

# Taking charge of your career – a women in mining perspective

BY KATE SOMMERVILLE, FAUSIMM(CP), AUSIMM DIRECTOR AND WIMNET COMMITTEE MEMBER

**K**ate Sommerville is a mining engineer with over 16 years in the mining industry. She is also a Director of The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy ('The AusIMM'), the leading organisation representing professionals in the Minerals sector, and a longstanding member of the Women in Mining Network (WIMnet), which operates under the auspices of The AusIMM, to support women in mining through networking events, advocacy and professional development opportunities.

Whatever your stage of career or life, it's important to check in with yourself every now and then to examine the commodity which is yourself: Who are you? What are your strengths? What's the differentiating element that you normally bring to your workplace? What are your goals now, and in a few roles' time? What are the gaps? Doing this allows you to reflect on your development, identify what you need to work on and then communicate this to people who can help facilitate your path.

I have attended a number of Women in Mining networking events over the

last year. These events are open to both men and women, and often feature a speaker who is considered an inspiration in terms of achievement and contribution to the sector. These women who generously share their stories often mention that careers are sometimes a meandering journey with a few stops along the way. There are some detours required around barriers, and some dead ends. There are so many paths it is difficult to generalise, but there are themes around having good foundations, planning for cycles, and communication.

Whatever the professional field, on entering the mining industry there is usually a period of having a go at all parts of the discipline: planning, production, exploration, feasibility, supervision and generally getting good exposure to find out what you like and are good at. It's important to check in on your development often to ensure you are moving through all aspects and not getting left in one area for too long. It is important to contribute value so careful judgement is required regarding timing. Whilst you may find early on that you like something, you

should still try to cover the whole spectrum of roles, as this will give you credibility, the ability to understand what your customers need, and the ability to communicate effectively. It also gives you career options. Foundations can take a while to establish but deliver a robust professional who can then progress quickly.

There is a lot said about graduate programs, mentoring and formal career paths. Some companies do have formal programs, but it should not stop you doing your own work. Everyone is unique, with different strengths. You are the only person who can take charge of your career. Others can just guide, help and facilitate. There is a lot you can do on your own. Advice and mentoring can be given over networking drinks or an informal coffee. Chase down those you admire. They will more often than not be flattered, and will be generous with their advice.

Joining a professional organisation such as the AusIMM is a great way to become exposed to the variety of career pathways and opportunities in the industry through networking, and

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Kate Sommerville, FAUSIMM(CP), AusIMM Director and WIMnet committee member



Miriam Lyons-Stanborough, WIMnet Deputy Chair MAusIMM

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to learn about new developments and growth areas in which you may want to evolve your career.

The AusIMM’s Chartered Professional Program is a great tool to capture your progress, reflect on the year and plan for the future. The chartered program is a formal commitment to ongoing professional development and includes: attending conferences and short courses; attending technical talks; listening to podcasts; writing a paper; peer reviewing a conference paper; internal technical training; private reading; AusIMM committee work; organising technical and networking events; and mentoring. There is plenty that can be done at low cost in a timetable that suits.

It’s important to plan for cycles; both the industry’s, and stages of your life. The industry’s cycle is something outside our control, but we can position ourselves well. It is the usual kernel about performing well, being a good team player and having good foundations, continually developing yourself and networking outside with professional organisations. Lay-offs happen, you can’t take it personally. I’ve seen many people laid off who ended up going on to much better things and changed their profession completely. Manage your own development, even if it means taking some annual leave, paying for your own conference and claiming it as a tax deduction.

Personally, you should take time to think where you want to be working in the future, where you want to live, and

how you want to work. Mining is a lifestyle choice. For those with a young family, residential or city jobs are often preferred. For having babies, fly in fly out (FIFO) is not really an option, so it’s best to get into a position and build your reputation to enable a smooth transition and ensure good employer support. There are lots of strategic moves required and often different skill sets. It can take time to line things up, and that’s where reassessing skills, gaps and positioning are really vital.

A great example is the WIMnet Deputy Chair, Miriam Lyons-Stanborough, MAusIMM. She is on her third stint of maternity leave and is still enjoying career success. Well regarded for her chemical engineering technical and line skills, she is now rounding out her business skills in a part-time human resources role whilst contributing her expertise on diversity and operations to the organisation. She was invited to do the role after being spotted giving a WIMnet presentation about workforce diversity.

When she is ready to go back to operational roles, Miriam will have a greater business understanding. Miriam also keeps connected by being on the WIMnet committee and serving on the Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA’s (CMEWA) Women in Resources Reference Group on behalf of her company. Additionally, Miriam is currently a finalist in CMEWA’s Outstanding Women in Resources Awards.

Communication is very important once you have mapped out your

direction and what your personal development requirements are. If you have a desire to do a particular role sometime in the future, mentioning it to your supervisor will ensure that the seed is planted. It does not have to be a concrete timeframe, a desire is often enough to get people thinking. It may not happen straight away, but there is a good chance of it coming up and it being the organisation’s initiative, which is even better. In more senior roles it becomes important to think two steps ahead, which requires a bit more long-term thinking and development planning.

Detours and barriers often come up and sometimes you are advised to redo a role in a new business or take a sideways step. It’s important to assess who is offering you this advice and what their motives are. People often forget resumes and have preconceived ideas, so it’s quite important to explore the advice and restate where you think you have covered the gaps elsewhere. If this does not work, then getting another opinion is valuable. Have courage and be firm. It will pay off.

You are unique, so only you can chart the journey. By spending some quiet time analysing your gaps, desires and needs you can set about creating your own development. Build a solid foundation, identify your needs, then share your ideas so that others are aligned with your vision and can assist where opportunities arise.

“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.” – Helen Keller