

DEAF IN A HEARING WORLD

BY SUE O'REILLY

Alistair McEwin.
Photo by Marian Clarkin

With degrees in arts and law, an MBA from the Australian Graduate School of Management and an impressive list of senior managerial positions to his name, 38-year-old Alastair McEwin is obviously a singularly high achiever.

Far less obvious is the fact that McEwin is also profoundly deaf, and has been so since birth. It's not that McEwin tries to hide his deafness; rather, he has simply forged ahead in his life and career despite his hearing loss, determined to succeed and make a worthwhile contribution in a world where deaf or hearing-impaired people have to overcome numerous barriers in day-to-day life – a fact that is rarely acknowledged.

Alastair – or Al, as he prefers to be called – is a senior management consultant working in the human rights sector; previous roles include CEO of People with Disability Australia and President of Deaf Australia (NSW). McEwin is heavily involved in the Australian Theatre of the Deaf and is the co-ordinator of the World Federation of the Deaf's Expert Group on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Living and working in a society where it is automatically assumed everyone can hear clearly often resulted in him becoming frustrated, anxious and angry. But McEwin also acknowledges that his attitude is central to encountering – and triumphing over – obstacles.