



Our responsibility to develop future industry leaders



At a recent conference, a young professional asked me: “What do I do if my boss won’t give me the time to get involved in SAIMM Young Professionals Council activities and events?”

This question cuts to the heart of a broader issue: What is our responsibility as leaders to guide, coach, and prepare the next generation to take our place?

I remember being a young graduate, fresh out of university, unaware of what I did not yet know. It is easy to get consumed by the demands of a day job and neglect the time needed for personal and professional development.

Fortunately, I had the benefit of learning from some exceptional leaders in the industry who encouraged me to look beyond my immediate role. Their guidance helped me understand the importance of contributing to the broader mining community and part of my career and personal development.

While many companies offer formal management and leadership training, this is only one piece of the development journey. My own journey with the SAIMM began 20 years ago, when a respected industry leader encouraged me to join, get involved, and give back.

Over time, my involvement in the SAIMM has significantly contributed to my professional growth and confidence. I have learned how to present ideas clearly through technical papers and conference presentations, built skills through chairing conference organising committees, and gained insight into the value of collaboration across the industry. Serving as Chairperson of the Technical Programme for the past eight years has further strengthened my ability to lead, facilitate dialogue, and shape the Institute’s value proposition.

Now that I have taken on the role of the SAIMM President in 2026, I recognise how deeply this involvement has shaped my leadership capabilities—and how critical it is that we create the same opportunities for others.

Serving on the SAIMM Council provides professionals with exposure to governance responsibilities, often for the first time. It acts as a valuable stepping stone into board-level thinking and decision-making. The SAIMM is, without doubt, a vital platform for developing the future leaders of our industry.

But it only works if we, as the current leaders, support it. That means setting clear expectations for the professionals in our teams and explaining the value—to the company, the individual, and the industry—of dedicating time beyond day-to-day responsibilities.

In our company, every young professional is expected to become a SAIMM member, join the Young Professionals Council, and participate in conference organising committees. As they gain experience, they are encouraged to submit abstracts and contribute papers to conferences.

We have seen the results: Our Operations Director served as Chairperson of the Young Professionals Council, is now a member of the SAIMM Council, and has become a Certified Director. Connie Chijara—another one of our own—is now the chairperson of the Young Professionals Council, the first female to take on this role.

We give them the time because we have seen the benefit—not just to them, but to the industry and to our company. These young professionals are not just contributors today. They are the leaders of tomorrow.

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