



The last month or so has not been a particularly bright period for the mining industry. The platinum industry in particular has had to contract by temporarily closing sections and even mines, while others have had to delay expansion plans. We all know that this is a short-term contraction and that once the world economy recovers, mining will take off again.

The challenge is to find and use the opportunities offered by the quiet period, because it won't be this way for too long.

This is the time to prepare for the next boom, to position ourselves such that we can benefit fully and sustainably when the next up-cycle comes. When it does, there won't be time to sit back and reflect –the present is the only time that we have.

What could we have done better over the last few years? With the benefit of hindsight, what should we have done or not done to work safer, cheaper, and with less environmental damage? How should we have been structured? What knowledge should we have had? What would have made our workers more enthusiastic about their jobs and our communities happier that we operate in their areas?

Is this not the perfect time to review our mine plans? Of course, this is essential to maximize profits as far as we can in a depressed market, but that should not be our only goal. We have to keep an eye on the horizon as well, knowing that in the not too distant future we will be back on the highway and then we must have to have enough reserves in the tank go full speed again.

Is this not the perfect time to train and retrain? When we operate at full speed, it is difficult to take time off for courses and other training events. Why don't we use this time to make sure that when we run at full speed again, we have the skills and are fit enough to do that? And that the people with those skills are still with us? I remember all too well Ian Cockerill's remarks of some years back when he said that training centres were closed down after companies had costed them, and the next thing industry was faced with was analysing the cost of ignorance ...

Why don't we determine now what knowledge we will need in the time to come, and generate it now, so that it is available by the time we have to have it? Somebody once defined research as something that by the time you realize that you have to do it, it is already too late. We have the opportunity now to avoid that.

Review and reflection at this time should not be confined to what happens on the mine. We should look at the whole picture, including our more remote head office functions. What about marketing? Is there something else that our products can be used for, apart from our traditional markets? People pay now for what they need now, not for what they would like to have. How can we benefit from that?

Our first objective now is to survive, and that in itself requires change. Costs have to be controlled even more tightly, there is no scope for luxuries. But let us not be completely short-sighted during this period. Let us not bind off the arteries that will feed our muscles in the time to come.

If we restructure, let us do so by using hindsight to put the perfect structure in place for the next up-cycle and fill the positions now that we need for survival. Let us place ourselves to react quickly and correctly when the next opportunity arises.

Of course, when I talk about the mining industry here, I include the various associations and societies serving the industry as well. We are all in the same boat.

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