



**What is the 'go' with Barrister 'awards'? Back in the day, it was a cardinal sin to advertise as an officer of the Court. Nowadays, the LinkedIn Autobahn seems congested with Barrister awards (the nomination, the short list, the award night, the thank you notes and a couple of self-congratulating filter added selfies thrown in). Will applications to Senior Counsel and/or Bar Council require a good smattering of such awards in times to come?**

This may be difficult to believe, but once upon a time, even the use of business cards was prohibited by the Barrister's Rules. How things have changed! But one thing remains the same which is that it is still considered distasteful to advertise one's practice. Quite what this means in the current age of LinkedIn, bespoke websites, Twitter and YouTube should be the subject of another post.<sup>1</sup> However, we are confident that such distaste cannot extend to industry awards.

Awards recognise, as they must, perseverance, hard work and diligence. First, one must download the application form. After that, one must fill out the application form. This is no easy feat. One must select one's sample cases with due regard for their objective importance balanced against the importance of one's role in them. For example, does one feature the ground-breaking case in which one was the seventh junior or should one prioritise the discovery application one made in the District Court, unled? Then, one must carefully choose one's referees. This, itself, may reflect many months, if not years, of carefully curated coffee dates with solicitors to whom promises of referee reciprocity have been made (a promise one does not give lightly now that law firm award providers outnumber law firms).

After all of that, one must pay for and (usually) attend the awards night. And should one win? Well! The work just does not stop! One must express, on social media, both one's *privilege* and also one's *humility* at being the fortunate recipient of such an award. The cognitive dissonance involved in expressing two such contradictory states, alone, must be productive of extreme mental distress.

Of course, if an award recipient is sufficiently privileged *and* humbled, the recipient may coyly refer to this success in their silk application. This, of itself, should recommend the award recipient for silkdom if it were not for the committee's unfortunate preoccupation with the applicant's work as an advocate for other people as opposed to the applicant's advocacy on his or her own behalf.

Sadly, the failure to accord awards their due weight is not limited to the silk selection committee. Indeed, there are those pre-eminent silks who need only be known by their first name and who appear not to want to lend it further distinction by attaching it to an industry award. How does one reconcile such misguided thinking with such brilliant minds?

Do not despair, dear reader! If, after all of your careful coffee dates and application filling out, you have bagged an award, savour it and share news of it widely, knowing that at least we, the Furies, understand its true worth. If, on the other hand, your CV or chambers' website do not feature industry awards or the like, you may just have to content yourself with being well remunerated for doing your job competently and that, by not advertising an award, you likely have more in common with the leaders of the bar than those who do.

**A learned friend recently marked a significant milestone in terms of years practising at the Bar. He's widely regarded as being particularly hopeless, with poor forensic judgment and little understanding of the law being just some of his limitations. How do such creatures survive for so long?**

Ah! Do we detect the easy disdain of an earnestly ambitious youth? Why, we hear you ask rhetorically, would one submit to being something less than a lauded and brilliant silk? Who would willingly endure the indignity of shuffling about chambers like old Uncle Tom in *Rumpole of the Bailey*?<sup>2</sup>

Of course, no one joins the bar expecting mediocrity, least of all the mediocre who lack the perspicacity to recognise it in themselves. And it is not unknown for the early blush of promise to pale in the face of life's vagaries. This may all seem unlikely to your freshly minted and, as yet, undented ego. And, at the risk of sounding jaded or cynical, you should also know that life at the bar makes us all unemployable at some stage even, if not especially, the best of us. For the rest of us, the best we may hope for is to become self-sufficient by the time that happens. If your 'learned' friend, as you call him, is self-sufficient, that is success of a sort and his longevity, unimpeded by talent or learning, is a marvel. We feel there must be a Bar Association CPD in that, perhaps under 'practice management'?

Provided that *Attwells v Jackson Lalic* remains good law and Find-a-Barrister does not introduce a five-star rating system, your friend will live to shuffle around chambers another day. And when he shuffles past you, be sufficiently gracious to say to yourself, 'there, but for the grace of God, a solid understanding of the law and sound forensic judgment, go I' and hope that, one day, no one says the same of you. BN

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Please 'like' and subscribe if you want to keep receiving more Furies.
- 2 Actually, we expect that you are too chronologically challenged to ask this question. If you must, look it up on Wikipedia as Horace Rumpole and his colleagues are unlikely to feature in your Instagram or TikTok feeds. BN