





PEOPLE specific

In the blast hole drilling industry, the '80/20 rule' generally applies – meaning mines spend 20 per cent of their time solving 80 per cent of their problems. The remaining 80 per cent of their time is spent on general operations, which means 20 per cent of the problems remain unresolved. These problems can appear insignificant, but they come with a cost, and the cost adds up. Correcting those problems can have a significant impact on productivity and efficiency.



“Many drillers were new to the mining industry, and had the skills to operate the equipment, but they didn’t know how to get the most out of them or how to avoid expensive problems.”

All of this is according to Graeme Exelby – Principal of DTH Drilling Solutions (DTHDS), and a 30-year veteran of the industry. He believes coaching and mentorship is the solution.

Graeme has been involved in blast hole drilling, tooling design, and failure analysis since 1976. For 20 years, he held technical sales and management positions with Horwood Bagshaw, Ingersoll Rand, and Sandvik Mining in Australia. Over the next 10 years, he took on a global role in technical marketing and training with Sandvik, based in Houston and Dallas, Texas, in the United States.

During his time overseas, Graeme observed what he calls

a “gap in the market.” His role was providing training and technical support, but it was written into the contracts that he was not to “interfere with the personalities in the mine.”

“As far as behaviour was concerned, we could not get involved,” he recalls. “That was the mining company’s business.”

Graeme did observe some behavioral issues, however – or, at least, differences in behavior that reduced efficiency. The drillers were operating their machines in different ways and sometimes with very costly results. Many drillers were new to the mining industry, and had the skills to operate the equipment, but they didn’t know how



to get the most out of them or how to avoid expensive problems.

There was room for improvement – for lower costs and increased efficiencies – and Graeme saw an opportunity to help mines realize that. In 2006, he returned to Australia and formed DTH Drilling Solutions with the aim of helping mining companies optimise their blast hole drilling operations.

In the years since, DTHDS has provided a unique and valuable service to the mining industry around the world. He has used his more-than-three decades of experience to help drillers avoid and overcome problems such as hole deviation, collaps-

ing holes, stuck or broken rods, broken machines, and other issues. In the process, he has saved mines up to hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

The key to Graeme's success is that he provides coaching, not just training. The two words may seem similar, but the distinction is important.

'Training' has a focus on helping a person develop new skills. The drill manufacturers usually provide training, but their training has a strong focus on a machines' technical operation, and it doesn't address behaviour.

'Coaching' goes beyond training and addresses gaps in knowledge and behaviour. Coach-

ing is people-specific, with a strong focus on principles and behaviour. By providing coaching, Graeme can help drillers improve and retain their existing skills. He can help them get better results on the same machine in the same rock. And he can help their employers improve time, tonnes, and cost – "the three things mining management is usually concerned about," he says.

As a common example of how his company helps facilitate those improvements, Graeme points to the way they helps drillers become comfortable with different ground conditions. In his experience, the manufacturers training is typically centred on drilling hard



