

## INTREPID PATHWAYS—AMABEL STRATFORD

### **PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND**

#### **Formal Qualifications**

BSc Hons Geology and MSc Mineral Deposit Evaluation (returned to uni for MSc after completing a grad programme with an oil company).

#### **Current Professional role & responsibilities**

I currently work as a Senior Geologist. This position encompasses a variety of responsibilities and accountabilities including:

- Technical accountability for data review and design of information gathering programmes;
- Implementation of programmes of fieldwork, including responsibility for the day-to-day activities of approx. 60 personnel in remote areas, both technical accountability and HSE. Teams include both professional and contractor personnel;
- Technical accountability for data interpretation (by self and team) and 3D geological model construction, including regular engagement with key stakeholders;
- Associated budget control and reporting;
- Statutory report writing;
- Involvement with development of new systems, procedures and processes;
- Personnel management;

Etc!

#### **Current employer - type**

Large diversified international mining company.

#### **Overview of career in the industry**

After university (BSc Hons) I worked for an oil & gas company in their project management department on a 2 yr graduate training programme in the UK. This was in the late 1990's when the resources industry was in a large downturn – I was very lucky to get a job at all in the UK in this field.

After this I started studying full time for an MSc in Mineral Deposit Evaluation and Mineral Exploration. I also joined the Territorial Army in the UK (similar to the Reserve Forces here in Australia) in order to be able to put something on my CV that 'proved' that I was able to work in difficult conditions (e.g. working in remote locations with limited support etc). I'd already found that the resources industry was reluctant to take on a female graduate at this time.

I then worked for a variety of companies on a contract basis (including the consulting arm of the university) on a series of overseas projects in countries in Africa and Europe, ranging from grass roots mineral exploration through to engineering assessment of a mineral processing facility for government funding. In between contracts I worked as an Office Manager in a hospital in London. This lasted for eighteen months.

I then moved to an engineering company, working in their environmental services department on projects for geotechnical and environmental purposes. This involved a lot of fieldwork, designing and supervising drilling and pitting programmes on brownfields sites all over the UK. I carried on in this field, moving to a London based engineering consultancy as a geotechnical engineer, where I took on more responsibility and accountability for technical issues and managed my own projects and clients. I worked in this engineering capacity for three years. This change to engineering was primarily because I couldn't find suitable work in the resources industry in the UK, where I needed to be for personal reasons.

I moved to Australia and worked as a contract mineral exploration geologist on a variety of projects in a variety of states for the first year, movements due to visa restrictions. Shortly after this I gained Permanent Residency and took up a permanent position with my current employer, where I've been for 4 years.

### **EXPERIENCES WORKING IN THE RESOURCES SECTOR**

**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?**

Leaving a good secure career in London to come to Australia at 30 yrs of age. I came because I'd heard that there were some mineral exploration jobs here, I had never been to Australia before, didn't know anyone here, had a short term visa and didn't have any savings. It has definitely paid off!

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

Changing disciplines from mineral exploration to geotechnical engineering was a big change. I knew that I needed more fieldwork experience in order to secure a permanent position in mineral exploration, and site investigation / geotechnical engineering was the area that was hiring geo's in Europe at the time. I therefore adapted well as I knew the purpose of the change and was focussed on my goal.

I also think that becoming a soldier for the purpose of advancing my career in the minerals industry was a significant undertaking. Again, having a 'higher' purpose assisted with the adaption. I actually thoroughly enjoyed my experience and continued to serve in the Territorial Army for longer than I had planned.

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

Yes the MSc that I completed was excellent, it provided a great foundation for a career in the mineral resource industry including emphasis on financial aspects of exploration and mining as well as technical aspects. It has given me confidence which has definitely assisted with my career progression. I am also fortunate to have found a position that relates directly to the subjects covered in the MSc.

**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 pros are being aware of bigger picture, able to influence decision making, great feeling of achievement when things go well, an increased variety of tasks; the personnel management,

accountability and responsibility that come with it can be rewarding.

The cons are longer hours; increased exposure in being accountable for a team of people.

**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 really enjoy the work. Becoming a geologist was definitely the right career path for me as it involves science, technology, fieldwork/travel and people. The thing I have found most rewarding to date is the great feeling of achievement that comes with project delivery. In the future I would like to increase both my technical and management awareness and experience in order to become a successful senior leader.

**WORKING LIFESTYLE**

**What are your current work/accommodation arrangements?**

Capital city based (but travel extensively)

**Do you have a preference for any particular working arrangements? What have your experiences with different types of arrangements been like?**

It depends on personal circumstances. FIFO is great when you're young without commitments, City or Residential is better if you have a family. It's great that there is the variety.

**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?**

Still searching for the balance, I spend too much time working to the detriment of family.

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

My experience thus far has been positive.

**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?**

At the time I entered the industry during a major downturn there was an initial reluctance of companies to hire female graduates. I therefore had to 'prove' myself prior to being able to obtain a suitable position, hence becoming a soldier, working in Admin as a gap filler etc. However these experiences have all contributed to my success in my current role.

**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?**

There is definite stereotyping however, I have focussed on developing my skill set and experiences to overcome any colleague or employer preconceptions. Always smile :- )