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VIEWS

Attention Mining HR Managers: You are Losing the Best!

I have just finished grading an assignment I give every year to students in my Introductory Mineral Deposits class. Students are asked to attend our school's Fall Career Fair and talk about job opportunities with at least three companies that are hiring young geology graduates for the mining industry. Over the past 15 years grading these papers and then watching both undergraduate and graduate students with their job searches, I have had a good chance to evaluate how our industry approaches one of its most important tasks—attracting new talent. Unfortunately, the picture is not pretty and, more distressing still, things have not improved much during this period.

Currently, many readers may be anxiously hanging onto a job or looking for a new job due to the state of the industry and may not be concerned with young people trying to enter the business. However, people are what make companies successful. If our industry can attract the best and the brightest, it may help us to overcome our seemingly inevitable ups and downs.

When I left industry and joined academia in the 1990s, petroleum companies' hiring practices were like those of the minerals industry today. Back then, minerals companies had practically no presence on campus. As the petroleum companies are the competition for the best geoscience students, it is worth noting their current hiring practices.

The petroleum companies have chosen a select number of schools in the U.S. (and overseas) from which they recruit. Many companies visit no more than five or six universities. Interestingly, the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG), through their student chapters, has started regional job fairs that attract students from a wide variety of schools not commonly visited by petroleum company recruiters. Many petroleum companies have added these fairs to their recruiting schedule. SEG might consider doing something similar!

The petroleum companies visit the same schools (and now AAPG job fairs) every year, whether or not they are

hiring many new individuals. In down years the recruiters are honest with the students: "Not many openings this year, but we will stay in touch with you for when opportunities arise." The students expect to see the same companies year after year and know that they will be hiring at some point. While some mining companies, notably Freeport McMoRan and Kinross, have started doing this at my school, it is still rare.

Petroleum companies send teams for recruiting. The teams may be led by an individual from the human resources (HR) department, but, more commonly, it is someone from the technical side of the business who has been designated a part-time recruiter. It is common, and very beneficial, to include a graduate of the school being visited as one of the recruiting team. Crucially, the same people come to the school for several years in a row. Nearly every one of my students this year had the same complaint: "The only people from the mining companies were from HR. They did not have answers for what geologists do in the company."

The petroleum companies routinely select a small group of quality individuals during the Career Fair and interview them on site with specific timelines for when they will hear if they will be successful in obtaining a position. In contrast, nearly every minerals company simply told students to go to their company website to apply for a position. There was no sense that the company cared about them as individuals or could help them with the application process.


The petroleum companies use part of their time on campus to talk to department heads and professors teaching classes geared toward petroleum exploration. They ask who the best students are, and whom they should talk to and try to attract to their booths and interviews. The recruiters maintain a relationship with the department and professors over the long term, often helping to support the department financially, even if only in a small way, with funding for field trips or by providing company speakers for lectures. The

students become more aware of these companies through sponsored activities and through word of mouth from their professors.

The petroleum companies have moved toward internships, especially for undergraduates. This allows them to offer more positions, which brings a PR benefit and allows them to carefully evaluate a larger number of individuals to see how they perform on the job and how they fit into their corporate culture. Some mining companies are moving in this direction. Freeport McMoRan, Kinross, and Imerys (a major industrial minerals company) have been offering internships for several years at my school and appear to have found this successful. More minerals companies should consider this option.

Minerals companies in general do not make offers of either internships or permanent positions until the spring of the year here in North America. By this time they have lost the best people. At least at our school, the petroleum companies provide offers for internships or full-time employment prior to the end of the year. The best students all have positions by mid-January. If the minerals companies want the best and the brightest, they will have face this reality and adjust their hiring schedule to accommodate it.

In my experience there are many excellent students who desperately want employment in our industry. They are attracted by the chance to do fieldwork, to work with real rocks (not well logs), and to travel both domestically and internationally. They are aware of the vagaries of the industry in terms of boom and bust cycles, but the attractions outweigh the negatives. The industry must compete to identify and pull in these individuals. We need the very best to help our industry prosper.

So to the reader, if you are in industry: please pass this on to your HR department. 



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