

**'Awards are a transformational business asset,
and this book will transform your ability to win them.'**

Daniel Priestley, bestselling author, entrepreneur and founder of Dent Global

WIN!

**Raise your profile and
grow your business
by winning awards**

DONNA O'TOOLE

Recognition is like rocket fuel: it powers you to reach heights you never believed possible.

If you think winning business awards is out of reach, a waste of time and money, or that they are all just a fix and you wouldn't win even if you tried, this book will change your mind.

WIN! is packed with everything you need to know to win business awards. Expert guidance and clear steps to follow make it faster, simpler and easier than ever before to raise your profile, grow your business and accelerate your journey to success.

This book will help you:

- Discover the award-winning secrets of the world's leading brands
- Raise your profile and increase your personal brand value
- Accelerate your sales and grow your business
- Recruit and retain the best talent for your team
- Enhance your credibility and gain customer trust and loyalty



Donna O'Toole is the founder of August Recognition, a global awards agency. Named a Top 25 Customer Experience Influencer, and herself an award-winning international awards judge, Donna has helped hundreds of brands and leaders to raise their profile and is renowned for her outstanding success in the most highly regarded awards in the world, including The Queen's Awards for Enterprise. Learn more at www.craftedbyaugust.com

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Praise

‘This is simply a brilliant read that allows entrepreneurs and scaling businesses to know the importance of recognition and celebrating success. Donna is a fountain of specialist knowledge and practical tips when it comes to winning awards and maximising every opportunity in front of you. If you want your business to grow and identify its strengths then read this book and learn how to shout about your success and be proud of it.’

— **Sarah Austin**, leading awards organiser, CEO and founder of British Business Excellence Awards and Chief Connectress

‘As an entrepreneur, you need to stand out from the crowd. Awards are a sure way of doing that, and why shouldn’t you be rewarded for your hard work? The issue is, how do you win them? Like winning medals, you need a plan of action. Just putting in lots of hard work doesn’t usually cut it. Instead, direction and clarity is what you need. This book is your blueprint. It’s time to stand out.’

— **Neil Fachie**, Paralympic champion cyclist, performance coach and bestselling author of *Earn Your Stripes*

‘Donna is an expert when it comes to awards and she’s got a real talent for helping awards applicants tell their story in a compelling and engaging way. Storytelling like this is useful not only for an awards application but also helps an entrepreneur to really define their goals, why and purpose on paper. I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend this book to anyone looking to raise their profile via awards, which as we’ve seen is often about far more than just a trophy on stage. Our previous winners have regularly cited their award wins as being pivotal in helping them secure a retail listing, investment and media coverage and exposure.’

— **Francesca James**, founder, Great British Entrepreneur Awards

‘Donna shares her vast awards experience in a step-by-step guide that demonstrates the value of winning awards and also how to do it strategically and practically. Packed full of insights, this book provides the inspiration and the insider information for entrepreneurs to raise their profile and increase their credibility by winning awards. Engaging, empowering and inspiring, this is a truly brilliant book and a must read for every entrepreneur!’

— **Jude Jennison**, bestselling author and founder of Leaders by Nature and AskOpus

‘Donna’s book *WIN!* is the missing guide every entrepreneur has been waiting for. Jam-packed with practical tips and expert advice from one of the world’s foremost award-winning experts, entering and winning awards is no longer an elusive mystery reserved for a lucky few but is now available to all who are making a difference with their business. This book will be a game-changer for all those who read it. Ignore it at your own risk!’

— **Mark Leruste**, award-winning podcast host, public speaker and founder of The Unconventionalists®

‘Donna O’Toole is the queen of awards. Luckily for the rest of us she has now summarised her wealth of experience and wisdom into this ‘how-to’ guide for winning awards. *WIN!* walks you through everything you need to know – why awards are important, how to select the awards that will best help you meet your business goals, writing that impactful entry and learning from the outcome. This is an invaluable resource for any business owner and entrepreneur who wishes to stand out from the crowd.’

— **Antoinette Oglethorpe**, director, Antoinette Oglethorpe Ltd

'This is a must-read book for any entrepreneur or business professional that wants to learn why it is so important to enter and win awards – not only to increase sales but also to add value to your brand story and engage your employees.'

— **Andrew Scott is an entrepreneur and CEO of the Ascot Group**, a media and technology business that runs multiple national business awards

'Donna makes a strong positive impact on everyone and everything she comes into contact with. She is one of the most ambitious and successful leaders in the awards business. She is full of ideas, always trying something new and driving the standards in the industry and her business forward. I know that anyone who reads this book will gain great insight from someone who is a winner of multiple awards and a winner in everyday life and business.'

— **Neil Skehel MBA**, CEO and founder, Awards International, Proprietor CXM.co.uk

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DONNA O'TOOLE

R^ethink

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For Amelia and Katie, my two dancing princesses

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Foreword

Awards are worth it!

We live in a world with a massive backdrop of noise, news and nonsense. Digital technology has turned every business into a global media company with a megaphone. Today your business is being drowned out from all directions with messages from influencers, entertainers and big, well-funded brands who all have news, announcements, trends, viral content and politics.

