



I had the honour of opening the 2012 student colloquium last month. What an absolute pleasure to be able to meet and spend time with so many excited, bright, and motivated young people. The presentations were of a high standard technically and generally well presented. This annual engagement reaffirms my belief in the future of our industry – it certainly will be in the hands of fine miners and metallurgists.

However, it is rather sad that, apart from the educators from the supporting tertiary institutions and a few industry representatives, there were few others to appreciate the depth of our upcoming talent. This is an event you should make an effort to attend – it is certainly worth the while.

In my opening address I offered some guidance to the students, in the form of four themes.

Firstly, graduate, celebrate, and revel in the success that you have achieved. Then ensure that you are on a graduate training programme for registration with ECSA. Professional registration is the foundation for the rest of your career – do it as soon as possible.

Secondly, finish your training and get a substantive job as soon as possible. Do real things: get a real job, take accountability, be responsible, learn to be part of a team and then to lead a team. Avoid the trap of being continually in training.

Thirdly, welcome those difficult jobs in awkward places; adversity builds character, improves creativity, and enhances self-reliance, all of which are critical attributes in the minerals industry. You have a narrow window of opportunity to gain experience before the realities of life – mortgages and children – start to reduce your options.

Lastly, while you are doing all of this, and later: 'Pay it forward', by guiding and coaching new entrants to our industry and by being an active member of the SAIMM.

Later, in conversation with some of the students I was aware of general concerns around the future of the industry, the scale of the social challenges facing the country, and general uncertainty. However underlying this was firm belief in the need for their skills, and confidence in their competence and ability to contribute. There seemed to be an acceptance that change was inevitable as we move forward as a nation, that the industry would be different in the future but that there would always be a need for their contribution.

Their positive attitude reinforced my view that change is not a bad thing - it's how we evolve with, or rebel against, inevitable change that makes the difference.

**G.L. Smith**  
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