

A closer look at the trophy case

> **A** service provider recently contacted me to subscribe to their product. The salesperson told me they have “award winning products.” I’ve always been skeptical about awards. Maybe it’s my naturally jaundiced eye. Presentation of personal awards should be accompanied by one of two reactions: either a barrage of week-old ripe fruit and vegetables; or more properly, a loud murmuring of “richly deserved and long overdue.”

Which makes me think about awards in general. I have the utmost respect for most awards. I tip my hat to winners of Purple Heart, Silver and Bronze Stars, Navy Crosses, and Army Commendation Medals. I would walk barefoot through the snow to shake the hand of a Medal of Honor Winner or a Nobel Prize Laureate.

Being a buyer, I am almost automatically skeptical. Let’s take a look at awards. I am not talking about the legitimate ones we know undergo a vetting process. I have yet to walk into a business, whether a startup or a long-established company, that doesn’t have a collection of awards, certificates and other items attesting to their competence. Some awards seem to have a fog about them, such as “Best Service Company for BLANK” or “Voted by their peers to be the best of BLANK” or

Professionally, the question we should ask is “what does the award stand for and who is giving it?” When I see the recipient of an award, I try to find out what standing it has in the industry, and what are the qualifications and backgrounds of the judges?

“Winner of the Smedley Award for Excellence.” I put some personal awards and certificates in the same category as “Fastest Hamburger Flipper” or “Outstanding Fish Cleaner.” I put them in the same category as claims by vendors that can’t be substantiated. I look for verification and substantiation. And if I can’t get that, I walk away. If your instincts tell you to look more closely, follow your instincts.

Anyone can make up an award and anyone can win an award. If you want to make up a special award and give it to your friends and colleagues, have at it. But professionally, the question we should ask is “what does it stand for and who is giving it?” When I see the recipient of an award, I try to find out what standing it has in the industry, and what are the qualifications and backgrounds of the judges?

I try to learn everything I can about the award criteria. I ask specific questions about how the recipients were chosen. I look at the nomination process, and ask how many awards are given in a particular year. I try to find out if there was undue influence in the selection or if the judges were fair and balanced.

Was the award criteria met and could it be verified and documented to the satisfaction of a majority of the judges? Were previous winners consulted and what influence did they have in the award process? Ask specific questions about how they were chosen. And if you didn’t apply for it, or nobody on the planet you know recommended you for the award, be wary.

Check out the nomination process. See what the requirements were and how you fit. Ask how many awards are given in a particular year (Hint: You want to hear a very small number)

I try to find out who had previously won the award. Do, or did, they have standing in the industry or profession?

And if you are lucky enough to get a legitimate award based on your accomplishments, and drink the heady wine of your success, remember: “The pellet with the poison is in the flagon with the dragon! The vessel with the pestle has the brew that is true!” <



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