Your customers and potential customers see hundreds of ‘special offers’ and ‘important announcements’ every day from all corners of the world.

People rightly need shortcuts to know if you are any good at what you do – a quick way of knowing if you

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are as good as you say you are. One of the fastest ways people can arrive at the conclusion that you are a great company is to see you have won awards.

I never really bothered with awards. For many years I was growing my businesses, doing marketing, sales and customer service, admin and operations. I was proud of what we achieved, and, internally, we celebrated our little wins as they happened. But I never felt ready to submit an entry to an independent award.

I never 'got it' for several reasons. I didn't feel comfortable winning an award when I could think of someone else far more deserving, who I looked up to, or a company that was far bigger. I would think 'how could I win an award for Business Enabler of the Year, shouldn't that go to Google or something?'

I also never had the time to jump through all the hoops to enter awards. I hated having to chase up all the information required to meet the judging criteria. The combination of collecting the information needed to enter and then having to make a case for why we are 'the best' stopped me from trying.

Then I met Donna O'Toole, and two shifts in my thinking happened after we discussed an awards strategy.

Firstly, I realised that having an award was not for my benefit, but rather it's a way for customers to quickly see that I've been independently judged and vetted.

When people see Dent Global winning awards they can relax and trust that we're going to add value. It saves them time and stress in figuring out if we are who we say we are. It's an act of service, allowing them to evaluate us and trust us faster.

It's also something that recognises the work of our team and how dedicated, effective and skilful they have become. This acknowledgement is far more important than I realised for our people, and I owe it to them to highlight their results.

Secondly, we got Donna O'Toole's team at August Recognition to do the applications for us. They do these submissions all day every day so they know how to hone in on the important stuff. As they aren't inside the business, they actually have a better way of explaining things so that the judges understand. Their professional approach makes the award application process easy.

Within six months of working with Donna, we'd won three major awards and been finalists for another three major awards. It feels good and it translates into more business, more confidence in our people, higher standards to maintain and ultimately a more valuable business.

Personally, winning awards has resulted in speaking opportunities and media appearances I otherwise wouldn't have had.

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I'm now proud to put the term 'award winning' into our marketing materials. I love that when we hire someone for a role in the company, we offer people the opportunity to join an award-winning team. Our existing clients find it easier to refer us as an award-winning supplier they have worked with. I've noticed that big corporate brands look to our award-winning approach as a way of de-risking their selection.

Winning awards is a bit like adding engine oil that makes everything run more smoothly. Awards are an asset to your business and should be part of your strategy to win more business, attract the right people, raise investment, forge a partnership, expand globally or sell your company at a high valuation.

Going forward, as the world becomes even noisier, I am completely sold on the idea that awards are a vitally important part of growth and profitability. Donna O'Toole is the perfect steward to guide you successfully on your journey to becoming a multi-award-winner.

Daniel Priestley, bestselling author, entrepreneur and founder of Dent Global

Introduction

Destination unknown

It was a regular Wednesday morning in June 2018 when this email dropped into my inbox:

‘Hi Donna,

I’m aware we arranged appointments twice and I failed to turn up.

I can tell you briefly what’s going on in my life. My wife is a cancer survivor who I care for, and my son is being bullied at school. I run a family, a home and a business. Business is good! We are making strides and we are exporting and growing five years in a row now. I am not sure I or my company deserve a Queen’s Award for Export if I cannot turn up

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for a phone appointment. However, it's still in my heart to do this... I don't know why.

If you think we have a shot and would give me another chance, let me know. Please be aware I am terrible with appointments. Awful. Even with a reminder set on my phone, I miss them. I just need a really hard kick or something! My apologies for before...

Andrew'

The sender was an entrepreneur who'd been recommended to speak to me by an advisor from the Department for International Trade a few months earlier. The advisor thought Andrew might be a good candidate for The Queen's Awards for Enterprise competition, and suggested he speak to me to see if I could help. The entrepreneur's business was growing fast, so he must have been doing something right, but pinning him down to a telephone call was proving a challenge.

After a couple of missed appointments, I thought perhaps he just wasn't interested, until I got this email, and it stopped me in my tracks.

As a fellow entrepreneur, I immediately understood his difficulties. There you are, trying to juggle the priorities and needs of your business, finances, home, family, children, health, pets etc and now you have another job to add to the list: trying to win an award. Yes, you know that becoming an award-winning business would have

a massive impact on your results, and yes, of course, you'd really love to win that award and become known as the industry leader, but quite frankly, the camel can't carry another straw on its back. It's just too much. Putting all the effort in to even try to win could all just be a big waste of time, and you are one diary appointment away from losing it completely. Trying to win an award feels like getting in the car and going on a journey to an unknown destination without a roadmap: a total waste of time and energy.

I get it. Winning feels impossible. You're not ready. There's too much else on. It's not the right time. I see it all the time, and here's what happens next...

