



The value of good mentorship



Just a couple of years ago the outgoing Chairman of the SAIMM Editorial Board, Dave Tudor, suggested that, as a previous metallurgical colleague, I should join the Board. Although I have been a member of the Institute for many years and was a previous Chairman of the Free State Branch, my knowledge of the management of the Institute was limited to attending some excellent schools and studying relevant journal papers.

After attending several Editorial Board meetings, I have come to appreciate the Board's and the Institute's dedication in putting together a world-class journal. As a retired engineer, designer, and operator of metallurgical processing plants, I have now come to admire the knowledge and hard work that my recently acquainted Editorial Board colleagues, both academic and industrial, consistently put in.

At a recent Board meeting the subject of publishing student papers was raised, which reminded me of the commitment of my former mining house to the development of future metallurgical management, which started at school level with identifying students capable of the required matric results to succeed with metallurgical or chemical engineering degrees or higher national diplomas. In addition to local mentoring and coaching when graduates were employed by a mine, a panel managed by the Technical Director's office interviewed metallurgists regularly to discuss wider group opportunities. My most memorable interview was during the commissioning of a particularly difficult plant, when I was told some home truths and reminded of the importance of the success of that project with specific reference to my future career! To this day I am thankful to the panel for their straight talk.

Which brings me back to the subject of student papers and indeed other papers that have a topic of relevance to journal readers, but which still need further input to raise them to the standard required by the journal. It is surely the responsibility of academics to coach their students in presenting promising papers to this Institute and others for review. Such mentoring is important not only for the development of such young people at the start of their professional lives but also for the submission of important papers that such young engineers may yet write in the course of their future careers.

The selection of peer reviewers for all papers submitted to the Institute is a challenging duty and arguably the most important task undertaken by the Editorial Board. It is in this context that the levels of written texts and graphic portrayals, the standards of referencing of previous work, the degree of clarity and accuracy of data presentation, and ultimately the significance of the interpretations and the originality of the data acquired, are judged in terms of the degree of advancement of science and technology in the relevant mining, minerals, and metallurgical fields.

When successfully published, a paper may be considered a significant achievement and a feather in the author's cap, albeit a team effort on the part of the reviewers, the editor, the Board's editorial staff, professional proofreaders, and finally, the author.

The need to maintain standards for all papers published in the Journal is of vital concern as this is required in order to retain the internationally accredited standing of this Institute's journal. Such matters also reflect in the overall numerical grading of all scientific and technical journals, as portrayed by various numerical systems, including the impact factor and other such evaluation tools. The grading of a journal and the papers it publishes impacts, in turn, on the monetary value for which academics are financially and academically rewarded. And so, the relevance of mentoring to achieve the production and publication of valuable papers has meanings way beyond that simply of a grammatically correct text.

I am glad to say that mentorship from supervising academics for young student authors is generally the case. I was pleasantly surprised recently to have sight of a student paper, which 'ticked all the boxes' such as relevance, originality, and presentation. Someone, somewhere in our double-blind reviewing process was mentoring splendidly! May this be the case for many more young authors, as it is these young people that will evolve into mature authors of the future and hence, the source of excellent papers for this and other journals, and the scientific and engineering communities they serve.

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