

COMMENTARY

Gender diversity and ‘Women Who Rock’



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The issue of gender diversity is gathering real steam in the mining industry, despite its reputation for being male-dominated.

The recently introduced Ontario Securities Commission disclosure requirement that deals with representation of women on boards of directors is only the latest catalyst behind the industry taking positive steps towards trying to integrate more women into the mining community.

With Women Who Rock (WWR) — a Toronto-based social club dedicated to supporting and empowering women as they develop their mining careers — closing in on its first birthday, it’s a good time to pause and think about why we are working so hard to attract more women into mining. Do we really need gender diversity? Is it simply a fad? Does WWR bring any real value to this effort?

Such questions should be framed by women’s historical place in the industry. After all, it wasn’t that long ago that having a woman near a mine was considered bad luck. But it wasn’t just superstition

that women had to fight against. In the late 19th century, laws prohibiting mining companies from hiring women were introduced and remained in effect all the way up to the 1970s. And once such archaic policies were finally pushed aside, women still faced widespread harassment and discrimination.

Added to such obstacles was a persistent image of mining as a dangerous and male-dominated industry, and as such, one that was unsuitable for women. This perception stood widely unchallenged until recent times, and when coupled with a lack of strategic foresight, it still deters many women from launching a career in mining.

Obstacles notwithstanding, one can ask: Does mining need more women? An increasing number of studies show that bolstering the percentage of women can play a key role in the industry’s success. Including women at all levels has been linked to improved governance and overall higher financial and organizational performance. Furthermore, encouraging more participation by women can help resolve skilled worker shortages through access to a larger talent pool.

As business complexity increases, simply having strong technical skills and a grasp of the underlying business drivers are not always sufficient. Cultural, political and social realities of host countries as well as collaboration with local governments and communities often determine a project’s success or failure. Those who have teamwork, com-

munication, negotiation and conflict-resolution skills — traits often held by women — are well positioned to bridge the needs of diverse stakeholders.

So attracting women to mining may be a pretty good idea. But despite the industry’s best intentions, we are a long way from reaching a consensus on the best ways to achieve this. Some women shy away from what they call “preferential treatment,” or a bright spotlight. Furthermore, while many companies acknowledge the importance of gender diversity, they may indulge in rhetoric instead of action.

Perhaps the most important ingredient to increase gender diversity is direct and continuous involvement from those who are in position of power. Introducing awards and scholarships, creating in-house programs, communicating best practices and supporting industry organizations are just some of the ways mining leaders can create gender diversity.

Two examples come to mind. Goldcorp’s gender diversity initiatives resulted in “Creating Choices” — the world’s first company-wide development and mentorship program for women in mining. Created in 2010, the program helped more than 1,200 women across the company. One of the program’s main messages is “Dare to Dream” — which resonates with many of the adventurous, tenacious and resourceful women working in mining.

Kinross Gold does not yet have a formal program, but many individuals in



WOMEN WHO ROCK

Elena Mayer (far left) hosted Women Who Rock's live mentor auction in Toronto last year. The auction saw women bid for one-hour mentorship meetings with industry leaders. All funds raised were donated to the Alma Foundation to benefit children in Peru. This year's auction is scheduled for the last week of October.

the company frequently show their commitment to gender diversity. Vice-president of corporate responsibility Ed Opitz was an early supporter of WWR, and recently agreed to join our board of directors. Helene Timpano, vice-president of business optimization and operations strategy, expressed interest to get involved with WWR, and is connecting women in Kinross with other female and male thought leaders. Finally, Kinross CEO Paul Rollinson donated his time through WWR's first annual CEO "Auction for Action" event in Toronto last October to a Schulich School of Business student who was inspired and motivated by his advice.

And yet the pool of students joining mining related disciplines is shrinking, and the number of women remains low. A study by Women in Mining Canada and the Mining Industry Human Resources Council identifies two reasons behind this trend: most students are unaware of career opportunities in the mining, and those who are aware have a negative impression.