You do the 'sensible' thing and decide awards are not a business or budget priority, and you have far more important things to do. You decide to leave it until next year, or the year after. Except that next year you're just as busy, spinning just as many plates: they're just a different size and colour now. Maybe there's even been a global pandemic, or some other unimaginable situation to overcome in the meantime, pushing awards even further down the priority list.

In reality, 'next year' will never come for you when it comes to awards. Instead of becoming an award-winning business like many of your competitors, you'll stay the industry's 'best-kept secret'. But that's OK. You're running a good business already, without all that added hassle of winning an award and then having to

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tell your customers and organise a celebration with your team. You've successfully avoided the faster pace of the awards superhighway and now, instead of accelerating your business, you can stay focused on avoiding the potholes of the business B-roads as you keep pootling along the road to retirement.

Roadblock ahead. Make a U-turn.

Not winning an award is fine. It's just that, as a business operating *without* the benefit of the raised profile, credibility and trust that awards bring, and *without* all those pesky extra customers to serve and new employees to reward, you just need to make that bit more effort to navigate the road ahead. Yes, sometimes it seems like you're on a road to nowhere or going around in circles, but you already know how to get past those roadblocks. You just need to raise your advertising budget, keep slogging away at your marketing, strive hard for every sale and keep reassuring your team that you do appreciate them and that one day you'll all go out and celebrate your achievements... just as soon as you've got time.

And when you get five minutes to hop on LinkedIn, you can just scroll quickly past your award-winning competitors who are posting loads of pictures showing off their black ties, big grins and shiny awards at the latest ceremony. It's no biggie.

Of course, you don't have time to waste on something as frivolous as awards, but now there's an annoying

issue... Your leads have started to dwindle... Your sales have started to stagnate... And your best employee has been poached by the award winners down the road.

Ugh. Now you *need* to make a U-turn. You reluctantly say, 'OK. OK. We'll do some awards.' Secretly thinking, 'I'm sure I can knock one up tonight, it can't be that hard'. Who needs sleep anyway? But oh dear. Now it's too little, too late. Last year the business was going great guns. This year you've had a lot of changes to manage and your results have plateaued; getting awards is going to be tougher now. A year ago, your sales were growing... A year ago, your customer reviews were flowing... A year ago, you had a really innovative service, but now your competitor down the road is doing it too... Oh, and that award entry you threw together at midnight? Well, it doesn't actually meet the criteria or answer any of the questions in a way that will win, so it's definitely not going to persuade a panel of judges that you are the very best in your field.

Never mind. You've committed now and you're determined to get somewhere, so you send off your hastily typed words and wait, full of hope, until the day the finalists are announced.

The big day arrives and you open the announcement email with bated breath. It says:

'We're so sorry to inform you that your award entry has not been successful. The competition

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was really strong this year. Please try again next year.'

Hmm. You may think 'What's wrong with my business? Can't they see how good we are? Can't they see how hard we work? We are so much better than last year's winners! It's a joke! It's obviously a fix. They're just going to give awards to the people who buy a big table.'

Oh hang on, there's some judges' feedback here...

'Unfortunately, your entry did not meet the specific criteria for the category and you did not provide enough evidence of your impact.'

Grrrr. 'Well of course I didn't have time to find any evidence, I only had a day to get that entry done. Don't they realise I have a business to run? And why do they need all that extra information anyway, surely the judges don't actually read it...do they?' And so the disappointment starts to chip away and is soon replaced by frustration. 'I should have never entered that award in the first place. What a waste of time. Who needs to be an award-winning business anyway? We're doing fine.' Just to be safe, you probably stop looking at LinkedIn for a couple of weeks, because those award-winning show-offs from down the road, whose service is not as good as yours, are going to really wind you up.

And so the annual cycle of striving for new customers and working night and day continues, uninterrupted

by ‘unimportant’ things like awards ceremonies, media interviews, chats with investors, speaking opportunities and team celebrations...

Recognise anything here?

It's a common story, but it doesn't have to be this way for you. Let me take you on a different journey...

Getting on the awards superhighway

When you join the awards superhighway, the recognition that you, your business and your team receive can be life-changing.

To demonstrate in real terms how this works, let's go right back to the elusive emailer...

As soon as I read his message I picked up the phone and called him. I said 'It's OK, I get it. Don't worry about the appointments. You're not too far away from me so let's have a coffee. And I promise you, if I think this is a waste of time I will definitely tell you...'

When I met Andrew Burnett-Thompson, founder and CEO, SciChart, it was clear that he had no idea whether his company had any chance of winning. After a long chat, I saw they had real potential, and all the key performance indicators that would give him a good chance of success.

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Ten months later, on Her Majesty The Queen's birthday, 21 April 2019, a small software business that had been started at a kitchen table by a new entrepreneur was recognised as a winner in the Innovation category of The Queen's Awards for Enterprise – the most prestigious award in the world. Andrew couldn't have been happier, and neither could we. He'd trusted me to create his Roadmap to Recognition and guide him along the awards superhighway to reach his destination faster than he'd ever thought possible.