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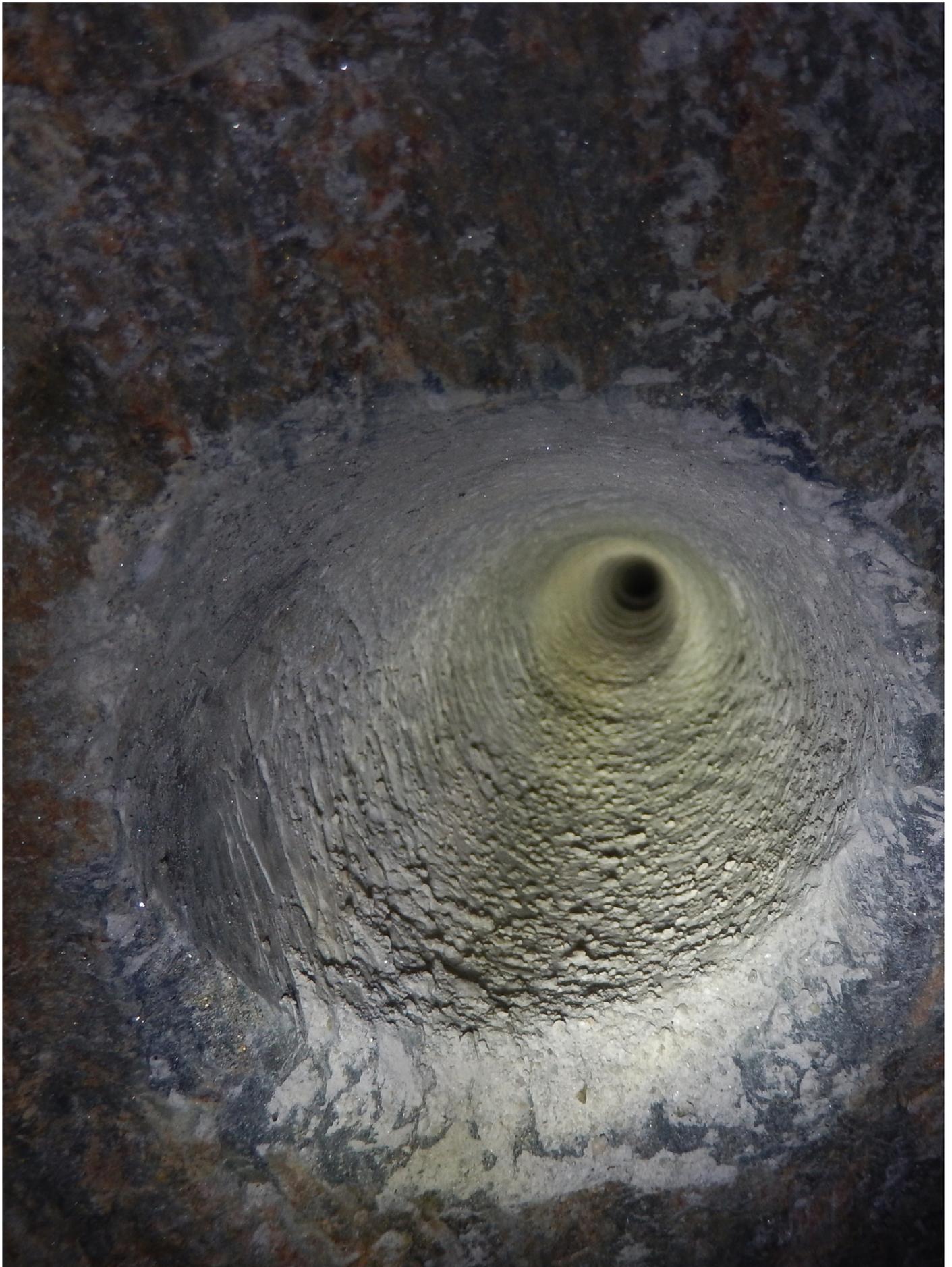
rock and their machines are delivered ready for that purpose. “When the rock is hard and competent, the machine works beautifully,” Graeme explains. “But that’s not the case in most mines. In a gold mine or a copper mine, the rock can be very difficult, there’s a lot of fractures, there’s a lot of water usually, there’s hard, there’s soft, there’s all sorts of conditions.”

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he reiterates. “Certain parts of the mine are wet and broken and difficult. The drillers don’t like to work there because they can’t drill a successful hole.” After working with DTH Drilling Solutions, and being taught how to change their technique to suit different ground conditions, that discomfort is eliminated.

“They are now are very happy to drill in all areas of the mine because they know how to do it,” Graeme says. “That sets us apart from anybody else.”





Improving performance, reducing cost

Today, DTH Drilling Solutions mainly works with gold and copper mines, with the occasional iron ore mine also in the mix. They work all around the world, but these days primarily focus on Africa, where the mining market has grown exponentially in the past few years.

The company's service is particularly valuable in many African countries because skilled labour is in short supply. Many governments require mines to be staffed by up to 90 per cent local employees, so bringing in foreign experts is not always an option. Instead, the locals need to be trained – and not only trained, but coached. That's where Graeme comes in.

In most cases, DTH Drilling Solutions has helped those mines achieve productivity increases of around 20 per cent. The challenge, however, has been getting the word out about those results.

"Ours is not an easy package to sell, because nobody else is doing this," Graeme says.

"I've looked around, and I can't find anybody else who is independent – who doesn't have any alliance with any manufacturer – and who is doing this type of work. There are plenty of blasting consultants, but because drilling is complex, most people don't want to get involved."



Once a client has experienced the benefits of DTHDS and their coaching, however, they tend to keep coming back. One client in the Congo, for example, engaged the company several times in 2018, and recently engaged them again on a contract that will last the length of 2020. "The relationship there is very, very good," Graeme says.

He recalls first starting working with that client in December of last year, at a time when their mine wasn't meeting its targets, and the mining guys were com-

plaining about the drilling guys. Graeme was brought in to identify the issues and empower the drillers so that they could resolve them for themselves. He did that, and when he came back six months later, he describes the difference as "night and day."

"They were very happy to see me back there," he says.

"Instead of just meeting their targets, they are now exceeding their targets," he adds. "Their revenue has increased substan-

tially and their maintenance costs have gone down because the guys aren't damaging the machines so much."

At a gold mine in Senegal, DTH Drilling Solutions recently achieved a similarly transformative result, and has earned similar loyalty moving forward. Graeme is in the midst of writing case studies on both projects.