Two leading programs in Canada that

raise awareness and groom the next generation of leaders are Mining Matters and the Schulich School of Business' Global Mining Management program (GMM).

Since 1994, Mining Matters has reached more than 600,000 teachers, students and members of the public, broadening understanding of earth sciences and the vital role mining plays in everyday life.

The GMM is a one-of-a-kind MBA program. Academically, it offers exposure to many aspects of mining — finance, operations, sustainability, strategy and valuations — which enables those who have no previous experience to build a strong foundation of knowledge. For those interested in networking, the strong emphasis on connecting with industry players is priceless.

Finally, industry organizations are vital for educating women about the career opportunities mining can provide. The Women in Mining not-for-profit organization with its various branches (Canada, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and the U.K., to name few) have been doing an excellent job by publishing research on gender diversity, creating

global networks and attracting media and mining community attention.

Where does Women Who Rock fit in?

Having been one of a few female students in the GMM, I experienced some of the challenges that all women in mining share. But guided by faculty and industry mentors, I also saw great opportunities.

Being sociable and curious about people by nature, I immersed myself in the mining community and met many motivating and inspiring leaders. At the same time, however, I couldn't help but notice that some women in the early stages of their mining careers shared a feeling of disconnect from leaders and even their peers. Inspired by the likes of Pat Dillon, Anna Tudela, Maureen Jensen and Deb McCombe, I saw that I could play a role in empowering and connecting women within the industry. And so Women Who Rock was born.

Today, WWR is comprised of a committed-to-change, diversified board of directors, a dedicated executive team and our supporters, partners and members. Together, we aspire to become a moving

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force that ignites curiosity and attracts more dynamic women into mining.

Our long-term strategy is to create programs and structures that connect various stakeholders in the industry with the goal of supporting and empowering women.

strict industry context and partner with the Canadian Art and Fashion Awards, an organization that fosters the next generation of Canadian designers. Canadian designers, stylists, fashion personas and non-mining media will participate, providing learning opportunities between

porting our vision and gender diversity. Other organizations that are sponsoring our upcoming event are Kinross Gold, New Gold, Barrick Gold, Gowlings, and the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada.

Our sponsors recognize that achieving gender diversity requires commitment and resources, and for that we tip our hard hat to such progressive organizations.

If our industry truly believes in the “why” of gender diversity, then the “how” and “what” are a matter of creativity and imagination. The sky is the limit.

Mining leaders, educators and industry organizations are all equally responsible for fostering meaningful and positive change. Women Who Rock views itself as an integral part of the industry’s efforts to attract, support and empower women in mining, and bring about this change.

— Based in Toronto, Elena Mayer is senior manager, clients relationship, mining, PwC Canada; founder and president of Women Who Rock; and a graduate of the GMM and International MBA at the Schulich School of Business. Visit www.pwc.com/ca, www.womenwhorock.ca, and www.schulich.yorku.ca for more information.

Goldcorp’s gender diversity initiatives resulted in ‘Creating Choices’ — the world’s first company-wide development and mentorship program for women in mining.

For the last year, we have focused on creating social events to promote this message. Our flagship event is the annual Auction for Action that took place for the first time in October 2014. With the generous support of 12 Canadian mining leaders, WWR auctioned one-hour mentorship sessions to women who aspire to advance their careers in the sector.

Our upcoming “Hard Hats and High Heels” event on June 8 at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto (womenwhorock.ca, with registration at bit.ly/1eIG0bG) will look at ways to create a positive image and general awareness of mining. In this instance, we step outside our

the sectors as well as highlighting the topic of women in mining. The event will bring awareness of what appropriate business attire looks like, both for women working in the field as well as aspiring new graduates who face fashion challenges as they transition to the working environment.

Finding supporters at a time when mining companies are committed to financial discipline is challenging. For a young organization like WWR that is still growing into its full potential, the support of several companies has been crucial. PwC Canada and Cassels Brock have proven to be early movers in sup-