Three months later, Andrew and his wife attended a royal reception for all the winners at Buckingham Palace. After they toasted their success, and time moved on, the impact of winning the award kicked in: not just because they'd won. Not just because they'd worked so hard to get through the last five years. Not just because all their new ideas and difficult decisions felt validated. Not just because they had made their colleagues, friends and family so proud. But because, since putting that award-winning logo on their website three months before, things were starting to get easier. Already their sales had increased by an incredible 30%. The recognition they received had put them firmly in the driving seat of their business, ready to accelerate and scale at speed, with an exciting journey ahead.

Today, as I write, Andrew's business has grown significantly in value and he has grown the team, expanded their products, enjoyed press and investment opportunities, gained an exceptional mentor and is on track to

reach all his personal and professional goals. Talking about what that recognition did for the team and the business, he says:

‘The prestige that came from it was undoubtedly a boost to us and company morale. It not only helped us to win enterprise customers but also gave the team something they could really be proud of.’¹

The power of winning awards

Winning awards is like exchanging your car for a rocket, with recognition as the fuel. It powers you to reach heights you never believed possible.

Winning awards makes you credible, trustworthy and valuable. It raises your profile and personal brand. It breaks down barriers, cuts through red tape and smashes glass ceilings, helping you to achieve your bigger purpose and make the world a better place. Winning awards tells the people working for you that you care about them, you appreciate them, you are grateful to them, and the recognition it brings helps them to achieve their goals too. Winning awards helps you get your time back so you can spend it with your loved ones and on activities that make your heart sing. Winning awards gives you a profile that people trust, respect and admire. This means easier pitches, faster sales, more opportunities, more partnerships and more choices.

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Isn't it time you had a few more choices?

Certainty breeds certainty

Winning awards has become more valuable than ever as the internet and social media allow us to compare and share the brands we choose more easily than ever before. Nowadays, when someone is deciding where they are going to spend their hard-earned cash, being an award winner puts you at the top of the list.

When someone is deciding where
to spend their hard-earned
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puts you at the top of the list.

Awards are a tangible business asset that lasts forever, and winning even a single award will give you an 'award-winning business' title that can never be taken away. And that reassures your customers that you are worth doing business with, so when they come to you, they also bring their friends, family and contacts too, accelerating your growth. Even better, becoming a multi-award-winner shows investors, partners, employees and suppliers that you are a valuable business worthy of *their* loyalty, too. The savviest businesses, such as Emma Mattress and Octopus Energy,² are excellent examples of companies making awards work

for them by showcasing their credibility and sharing why they are the most awarded brands in their sector. You could be doing exactly the same with your awards.

Why are awards so important to customers? Because expectations have changed. People have more choices and therefore need more help deciding who to buy from and work with. Awards are no longer a 'nice-to-have' – they are a 'need-to-have' for anyone who wants to attract, convert and keep customers, to thrive in a competitive marketplace.

There's a simple reason for this and, like laughter, it's highly contagious: *certainty breeds certainty, and uncertainty breeds uncertainty.*

Put yourself in your customer's shoes. You want to buy a product or sign up for a new service, but how can you be certain you are making the right choice? How do you know you'll get good value for money? How do you know you'll get great service? How do you know you can trust this brand with your hard-earned cash?

What's going to give you the certainty you need to buy?

Now, more than ever, customers want and need reassurance that they are making the best decision before they buy. That's why we've seen the rise of review sites like Trustpilot, TripAdvisor and Google Reviews. The more stars the better when it comes to pulling the trigger on the sale.

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Well, now it's the same for awards. According to a Nielsen study commissioned by inPowered, consumers rely on credible, third-party accolades more than branded media or user reviews when making purchasing decisions. The findings indicated that credibility and unbiased content are critical for consumers, with 85% regularly or occasionally seeking out trusted reviews and awards when considering a purchase.³

I know what you're thinking... 'But I don't even know if I can win awards!'

Well, the fact that you've picked up this book tells me that you have reached a decision. You don't want to just stay where you are in business, navigating the twists and turns of the business B-roads and watching your competitors overtake you and reach their destination faster. You're ready to accelerate your journey to success, and you don't just want to win at business, you want to win at life too.

It's all possible, I promise.

The competitive advantage

One final, but very important, point before we start your awards journey. Yes, you've got to be in it to win it, but understanding the competition will give you a distinct advantage.

For years I've been banging the drum on awards webinars about how important it is to write a high-quality entry or to create an outstanding presentation, and I'm pleased to say people are following the process better than ever, but that does push the competition up and the reality is that 80% of entries nowadays are very good.

Furthermore, around 10% of entries are excellent, with some really exciting initiatives showcased. You can expect to meet these in the shortlist. And the top 10% of entries are truly outstanding, so to win, you need to get to the top of that top tier, and that's no mean feat.

That's why, in this book, I will teach you every single, teeny-tiny, marginal gain you can make in your award entries and presentations to improve your chances of success. And that's why I'm deliberately not wasting time telling you all the boring stuff about writing good award entries, like keeping within the word count (important but obvious) or checking your spelling and grammar (ditto). No, this book is about training you to win, and that is a whole other ballgame.

