

INTREPID PATHWAYS—ALISON MORLEY

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Formal Qualifications

I started a BE (Civil) at Sydney University, and after two years of study, I realised that in that time I'd only really enjoyed one subject – Geology. So I transferred to, and completed, a BSc Hons (Geology).

After I got my first job, I studied part-time to gain an MSc (Economic Geology) from UWA and the (then) Securities Institute's Graduate Diploma of Applied Finance.



Current Professional role & responsibilities

My current position title is Principal Consultant (Resource Geology) at SRK Consulting. I consult to clients in the mining and financial sectors primarily providing technical advice to Corporate Advisors. I undertake valuation of exploration properties, fatal flaw analysis, Independent Technical Reports for reporting purposes (e.g. IPOs and ASX, TSE, HKSE requirements).

Current Employer

SRK Consulting is an independent, international consulting company providing focused advice and problem solving. SRK is one of the world's first one-stop consultancies offering specialist services to mining and exploration companies for the entire life cycle of a mining project, from exploration through to mine closure.

Overview of career in the industry

I was first employed on the Pasminco Graduate programme in 1998 as a Mine Geologist in Broken Hill, where I spent three years working underground. I then moved to Mt Isa where I worked initially for MIM (then Xstrata), first as an Underground Mine Geologist at George Fisher Mine, then later as Superintendent Geology at the Lead Mine, and finally Superintendent Geology at George Fisher Mine. I then took up a position at SRK Consulting in 2004 and have been there ever since.

EXPERIENCES WORKING IN THE RESOURCES SECTOR

Was working in the resources industry what you expected it would be when you were studying/training?

Throughout my first few years of uni, I thought I'd be kicking rocks in an exploration camp for the rest of my career. I didn't see myself in a management role, living in the city or dealing with

spreadsheets in the slightest. Then I did some summer student work at the Peak in Cobar, and went underground for the first time and I loved it. From then on, I focussed on getting a role in operations, which was definitely not the 'glamour' job at the time. So when I started geology, I really had no idea where I would end up. I remember thinking, in my naivety, that I'd never make any real money as a geo or have a real career, but that at least I would enjoy myself!

If at any time you left the industry and came back, why did you leave, how long were you gone for and what motivated you to return?

I took 6 months' maternity leave with my first daughter in 2006. After this experience, I decided that, for me, it was better to take off 12 months when my second daughter was born in 2008. I returned to work part time (3 days week) in early 2009. I returned because I love the work I do, I find it intellectually stimulating and fulfilling, and I like the people with whom I work. I couldn't wait to get back to work.

What is the single most risky step you have ever taken your career? Did you find it paid off? Is there anything you would have done differently?

I took a large paycut and loss of internal influence by moving from my position as Supt. Geology at Xstrata to junior Consultant with SRK Consulting, as well as moving my family from the eastern states to Perth. It was daunting! But I wanted to plan my career strategically, not just based on increasing pay. I knew I needed to learn different skills, I needed more exposure to different deposits and commodities. This was pre-boom, so with 20-20 hindsight, I was setting myself up perfectly to take full advantage of all the opportunities that were available in Perth around 2005-2008. It enabled me to move from a purely technical role (wireframing, resource models, hands-on mine geology) to a more 'corporate'-style role (valuation, technical reviews, providing advice to accountants, lawyers, financiers). I now have constant intellectual challenges within my work, as well as having a flexible workplace and a good work-life balance, and that's worth far more to me than a few extra years of higher pay might have been.

What would you say have been the most significant 'step changes' in your career pathway, and how have you adapted to these?

The GFC provided a fantastic opportunity for me - with the help of a formal mentoring programme supported by my employer (through FINSIA), I began to identify and work on the skills that I needed to further my career. I'd known for years that I needed to improve my marketing and communications skills, but there was so much technical work during the boom that I'd never had the time to focus on this. With the support of SRK Consulting, when things were a bit quieter through 2009, I could really focus on enhancing my marketing, networking and communications skills. The last year has been a great learning opportunity for me - I've learnt the power of personal relationships and networking and been given the chance by my employer to apply it, to the benefit of both me and the company.

Have you ever been in a supervisory or senior management position? If so, what are the pros and cons of being in such a role?

The things I liked about being in a supervisory role was taking care of people – making sure the really great people were promoted or recognised or given the opportunities they deserved. I liked having some influence on my workplace. I liked being in meetings where I had the chance to argue my case, get the budgets I needed and find ways of influencing an outcome for the geology team.

