

Mining Misfits – Roundtable Discussion: Next Generation of Leadership

Discussion Overview & Debrief of Major Topics/Themes

1.0 Introduction

The Misfits were at it again this month with another Roundtable Discussion, this time focusing on the “Next Generation of Leadership in the Mining Industry”. We did something a little bit different this time around to get a unique perspective of the challenges and solutions we see going forward – rather than bringing together the most seasoned and experienced industry professionals, we rounded up a group of highly successful and highly talented early- to mid-career individuals to discuss their views from the front lines of industry advancement.

This group of Misfits, like those before, did include the best minds in the technical fields (mine engineering, geology, etc.) as well as business and project management backgrounds. The group also comprised both owner and contractor experienced professionals, so as to ensure no bias to one discipline, practice, or vantage point.

Prior to hosting this discussion, we conducted a poll distributed to a wide variety of professionals in our global community, asking one question: *“What is the biggest challenge the Next Generation of Leaders will face in capital development projects in the mining industry?”*



Our host shared these results and mentioned that the solutions to each of these problems are more difficult to implement than to identify. Our conversation with the Misfits confirmed the same.

In this topic paper, we will discuss what this group of industry professionals identified as the greatest challenges for the next generation of mining professionals.

2.0 Resource Availability and Retention

It was no surprise that the Misfits unanimously saw qualified resource availability as a major problem for our industry. It was also no surprise that one of the underlying causes of this was identified to be the attractiveness of a career in the mining industry paling in comparison to more desirable careers of younger generations.

Anybody taking a look at undergraduate degrees being awarded in the world can see that mine engineer is nowhere near the top, but what is more concerning is the steady decline of engineering studies performed in universities and colleges.

Add to this the fact that many young professionals with a technical background are far more frequently drawn to other industries (see software development, coding, and just about any other technology-based industry besides mining), and we are left with a daunting challenge: how do we attract young resources to an industry that is being vacated daily by experienced professionals coming up on retirement?

Further to this, when we have attracted the young talent, how do we keep them in the industry rather than jumping ship to a more desirable field that is offering better life-balance opportunities?

One thing is clear, our parents' mining industry is no longer attracting enough of the most brilliant young minds today, who seem to be more content working from home, writing code for Google while earning a small fortune, than developing a remote mine site thousands of miles from their homes and families. Who can blame them?

As stated above, the solution is easy to identify: attract qualified resources, and retain them throughout a successful career in the mining industry. However, the implementation of this solution is not so simple.

Mining just isn't perceived as "sexy".

3.0 Lifestyle Demands of the Younger Generations

This Misfits discussed the lifestyle wants of younger generations, as compared to generations more senior to them. It is evident that the younger work force has different demands, and more relevant to the topic, can have these demands met in other competing industries.

If we want to do better, we in the mining industry need to adapt to the new working conditions if we wish to attract the next generation of mining professionals and leaders. If the global pandemic has taught us anything, it is that business can and will adapt to the technologies available to us, particularly those offering a remote work lifestyle.

The Misfits concur that 100% remote work is not a feasible solution for capital project development, but we also do not believe that our industry is living up to the full potential of those options available.

In discussion around the needs of the younger workforce, we also discussed the importance of social and environmental responsibility. It is no surprise to anyone that the younger generation has a strong focus on these elements when choosing their lifestyle and, as a result, their career path.

What may be surprising to those entering the workforce, is the same level of importance leadership in our industry has placed on social and environmental justice. This should not be surprising to them, the fact that it is, should be alarming to those looking to recruit.

As professionals in the mining industry, we have been steadily ramping up our focus on health, safety, environmental impacts, community relations and related factors. Just look at the importance, emphasis and resources mining companies are pouring into ESG.

Where we are lacking in performance is marketing and advertising this. Mining has a negative connotation when viewed through the lens of environment and social responsibility. However, we commit extensive resources to improving in these areas, but rarely take credit for this monumental effort.

If we want to attract young resources who place a lot of value in these arenas, we really need to make it known that we hold those same values and employ them in our daily practices as absolute and unshakeable core values.

4.0 Mentorship and Development

The Misfits that joined this conversation had two things in common: they are all advancing through their careers at a great pace for their relative experience, and they all give credit to mentors and teachers they had along the way. Any young resource, right out of school and without any real-world experience, rarely advances in the industry (or more importantly, advances the industry) without exceptional guidance.

What the Misfits identified is this is a two-sided coin. We need intelligent and ambitious resources willing to commit a good portion of their life to learning a trade, but we also need seasoned professionals who have the skillset and personality traits of a good mentor.

Without an ambitious student, vacant roles will not be filled. Without a pragmatic teacher, young resources will often struggle to advance their career to the full potential.

A lot of this comes down to emotional intelligence. Not all of us are good students, just like not all of us are good teachers. As career professionals, we are invested in the sustainability of our industry. The sustainability of our industry is reliant on training a new generation of the workforce.

Once we have onboarded young talent, the clear next step is ensuring that we are setting them up for success by passing on the learnings and the inherent knowledge of those experienced professionals. However, this needs to be done in a systematic and structured way.

The Misfits believe that selecting the right mentor is just as important as bringing on a new resource with the right skillset and traits to take on the challenge of development.

5.0 Conclusion

Throughout this conversation, several Misfits made a comment along the lines of “the industry needs to do this”, or “the industry really struggles with this”, or “the challenge for our industry is this”. One observant Misfit mentioned the same, and offered a difficult conclusion: it is incumbent upon *us*, not *the industry*, to implement solutions.

After a brief moment of self-reflection, we all passionately agreed! The industry is not going to change itself. We, as experienced professionals, need to step up to the challenge and effect change.

As stated right up front, we know what the solutions to our challenges are: attract new resources and develop them into the next generation of leadership for the mining industry. Implementing these solutions are not as simple, but we have to stop waiting for it to happen, and make it happen.

We can attract new resources by targeting recruiting in mining communities. We can attract resources with needed skillsets from competing industries. We can advertise and market our industry, and our career paths, to be compatible with (not contrary to) the values of our target generation: we value the environment, we value social responsibility, we value a strong work-life balance and have the tools available to make it a reality.

In the end, not advertising these qualities will only continue to be a detriment to our recruiting capabilities, and the generation gap (or the skills gap) will only continue to grow.

*The Mining Misfits are advancing in the industry as proponents of dialogue meant to bring about development and growth to meet the challenges of today. We are changing our name, but not our core values. Going forward, keep your eyes out for updates and other engaging information from the **Mining Mavericks**.*



If you're a progressive thinker and mining leader and you want to make a difference in our industry, connect with me. I would love the opportunity to speak with you and get your personal experience and perspective as well as share the thoughts, connections and ideas of other leaders in the industry!

Many thanks, and much appreciated.

Jason Fearnow, Founder & CEO – Prime Contract Solutions