I have distilled a decade of awards experience from both sides of the awards table into a guide that will help you make the shortlist of the awards you enter, forever more.

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Trust in the process and you'll achieve
more than you ever believed, give
back more than you ever dreamed
and find more entrepreneurial
freedom than you ever imagined.

This book won't just set out a step-by-step process for creating your own awards strategy; it won't just give you the deepest understanding of what you need to do to win awards, through my Six Pillars of Awards Success methodology; and it won't just give you the industry insights and insider secrets that will create an advantage over your competitors. This book will empower you to recognise your potential and accelerate your journey to becoming a Key Person of Influence. I believe that great entrepreneurs should get recognised, and great behaviour should get rewarded, creating a new generation of outstanding role models and leaders who are having a positive impact on the world. By taking the steps I recommend, you will be able to achieve more than you ever believed, to give back more than you ever dreamed and to find more entrepreneurial freedom than you ever imagined possible.

This is your Roadmap to Recognition. Follow it in detail, and you too will become a winner. It's time to take to the road!

PART ONE
YOUR ROADMAP TO
RECOGNITION

ONE

Promoting ‘Brand You’

The first stop on your Roadmap to Recognition is very close to home. It’s you.

Entrepreneurs don’t generally set out to become ‘entrepreneurs’. They often start life in other careers and then decide to start a business to solve a problem, to do more of what they love or to have more control over their life. They certainly don’t start with their sights set on creating an award-winning personal brand.

I’m willing to bet that you’re not hugely comfortable with promoting ‘brand you’. In fact, I’d put money on the fact that you spend more time talking about your business name, your logo, your book cover, your social media posts, your technology, your podcast, your team, your customers, your kids, your office dog and, well,

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pretty much anything else you can think of that keeps you safely out of the spotlight and in the background of your business.

Well, I have news for you. There's no I in the word 'entrepreneur', but there is a U. If you're serious about raising the profile of your business and leading your industry, you need to get serious about your personal brand and start promoting 'brand you' first. As Daniel Priestley, author of the famous book *Key Person of Influence* and the accelerator programme, says: 'Your ability to succeed depends on your ability to influence'. There is nothing more influential in business than winning an award.

There's no I in entrepreneur,
but there is a U.

It's time to stop hiding behind your business name, come out from the dark and into the light, stand tall and say, 'Here I am. I *am* the business. Yes, I've failed and I've succeeded. I have broken parts, and I have scars. I am not perfect. But this is *my* story. This is *my* vision. This is *my* business. If anyone can lead it, it's me. If anyone can make it win an award, it's me.' (Mic drop.)

In this chapter, you will develop your personal story, to improve your ability to win awards. You will uncover your *current* 'awards persona' and discover what you

need to do to develop it into an award-winning persona. You will overcome awards imposter syndrome, and find your unique selling point (USP) for awards and learn exactly what works, and what doesn't, when it comes to every award you decide to enter.

Your awards persona

Your awards persona is determined by the characteristics you display when it comes to entering awards. This is a system of early identification that I have developed over the years which, combined with other business factors, helps me to ascertain how much support an entrepreneur needs in order to become an award winner.

In the same way that understanding your Myers-Briggs® score,⁴ or which of the sixteen personalities you are,⁵ could help you to be a better boss or team player, understanding your awards persona can empower you to overcome your barriers to winning and accelerate your awards success.

To start, read the ten personas below. Which one do you identify with most right now?

1. The Imposter

The first (and most frequently recurring) awards persona I meet is the Imposter. Imposters don't think that they are good enough to win awards, they consider everyone else is more entitled to

win than they are and, given time, they will dream up 100 reasons why they shouldn't even bother to enter the award. We all have a touch of this persona in us, but in my experience female entrepreneurs tend to make up around 80% of this persona's population.

2. The Ostrich

Ostriches are expert procrastinators. They know that awards could help them, but they're not ready to get involved; they prefer to hide in the dark where they feel safe. This is a shame because, although Ostriches cannot take flight, they have other strengths that make them stand out above their peers, and yet they stick to doing what they do best – keeping their heads in the sand.

3. The Bridesmaid

The Bridesmaid is always the finalist, but never quite the awards bride. If you have no issue entering awards but always find yourself on the short-list and never up on the podium collecting the prize, this could be you. The Bridesmaid is a true diamond and a very popular choice with much to offer, but is often the support act, still waiting for the time to shine.

4. The Misfit

Misfits have many great attributes but haven't yet learned how to use them in awards to make themselves stand out for all the right reasons. Misfits have unique strengths, but in a bid to fit in they fol-

low their friends and end up in the wrong awards competitions in front of judges who are looking for something other than what they have to offer, making them uncertain where they do fit in.

5. The Storyteller

The Storyteller is a captivating weaver of words and knows how to tell an engaging story. Unfortunately, Storytellers do not focus on the criteria and often veer off-track into a land of make-believe. This awards persona is often so caught up in the story that they fail to provide any evidence to meet the point-scoring criteria and the judges can't decide whether their entry is fact or fiction.

