgoorlie services)....**the place IS mining!**

The first proof you have of the previous statement is as we flew into Kalgoorlie on a Sunday evening to see nothing but desert crisscrossed by pit to tailings dam to pit to tailings dam, from horizon to horizon. After checking in to one of the many crossroad tavern hotels, we ventured out

to have a quiet beer and meet some of the locals. The first real eye opener of the trip was to find that Kalgoorlie bartenders in most Kalgoorlie bars were the *exact polar opposite* of the unattractive, overweight, fully clothed, male stereotype. And therein lays the answer to the opening question of this article.



The theme for the conference was “Riding the minerals boom into tomorrow”. Although there were a number of papers presented across a variety of topics there were a number of recurrent themes that surfaced repeatedly across the 2 days. These also tended to be the topics that dominated the open forum, “2020 Vision-The Manager of the 21st Century” held on the final session of the event. We have narrowed the field to 5, and it is these themes we consider most important to get out to our colleagues back here in New Zealand. Not just to other recent

graduates or soon to be graduates, but also to our current industry professionals and leaders whose responsibility it will be to ensure that the existing vast industry knowledge and experience is passed on to the next generation of leaders.

Chasing the Money vs. Structuring your Career Development

This came up time and time again. With the current industry boom and consequent shortage of professional staff, there have been numerous occurrences of high salaried experienced positions being offered to relatively inexperienced recent graduates. The general consensus to come out of the conference on this topic was that the short term benefit of the higher salary to the individual may not necessarily outweigh the benefits of finding a graduate development program that gives you a broad base of experience and skill sets at industry entry level. Skill sets that will at a later date, give you the confidence to lead those under your direct supervision, and increase your employability should the current boom conditions tighten.

Generations Baby Boomer/X/and Y

This represents the implications of having a future working environment that is incorporated of large numbers from 3 distinct generations. Future supervisory and management positions may not necessarily be filled by the older/more experienced/ knowledgeable individual. How is this best managed? How do we ensure that the vast practical knowledge and experience of the baby boomer generation is adequately transferred to the X and Y’ers? Mentoring was another often mentioned word, with organizations putting in place the relationships that assist this transfer of knowledge between senior and junior. Graduate development programs being another key consideration in ensuring that future supervisors and managers *have* developed the “mine face” knowledge to lead those in their teams.

Women in Mining

“Sexual Harassment will always be around in the mining industry”....a slip of the tongue from one

of the girls presenting a paper on women in mining. To be fair, undoubtedly brought on by the pressure of Q&A time and the misfortune of presenting the morning after an extensive networking session at the meet and greet function. This statement was appropriately accompanied by a lot of wide eyes, a few gasps, and even a couple of “I can’t believe she just said that”. In following discussions it was made abundantly clear that sexual harassment will not be tolerated in the industry, and the effects of moving toward a 50/50 employment mix were considered. More flexible FIFO rosters, balancing family and career paths, Job sharing, and alternate position relocation were a few of the ideas brought up.

Globalization

This trend is not going to turn about, and in all likelihood will only speed up. What positive advantages of this trend can we implement? Ideas raised and discussed included; increased graduate exchanges for experience, better allocation of knowledge requirements through Job exchanges, and addressing industry shortages through immigration policy communications. What affect does it have on Australasian organizations? Other countries will undoubtedly continue to have lower labour costs. As a result better technologies are the asset that will continually to make us globally competitive. There was also an appropriate paper presented on selecting and implementing the *right* technology into an organization.

Implications to the Company

Although many ideas were raised on this subject, the real crux of it all came down to: Graduate Development, Mentoring, and Flexibility. Each idea interacts with one another as well as addressing individual issues of their own. As a whole, they are about ensuring that future leaders are given the time, training, and experiences to develop the necessary skills and knowledge in order to effectively lead those in their team. It is not necessarily about offering the top dollar, but about offering a competitive dollar accompanied with a culturally positive working environment that is flexible, knowledge developing, and structured to individual aspirations.

The above 5 topics are but a brief condensation of a lot of material that came out of the conference hall across the 2 days. But as they say, you are not really working unless you are networking, and the welcome function at the end of day 1 provided the necessary means to begin this process. “The 1st bus leaves at 6.15pm, the 2nd at 6.30pm”. There mustn’t have been many that made the 1st bus, as the 2nd was overloaded and not going anywhere according to the bus driver. Being gentlemen, and not wishing to delay the majority from the festivities the 3 kiwis present volunteered to disembark and wait for the bus to return for a 3rd trip. In hindsight, the pleasure of a 60 seater bus all to ourselves didn’t quite equate to the demolition of a \$6,000 bar tab within half an hour of the 1st bus leaving!

The final words must go to a couple of quotes presented by the well-spoken Mr. Richard Price of BHP Billiton:

“Leadership is Influence”, John Maxwell

“Example is not the main way to influence people, it’s the only way”, Albert Schweitzer