Graeme is also currently on the lookout for a protégé, someone to come in under him, learn the





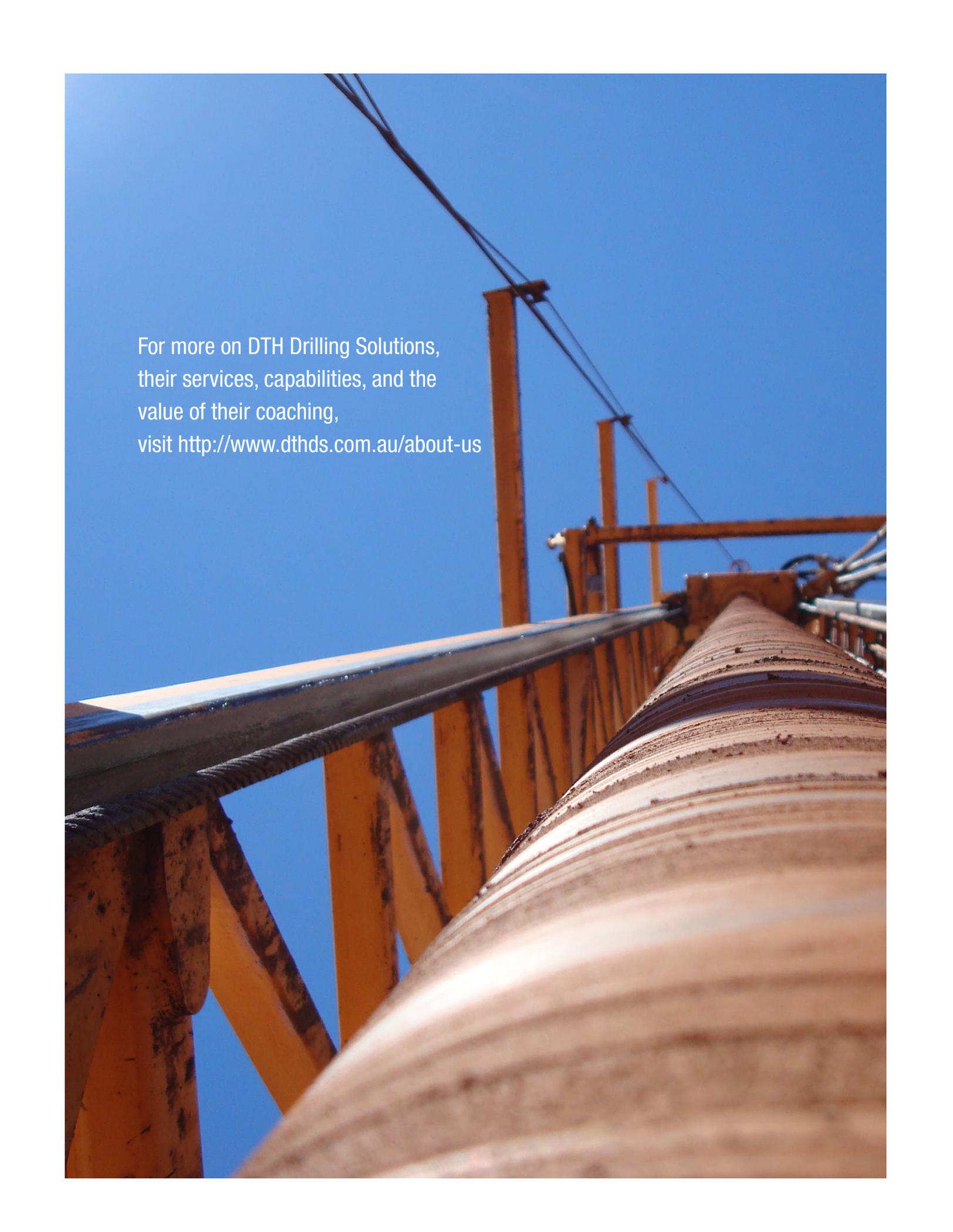


art of the busts, and eventually take over so that DTH can expand and continue on after Graeme's retirement. Graeme sees that as being somebody already experienced and respected - the drillers have to be willing to listen to him - but looking to do something different in the industry.

Beyond that, Graeme's goal is to continue raising the profile of the company, and continue building lasting relationships with clients.

"Over the last 13 years, we've worked with over 1,000 drillers, supervisors, and trainers from more than 30 mines across the world," he says. "We're really happy with what we've been doing. We've brought some big improvements to mining companies. We just want to continue to grow that, get some more exposure, and develop some longer term relationships with our clients."





For more on DTH Drilling Solutions,
their services, capabilities, and the
value of their coaching,
visit <http://www.dthds.com.au/about-us>