6. The Tourist

The Tourist jumps into an award because their friend went last year and it looked great fun. There is nothing strategic about their decision to enter, they are simply attracted by the bright lights, but they haven't taken the time to see whether they actually fit the bill and, as a result, they won't be taking home any shiny souvenirs.

7. The Politician

The Politician loves a 'vote-based' awards programme but fails to answer any questions in the written award entry. At the awards presentation, they charm the judges with catchy phrases and big promises, but when you dig a bit deeper and get past the clichés and rhetoric, their numbers don't actually add up.

WIN!

8. The Mathematician

The Mathematician has a statistic for everything and is fantastic at sharing commercial evidence. Sadly, Mathematicians tend to reduce the probability they will win any awards by failing to tell a story, creating logical but dull award entries, and eventually causing 'death by PowerPoint' in their presentations to judges.

9. The Party Animal

Party Animals are always the last to enter the competition. They don't really know how they got to where they are today, or where they're going to go next, and they start their entry late with no time for planning. They love an awards ceremony, though, so they are great fun to have around, and even though they didn't get a trophy they're going to photobomb all the winners and have a great night anyway.

And finally, the most effective awards persona...

10. The Athlete

Athletes know their strengths and are willing to work on their weaknesses. They know what they want to achieve, they set their sights firmly on the final goal, they analyse the competition, and then they plan, prepare and train to win. They never give up, no matter how many hurdles they face. They keep going until they get that win, again and again and again.

Did you recognise yourself in any of the personas? Maybe you are a clear Party Animal, or a bit of a Bridesmaid.

It goes without saying that, when it comes to awards personas, the Athlete is who you should aim to be. Don't worry if you're feeling more like an Imposter at this stage, or you secretly know your inner Mathematician is getting in the way of your success; this book will give you the tools and techniques you need to become a winner. No more sitting in your pyjamas watching other award winners on your Twitter feed. It's time to win!

Start with you

I'm sure you've heard of Simon Sinek's inspirational TED Talk 'Start with why' – which encourages business leaders to focus on purpose before profits.⁶ Well, your *why* is going to play an important part in developing your awards story too, but first, we need to focus on *you*. Before an awards judge can understand *why* you do what you do, they need to find out *who you are*, because on your awards journey as far as your business is concerned, *you* are its most valuable asset.

(Cue cries of objection from all entrepreneurs: 'Oh, but I won't be able to sell my business if it's all about me,' 'I want my brand to be the winner, not me,' 'It's not fair to my team if I get all the glory,' etc. OK, tell that

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to Richard Branson (Virgin), Elon Musk (Tesla), Steve Jobs (Apple), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Arianna Huffington (Huff Post), or Rihanna (Fenti Beauty). They are examples of past and present inspirational, high-profile leaders, and no one would say their brands have been devalued by their profile, would they?)

People buy from people, so as the leader of your business, becoming an award-winning entrepreneur with a powerful personal profile will only *increase* the value of your brand, your products and your services. Faceless businesses find it much harder to win awards than businesses with an entrepreneur at the helm who is brave enough to be the face of their own brand. In this book I'm championing a new movement: start with 'you'. To do this, your mission is to establish your award-winning story, and you know what every story needs, don't you? A hero, of course!

Become the spotlight

One of the biggest causes of awards imposter syndrome is that entrepreneurs don't want to be in the spotlight. One of the fastest ways of overcoming that is simply to move the light off yourself and become the spotlight for something else that you are passionate about.

Expert storyteller Mark Leruste helps people to discover and communicate their purpose. He says that having the courage to share your personal story au-

thentically can not only transform your business and change your life but also have a huge impact on the lives of others. Mark has proved this himself. As the founder of the Ministry of Purpose and host of the award-winning The Unconventionalists® podcast, Mark previously served as country manager at the Movember Foundation, where he helped raise €2.8 million for men's health and inspired 110,000 fundraisers to sign up, winning multiple awards along the way. Since then, his videos have been viewed over 3 million times on social media and his podcast has had over 200,000 downloads from more than 100 countries. His book *It's Not You, It's Me* helps unfulfilled professionals to find more meaningful work, and his new book *Glow in the Dark* is a great place to learn how to tell your story, if you fear you're becoming your industry's best-kept secret.

If you could use your award-winning profile to help you to achieve something, what would you become the spotlight for right now? A special cause, a movement, an industry change? Whatever it is, winning awards will empower you to shine a light on the thing that matters most to you.

I need a hero

Your journey here has been unique, and you might not realise it yet, but in one way or another, it's been heroic. In this section, I will show you how to identify the hero

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in your story and use it to help you reach your highest awards potential.

The Hero's Journey (Joseph Campbell, 1987) proposes that everyone's life follows a distinct and 'heroic' twelve-step journey.⁷ This journey is an epic adventure in which they meet a guide, overcome challenges, slay villains, withstand ordeals and ultimately receive their reward before starting all over again. I highly recommend taking some time to read up on the theory and discover how your own story fits into all twelve stages. But to quickly understand the concept and use it to the best effect in your award entries, just think about the fairy-tale adventures we all know and love, like Cinderella,⁸ or iconic movies like *Star Wars*, the Harry Potter films, *The Lion King* or *Spiderman*.⁹

'But I'm not exactly Spiderman!', I hear you say. And that's OK, it really is. The point is, these stories are powerful, memorable and engaging and, in the context of winning awards, your unique story (or lack of it) has the power to make (or break) your entry, too.

