

# Doing yourself justice when entering



**If over the past year your work has resulted in measurable impact on your organisation and its' people – then you might well deserve an Investors in People Award. But standing between you and the recognition you quite possibly deserve is the (not so) small matter of the written or video submission. This article will help you do yourself justice when preparing this.**

In partnership with Boost Awards, we have put together some helpful tips and hints on what our judges are looking for in award winning entries.

This article, written by Founder and Managing Director of Boost Awards Chris Robinson, sheds more light on the process followed by the judges as well as the story that they are looking for!

Chris writes:

*"I've poured over the entry forms and scoring systems for this year and combined this insight with my experience of writing learning award entries for over 20 years now, including many Investors in People Award entries, and here is my advice."*

## Firstly, how are the entries judged?

Before we dive into the top tips, it is important to understand the process here. For all the awards other than the 'UK and Overseas Employer of the Year' awards (which are initially judged using data from the Investors in People assessment) the written or video entry is your one and only opportunity to get your case across.

Since there is no second stage interview or face to face presentation to elaborate, the submitted entry is the one and only chance to tell the story to the judges. You can add up to 3 pieces of supporting information to help the judges understand your entry better, however these are not scored.

Once you've uploaded your written or video 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.

The shortlisted applications are passed to the Judges who assess entries and, combined with the initial Practitioner score, determine the winners.

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

## **Overall advice: Cover three bases equally well**

There are 30 marks up for grabs, split equally between efforts, results and sustaining success. The latter refers to the longevity of the programme and its impact rather than its green credentials. The award entry needs to hit the following highlights:

- 1) A detailed description of what was implemented and why. Try and evidence how thorough the needs analysis was.
- 2) Detailed evidence of measurable impact on the business. Note this is more interested in business impact than learner satisfaction. See Tip 2.
- 3) An explanation of how your approach will continue to improve and deliver impact. Reassure the judges that this wasn't simply a flash in the pan in terms of impact.

While the entry form doesn't give separate boxes for this structure, it is important to provide a robust response covering all three bases to maximise the marks in your favour.

## **Tip 1: Demonstrate business alignment from the start**

The scoring system is very much focused on recognising people strategies which are aligned to business goals and strategies. In other words, if in your entry you make regular linkages back to the higher purpose, the ambition or the business case, then the judges will thank you for it with more marks.

This connection shouldn't be simply implied or tokenistic. You should start your entry by setting the scene from a business perspective. Assume that the judges ask "Why?" a lot, not least in the start of the story. By this I mean "Why did this matter to the business?" and "Why did you use this strategy not some other approach?" There must be a clear rationale with research, and ideally put some numbers against the business case too – the scale of the issue, and ideally some SMART objectives.

## **Tip 2: Ensure your results are big picture too**

You need to reference the big picture in terms of the results too. It isn't enough that you invested in your people, the judges want to know that this investment worked. By 'worked', I don't just mean your people enjoyed the learning, or even that they completed it. 'Worked;' means that they applied it and the business is performing better as a result.

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

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 learning) 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.

Top tip: You don't have to write your whole entry today but do try and find an hour as soon as 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 impact evidence.

### Tip 3: Demonstrate sustainability in terms of impact

Finally, you should continue the theme of linking learning to business needs in terms of the third element of the scoring – ensuring that the programme continues to deliver against this need into the future.

~~As mentioned, don't let the judges reading your entry worry that your strategy might be a flash in the pan approach.~~ 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 upon too.

### Tip 4: 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 in fact explicit in the scoring system.

Sometimes stories are so strong or ground-breaking that this 'wow factor' is evident. However, while the extraordinary aspects of your achievements may be internally obvious, the judges need pointers to distinguish the miraculous from the mundane.

For example, a potentially great people management strategy, leadership development programme or learning experience platform deployment can all too often be so diluted by ordinary good practice – or, worse still, weakened by a lack of clarity about the uniqueness – that it simply fails to pack a punch.

If something is unique to your business – or the industry as a whole, make sure you let the judges know loud and clear.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach here because every story is unique.

### Tip 5: Tell a story

The final tip is less of a science and more of an art: tell a story.

Of course, meet the strict three-element judging criteria, but in doing so ensure that 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 this though.

## Conclusion

I hope our top tips inspire you to raise the bar on just how strong you intend your entry to be. I guarantee that the process of putting your story under the microscope of an award entry process will

give you an even greater sense of pride, and stronger story of business alignment and impact to share with your peers. That is your first win in the award entry process.

**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 2,000 awards, including many winning entries in the Investors in People Awards.*

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