

The best business networker you've never heard of

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Victorian economist Alice Hill heads what may be the world's ultimate professional network.

The Canadian-Australian was this year appointed president of the Harvard Alumni Association, the body that represents 370,000 Harvard graduates around the world and some 3000 to 4000 in Australia.



Dr Hill is the third non-American resident to hold the position in the association's 159-year history, and the first from Australia.

After graduating from the all-women's Radcliffe College in 1981, she earned a master's at the London School of Economics, and then returned to Harvard for her PhD in business economics, which she was awarded in 1991.

About 15 years ago, after she moved from London to Melbourne, Dr Hill decided to devote herself to serving on the boards of community organisations.

She accepted the chairmanship of the Children's Protection Society, which helps children who have experienced abuse and neglect. The Myer Foundation is a major sponsor.

"I reflected there was probably nothing I could do professionally that would have an impact as big as chairing that committee," she said.

Dr Hill has been a council member of the Harvard Club of Victoria for 22 years, an association that led her to become the Australasia representative on the Harvard Alumni Association board in 2008. She took over as president last month.



Alice Hill, president of the Harvard Alumni Association, urges those interested in networking to get involved in non-profit organisations. *Arsineh Houspian*.

A resident of the outer Melbourne suburb of Mount Eliza, Dr Hill travels to Boston five times a year for association meetings. A skilled networker, she recommends people engage in volunteer work to develop contacts outside their industries.

"If you are doing career networking, you are probably looking for people in your field and looking to advance yourself," she said. "To accomplish something [for society], people who want to meet people and know more people get involved in not-for-profit boards. It is doing well by doing good."

One of the changes Dr Hill has made at Harvard is acknowledging the original inhabitants of the region at the start of every public speech.

The "welcome to country" is an Australian tradition that she used this year when she welcomed Harvard's graduating class to the alumni association, in the presence of former vice-president Al Gore, who also spoke.

"It got the biggest cheer of the day," she said.

Topics

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