This book will name some award winners who have actually been involved with saving lives, but most award winners are heroes because they save customers from the high prices and poor service they have been getting from competitors. They are heroes because they give people more power and more choice. They are heroes because they use their business to change society, to fulfil a higher purpose or even to give people a great

place to work. Whatever it is they do, and no matter whether on a big or small scale, they make a difference and that's what makes them heroes and award winners.

This is not about saying 'I'm a hero because I killed a dragon'. It's about showing how you use your mountain of value,¹⁰ that is your personal values, unique experiences and vision for the future, to make decisions and changes that will ultimately help your industry, your community or your little part of the world to be a better place.

Over the course of this book, I will introduce you to award winners who have used their business, skills, products, platform, relationships and expertise to rescue their customers, their employees or even their industry from its former state and change something for the better. In the meantime, though, it's also important to know what won't help you to win awards.

How *not* to stand out

In understanding what you need to do to make yourself stand out as a winner in awards, it's equally important to know what *not* to do.

A little while ago I was judging a financial industry award. The award entries had been whittled down to a shortlist, then passed to me to decide the winner. I read every entry from start to finish, and by the end I felt in

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no better position to choose a winner than I had before I started. Why? Because all the entries were pretty much identical. Every single one of those companies had submitted an entry that told me:

1. How much money they raised in investment
2. How clever their tech platform/app is
3. How much their customers love them

All nice to know and worth including, but nothing they told me was unique. Being a start-up category, all of the entrants' businesses were pretty much the same age, pretty much the same size, with pretty much the same results, all doing pretty much the same thing in the same industry. Tell me: when you're comparing apples to apples, and they are all small, red and shiny, how do you pick one that stands out? You look for the unique features, that's how. And in business, and in awards, the feature that stands out above all else is the human being behind the brand.

All of the businesses I was judging had been founded by an entrepreneur, and yet not one of them had found a way to tell their story and to make themselves stand out. Not one of them told me *why* they'd started that business, *what* they had set out to change, *how* they were doing things differently, *who* they really were or *where* they had come from to arrive at this place. I'm certain that all of these entrepreneurial founders had their own unique stories and experiences that made an

impact on their decisions somewhere along the line, but I knew nothing about their past experience, their future vision, their values, their passion or their purpose. Not one of them had actually identified or communicated a USP. In fact, I could have swapped the names around on the entries and you would hardly have been able to tell at all.

And this is often the harsh reality of judging industry awards.

I puzzled over the entries for hours and eventually chose a winner, but I definitely didn't feel that I'd found a hero that day. If only those entrepreneurs had realised how much their own stories could have helped them to win, the outcome might have been completely different.

I know you have a unique story to tell, and now's the time to share it. And trust me, when you do, it will fast-track your ability to win awards, which will in turn supercharge your ability to achieve all your business and personal goals.

My story

My own entrepreneurial journey has had many twists and turns, and it took me a long time to have the courage to share it. But I recognised that this is my mountain of value, it has shaped my vision and my values, and given me the insights I need to be your guide on your

WIN!

awards adventure. As you read this short story, think about the journey *you* have been on and what *you* could share to demonstrate your own mountain of value.

People always comment on my passion for ‘awards’, and I have to correct them. I’m not passionate about ‘awards’ *per se*. I’m passionate about everyone having the opportunity to reach their potential, no matter who they are or how they got here. I have found that awards are a powerful tool that encourages and enables people to achieve their potential, and allows them to help others achieve their potential, too.

My passion for achieving potential goes back to my childhood. At sixteen years old, I found myself living in the care of social services. I continued going to school and finished my exams while learning to look after myself in a house with four other ‘girls with potential’ (as my social worker called us). One day our landlord, who was a successful local entrepreneur, asked me what I wanted to do with my life once I finished my exams. I couldn’t answer. As a child, I had wanted to go to university and become a teacher, but I’d been told my best hope was to be a nanny so that I at least had a job, some money and a roof over my head. My life had taken an unexpected path, so now going to university and becoming a teacher seemed impossible.

I felt utterly lost and hopeless and just didn’t know what to say. When I couldn’t answer, he said to me: ‘Donna, you can achieve anything you want. Anything.

If you just believe in yourself, focus and work hard you will get there. But remember, when you do, then it will be your turn to help someone else.'

That was the message I needed to hear to take control of my future. It sparked a fire in me that drove me forward. It wasn't easy, but I completed my exams, left school and started college. I'd wanted to do A levels but had been convinced to do a GNVQ, which was an early 1990s education initiative that we were told would take over from 'traditional' A levels. Within a few months, I knew it was the wrong option for me but it was too late to change. I decided instead to leave college and try to earn some money and get a qualification before going back and starting again in a year.