The things I didn't like were suddenly being put in charge of people who had previously been my peers, people with whom I had been friends for years – that was a hard transition to make. I found I couldn't talk about work with my peers in a social setting anymore once I'd become their boss. To cope, you either find new friends within your supervisor peer group or avoid talking about work, or do a bit of both.

Of course, there are a lot of other pros and cons, but these are the ones that affected me the most.

If you undertook any additional formal study whilst in the industry, did you find it useful in progressing your career? Why/Why not?

Further study for me was essential – not primarily because of the things I learnt, but because of the experiences I had and the people I met. I met people who have turned out to be exceptionally important mentors and 'career enablers' through my MSc., and got to know them well through the shared experience of intensive study and field trips. My MSc. also enabled me to see fantastic places – I went mapping in Kalgoorlie and to various mines all over South Africa – something I would never have been able to do as a 25 year old junior mine geo in outback NSW. I still draw on those experiences. Having a postgrad qualification also got me a 'foot in the door' to consulting.

The Grad. Dip. allows me to talk to my financial and management clients on an equal footing – it's a qualification that most financial people have a high level of awareness about and respect for, and allows you to talk their language without being intimidated by the jargon.

What have you found most rewarding about the industry and what would you most like to get out of your career in resources in the future?

I love the gleam of excitement in someone's eye when they're telling you about a project that they really, really believe in. I love the 'crazy' personalities you get in mining; the encouragement of entrepreneurial spirit; I like the excitement when you find a great new way of nutting out a problem. I like the sense of community, the fact that we're all so interlinked – everyone knows someone you know, or has worked on a deposit that you have.

WORKING LIFESTYLE

What are your current work/accommodation arrangements?

Capital city based (with limited travel). I choose to do a lot less travel now as I have small children.

What changes or compromises have you had to make in order to balance family or other responsibilities or interests with a career in the industry? Have you found the right balance for you?

I work three days a week and my children go to daycare on these days. I look forward to the day when I can work more, but I want to be around whilst my kids are so young. Because of my limited time at work, I have to regretfully pass on some interesting jobs that I'd love to do.

My husband and I carefully schedule our diaries regularly as he is also often on site. We're also building up a book of reliable babysitters to turn to as we have no family nearby. It's personally important to me to contribute to the community, so I am active on my children's daycare management committee, and have just joined the AusIMM WIMnet Committee. The biggest work/life challenge I have is finding time to do exercise – but that will improve as my kids get older and more independent. I don't think it's possible for me to find the right balance at any one time. I figure if I can aim to balance things out over a longer time period – 6 months or a year - I can pick up things I've let slip, and slacken off on other things. And I refuse to fuss about housework – it's unimportant!

Has your employer been open to negotiating changes to your role or roster to accommodate non-work interests or responsibilities?

Yes, my employer is very receptive to negotiation of flexible work arrangements.

BEING FEMALE IN THE INDUSTRY

What challenges have you experienced by virtue of working in an industry that is predominantly male? Do you feel you have had to adapt to 'fit' the industry?

Women often fall into the trap of thinking that if they work harder they'll be noticed – I did it myself for a long time. But you watch a bunch of very successful blokes at Diggers or Indaba. They're not making copious notes on speeches or writing up their technical findings for the day. They're laughing over beers and introducing themselves around; they learn more real information that way. I've learned that sitting at the lunch table and chatting with your colleagues, or attending networking functions and relevant company parties, is as important for your career as delivering reports on time (as long as you have good technical skills as well!). If you're working hard whilst everyone else is having drinks, you're missing out on an opportunity.

I also make a conscious effort to refuse to take on the 'supportive' roles often expected of women –if I'm in a technical meeting, I don't offer to get everyone else coffees, or act as scribe, or to photocopy that document. I also try to emulate some of my male colleagues when I'm in a situation where I need to ask for what I want. Men are more direct, and if you don't ask, you never get. However, I don't feel I have to act like a man to succeed. It's OK to be feminine, just don't be subservient.

Do you feel that you faced any obstacles or discrimination by virtue of your gender in your career and if so, how did you address these issues in order to continue to progress?

I never felt discriminated against when I was working underground or on site. I treated the novelty value of my being a woman as a positive – the blokes underground usually remembered who I was, they were more helpful and they often opened up a bit more if you're a woman. I've not had any problems within consulting either. I do find that I attend a lot of conferences these days and people's first assumption when they come up to our booth is that I am there in a non-technical role, and when they ask to talk to a geologist or a technical advisor and I say 'That's me' they'll do a double take. But once you're over the initial barrier and they work out that you know what you're talking about, there's no discrimination.