

Q&A

Bronwyn Barnes has carved a stellar career in the resources sector, spanning more than 20 years. In recent times, the mother of two has added to her repertoire as founder and chair of Legend Media Group which is aimed at engaging the Western Australia and China film industries, while her passion for horse racing has seen her thrive as a director of Perth Racing. Readers of this magazine probably don't need to be reminded of her role in the resources sector, however, for the record Barnes is a non-executive director of Mod Resources Ltd and non-executive chair of Indiana Resources Ltd. Before departing for the plush surrounds of Royal Ascot in the UK, Barnes took time out to tell **Paydirt** how she has embraced such a colourful portfolio of professional roles.



Barnes is just as comfortable in the remote surrounds of Botswana than on a plush race course somewhere in the world (over)

Barnestorming up the straight

Q: Has industry diversity served you well in your career?

A: When you're in boardrooms it is like managing widgets. It doesn't matter what kind of industry, subject or area you are focused, the fundamental duties of directors is to overlook the performance and strategy of the company, whilst overlooking and managing the performance of the CEO to ensure you maintain growth in your asset base. I think the fundamental planks of being a director don't change. What is interesting is that there are different sets of problems which arise. Wearing my Perth Racing hat, being a director doesn't have anything to do with horses. My role at Perth Racing is around infrastructure, hospitality and managing a SkyTV contract which broadcasts racing to millions of people in South East Asia. It also involves managing two incredibly complex infrastructure assets – Belmont Race Club and Ascot Race Course – and providing a premium hospitality experience for people who attend on race days; there's not a horse in sight until race day. I have no background in the creative industries and making movies but there

is someone at Legend who is incredibly good at that piece of business. What they needed to grow was access to capital, corporate governance and a plan of how to grow and leverage a really significant opportunity it had; that is where my skills were brought in. It was pretty good fun going to the Beijing Film Festival, which is split in two really – the glamorous red carpet event and then the film market where all the business of making a film gets done. My whole week in Beijing was spent with people who finance film projects and people who distribute the products inside China – cinema owners and all of those kinds of people. It is a very sophisticated business in China and such a wealthy industry, it is mind boggling.

Q: Do you enjoy one role more than others?

A: I actually really like them all. I am as comfortable in the bush wearing Janes' and boots than swanning about at a racecourse with a gorgeous hat. Diverse experiences and having the opportunity to experience different parts of life are the best.

Q: Do broad horizons enhance your capacity at board level?

A: I think having broad horizons is really good anyway. It doesn't matter where you are from or what you do, the ability to understand other people, cultures, opportunities and different ways to make money I think is a really great skill to have. No matter what industry you're in, the number one thing must be that you are focused on your strategy; don't get distracted. You need to stay focused but flexible on what you are doing, have the ability to change really quickly if you need to. Being able to modify your strategy or adapt to a changing market, environment and conditions or identify an opportunity and move on it very quickly, which may not have been in your original strategic plan, is important. You need really good people in your management team and really good people sitting around your boardroom table; that is incredibly important.

Q: In playing an active role in mining companies in Australia, Botswana and Mali, how do you find adapting to each environment?

A: You are doing the same job exploring, drilling holes and delivering results. I think the major differences happen around community, logistics and environments in which you work. Botswana is incredibly well-serviced with infrastructure, everything works, you can drink the water, you can eat the salad, you can get phone reception and the roads are amazing. In West Africa, your challenges become more about logistics; how do we get something into the field given fuel is not always guaranteed and you are going through pretty rough farm land, access to water, access to health care, managing malaria. They are the variables added on top of exploration.

Q: What perception would you like to change about the mining sector?

A: Not everybody that works in West Perth is a cowboy. That is very much how I think a large part of the Eastern States look at Perth. That would be one perception I'd like to change.

Q: Has your career in mining influenced your children's career choices?

A: I have been in mining for 20 years, so they have experienced it first-hand and seen how there are a lot of opportunities overseas and how we find these opportunities. They have a pretty realistic view of what it is like for a female working in the mining sector and I've had one daughter already work in the sector. As an industry, we need to recognise that not everybody that works in the sector is a geologist, mining engineer or an accountant. There are lots of different skill sets that get drawn into the mining sector, certainly that is my case with my eldest daughter [who had a stint with Fortescue Metals Group Ltd]. I think it is the ability of the sector to draw people in from all educational backgrounds and for them to find fulfilling roles which is the mark of an attractive sector.

Q: What is more exciting, being part of a development company or an exploration company with prospective greenfields tenure?

A: There are different sets of problems, but I like them both. If you look back through my CV, the majority of my career has been with exploration or development companies looking to develop an asset. I do enjoy them both, but if I had to pick one, I'd

have to say a company in development phase. That is simply because I love drawing together multiple complex issues with one overarching solution, which is construction. I love that, I think that construction piece is a wonderful example of team work, which I really enjoy. Solving complex problems with a group of people, I think is great fun.

Q: How does the role of a leader in the industry sit with you?

A: It's not like I wake up in the morning and say 'great, I am a leader in the mining sector'. You wake up and get through a list of jobs, run companies and sit on boards. I do acknowledge that I am probably quite a visible role model for a number of women and not necessarily confined to the mining sector. I do spend a large amount of time talking to women across industries about opportunities for women, how can they forge their own career paths and share some of the lessons I have learned during the process. I do recognise that I have the ability to have a voice. I am very happy to stand up and have a voice and should probably sit down more often and be



quiet. But, I am passionate about the industry and passionate about the role of women more broadly. I am happy to stand up and articulate my views. They might not always be right and people may not always agree with them but I don't think I'd be doing myself justice if I stood quiet. That is a responsibility I feel personally so whether that associates me with being a leader or not, I'm not sure.

Q: Where would you rather be: eating Ghanzi beef burgers in Botswana or sipping Pimms at Royal Ascot?

A: The wonderful thing about having a portfolio approach to your career is that you can do both; you have variety of roles. I do choose my roles quite carefully, they don't arrive without some considerable thought about where I want to position myself and things that I enjoy doing. I love being out in Ghanzi and working with the Mod crew, but at the same time: Hello! Royal Ascot.

Q: What is your favourite Diggers & Dealers memory?

A: I have attended for about 10-12 years and my favourite memories are associated with the networking and the stuff that happens after hours, which is great fun. Women haven't had a significant presence at Diggers, particularly in the early days. There was a group of women that used to go every year and we used to hang out together, watch out for each other and I remember one year we stayed in a house together which was huge fun. Your best memories are always associated with people.

Q: Your favourite mining conference in the world?

A: The conferences in Cape Town in February and the RIU Explorers Conference Roundup. I reckon that is a great conference because it is a great opportunity to kick the year off hearing everybody's stories. That is fabulous, plus I can catch the train home and sleep in my own bed that night!