

Doing yourself justice when entering The Investors in People Awards 2020

So, you think you deserve an Investors in People Award?

You quite possibly do.

But standing between you and the recognition you undoubtedly deserve is the (not so) small matter of the written submission.

How are the entries judged?

For all the awards other than the 'Employer of the Year' and 'Small Business' awards (which are initially judged using data from the Investors in People assessment) the written entry is your one and only opportunity to get your case across.

There is no second-stage, or face-to-face presentation to give you the opportunity to elaborate.

With this in mind, you really do need to ensure it does you justice.

Once you've uploaded your written entry to the online portal, and the entries close, applications are initially marked and scored by a team of on-the-ground Investors in People Practitioners, to create the shortlist.

Once shortlisting is complete, these applications are passed to the Judges who re-score and determine the winners.

How do you ensure your written entry does you justice?

So, with the rigorous process and highly-proficient judges in mind, what can you do to maximise your chances of winning?

Here are some important pointers from us here at [Boost Awards](#), the world's first and largest award entry consultancy.

We've put our heads together and distilled a huge list of suggestions and top tips into just five vital ingredients, aligned to the entry process and scoring system for these awards.

These are based on our own experience of writing – not to mention winning – a veritable plethora of HR and people development awards for our clients over the years.

The five vital ingredients

Deserving an Investors in People Award and winning an Investors in People Award are two entirely different things.

Being a winner requires five key ingredients:

- A 'wow' factor.
- A storyline.
- Business alignment.
- Strong and well-evidenced results.
- Sustainability.

1) The all-important WOW

While you can get a high mark with well-evidenced responses, you need to also bear in mind that this is not just a box-ticking exercise.

To get full marks you also need to attempt to induce a 'wow' response from the judges.

This is explicit in the scoring system.

Sometimes stories are so strong or ground-breaking that this 'wow factor' is almost handed to you on a plate.

However, while the extraordinary aspects of your achievements may seem obvious to you, you cannot leave it up to the judge to spot the miraculous from the mundane.

For example, a potentially great people management strategy, leadership development programme, or maybe an ingenious response to the Covid-19 crisis, can all too often be so diluted by ordinary good practice – or, worse still, weakened by a lack of evidence – that it simply fails to pack a punch.

If something is unique to your business – or the industry as a whole – spell it out just how unique and how you **know** it's unique!

Your job is to 'find the wow' and focus your precious character count on emphasising this.

For most companies, especially larger organisations with an abundance of initiatives within your wider people strategy, this is easier said than done. And yes, all the categories are interested in your approach as a whole, not just one initiative.

Maybe your approach is more thorough, more engaging, more inclusive, more interactive, more consultative than others in your sector – agree the superlative and spell it out, and try and back it up with some research or evidence.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach here sadly, because by definition each ‘wow’ has to be unique. However, if you simply accept that you need this as a vital ingredient to your entry, then that alone has made reading this article worthwhile.

2) Tell a story

Next, tell a story.

Yes, of course meet the strict judging criteria and do answer all the questions, but ensure that in doing so, you tell a story with a dramatic opener and an engaging tone throughout.

While doing all this within the character limit with mandatory questions is far from quick or easy, you can guarantee that the winning entry will have done exactly that.

This year, wouldn't it be great if that entry came from you?

3) Demonstrate business alignment

The scoring system is very much focused on recognising people strategies which are aligned to business goals and strategies.

So, your story needs to include references to the organisation's ambition and objectives in any context, research, results and future plans sections. Clearly this year the judges will be interested in how your people development strategy has helped the business meet the wellbeing and economic challenges presented by the pandemic.

This connection shouldn't be simply implied or tokenistic, you should reference stakeholder engagement, research processes, timescales, findings and important decisions to make it abundantly clear that the strategy you chose was 0% gut instinct, and 100% based on a thorough business alignment process, and that you put in place clear metrics to prove you delivered impact against the ambitions, needs or issues that matter in the boardroom.

Which leads us onto your next challenge...

4) The evidencing challenge

Being ‘well-evidenced’ is the tricky part here – you need to quantify every single assertion you make with suitable data.

Particularly your assertions about the scale of the challenge, and the scale of the impact on business performance.

Most HR and L&D professionals are familiar with the Kirkpatrick Model for impact evaluation. Although there are other models out there, the simplicity of this model makes it great for telling a story in the results section of the form.

As these awards are so focused on business alignment, you have another challenge here – proving cause and effect. Referring back to the Kirkpatrick model again here – you can't just leap from level 1 (reaction data about the training, reward or engagement strategy) to level 4 (statistical evidence of business impact). This creates a massive leap of faith that most judges will not make willingly.

Within your evidence you need to demonstrate how your strategy can take credit for the improvements in business metrics.

Here you need cleverly designed surveys (level 3) or clever number crunching of level 4 data. But just because this is difficult doesn't mean you can dismiss it with a remark like 'it's impossible'. Trust me, there is always a way.

You don't have to write your whole entry today, but do try and find an hour as soon as humanly possible to map out what you would like to say and where.

I can guarantee that you will find a substantial list of data points that will require a fair amount of searching, analysis or surveying before you find the relevant content.

Only by starting early will you have enough time to gather a strong body of evidence.

5) Demonstrate sustainability in terms of impact

One final piece of advice to end with – don't let the judges reading your entry worry that your strategy might be a flash-in-the-pan approach.

To help here, each entry form has a final section with a 1,250 character limit (about 250 words) asking you to "outline your plans for a sustainable future in continuing to improve your approach..."

After reading this small section the judges MUST be left with no doubt that the strategy will be continuously improved far into the future, and that the impact will correspondingly be sustained, and (better still) continuously improved too.

In some cases the story began before the pandemic and your answer here needs to explain how it adapted to suit home working or other challenges.

Conclusion

I hope this list hasn't deterred you from entering.

I hope it inspires you to raise the bar on just how strong you intend your entry to be.

This is a competitive and highly credible award scheme so the winning entry will have all five ingredients in spades.

Just make sure that this is **your** entry.

Good luck.

About the Author: Chris Robinson is MD of [Boost Awards](#), the world's first and largest award entry consultancy. Boost has helped its clients win over 1,400 awards, including many winning entries in the Investors in People Awards. [Contact Boost](#) for a free informal chat about awards, sign up to free monthly deadline reminders or visit their popular [UK Awards List](#) website to view over 4,000 awards to enter.