I found out about the Youth Training Scheme (YTS – the apprenticeship of the 1990s) and lo and behold there was an opportunity to join it as a dental nurse just around the corner from where I was living. I got myself an interview, turned up with a smile and a promise to work really hard, and I won the grand prize, working forty hours a week for £50. I was so excited since, the way I saw it, I could start learning a new skill, get a qualification and have some money while I worked out what to do with my life. Bingo!

I pretty much lived on a diet of peanut butter on toast during those years, but I got my dental nursing qualification. I still had a yearning to do A levels, and I still really wanted to be an English teacher, but I couldn't

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work out how to afford to live and go back to college. I'd become very good at my job though, and at the age of nineteen, I spotted a gap in the market, and with not much more than a good idea and a gut feeling that I could make it work, I left the security of my paid job and launched my first business: a dental nurse agency. I'll tell you much more about this story in Chapter Six, but suffice to say at this stage that my gut instinct was right and my new business was oversubscribed from the outset, and taking bookings a year ahead. Without even realising it, I'd created a new career path and become an entrepreneur!

After a successful few years, I got married and later exited the business to focus on being a mother of two daughters. And just a few years later, with my two little daughters at my heels aged 3 and 5, and with my yearning to complete my education still playing on my mind, I decided it was time to fulfil my promise to myself to study one day. I started my learning journey once again. I took an access course and applied to Sussex University where, three years later, I finally achieved my childhood dream of completing a degree in English language and linguistics.

Shortly after I graduated, I started my next entrepreneurial journey by writing for a living: business and marketing articles to start with, then I started working with entrepreneurs and business leaders who were entering awards. I had been an entrepreneur myself,

so I recognised a lot of their pain, saw their potential, and enjoyed getting to know their stories and retelling them in a way that had an impact on others, including the judges. I saw the power that was hidden in their personal journeys. Then I saw how winning the awards we entered transformed their businesses, their lives and even the lives of those around them. That was when I realised all the good that could come from recognising people's achievements.

After a few years of working in the awards industry, I launched August Recognition. Through this business, I made it my mission to use my experience to become the spotlight for others; to shine a light on their achievements so that they reach their potential and use it to help someone else reach theirs one day, too.

Summary

Now it's your turn. You've learned about the hero's journey, you've discovered why it's so important to tell your story and you've even found out what happens when you don't tell your story in an award entry. Before you even think about jumping into any awards competitions, it is essential to uncover your mountain of value and identify your USP. Only when you have been through this process will you be able to tell your story and stand out from the competition in all of your award entries, and win.

WIN!

What's your story? Complete the Awards USP activity now by writing down the key stage and stand-out elements of your story and your entrepreneurial journey. The notes and details you write down now will help you to build an award-winning entry later.

ACTIVITY: YOUR AWARDS USP

You are uniquely qualified to offer something people need, and your mountain of value is fundamental to your award-winning USP. Think about your story so far and answer these questions:

- *Mountain of value:* What unique experiences led you to where you are today?
- *Pivotal moment:* What instigated you to start your first business and/or this business?
- *Proudest moment:* What have you achieved in business that you are most proud of?
- *Values:* What are your personal values? If you're not sure how to sum up or which to focus on, ask other people how they would describe you, in three words.
- *Passion:* What makes your heart sing? (NB This doesn't have to be business-related.)
- *Purpose:* What is your big aim in life?
- *Become the spotlight:* On to what issue, cause, movement or industry change would you like to shine a light in the future?

As you read through this book you will have lots of opportunities to record your thoughts, and these will become hugely valuable when you start entering

awards. Download your own Roadmap to Recognition awards planner now by visiting <https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-awards-book> and record your answers there so you can reflect on your progress and update your results in the future.

TWO

You Win Or You Learn

One of the questions I'm most often asked is 'How do you know I can win these awards?'

My answer is always the same: 'How do you know that you can't?'

People tend to fall into one of two camps when it comes to awards and recognition. They're either super keen, excited and hungry for the process to start so they can accelerate faster and smarter than anyone else; or they hate it. Imposter syndrome rears its ugly head and makes them feel vulnerable, nervous and uncertain.

Ultimately, the common factor holding people back from even entering awards is fear. Fear of losing. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure. Ironically, when it

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comes to winning awards you actually have nothing to lose. If you didn't have the award to start with, it can't be taken away from you. Yes, you might have to pay something to enter a business awards competition, but the cost of an entry is often a fraction of the value of the PR and advertising you will get as a by-product of entering anyway (I explain how awards costs work in detail in Chapter Nine).

When it comes to winning awards,
you actually have nothing to lose.

Even if you enter, if you make it into the final you haven't lost anything; you will still find yourself or your business listed on the awards website, bumping up your search engine optimisation (SEO) and Google rankings; you will have great news to share with your customers, helping to raise your value, retain their business and create a perfect opportunity to showcase your brand/product/team across social media, and at the event to all the other finalists and winners and many of their contacts, too.

Nelson Mandela is often claimed to have said, 'I never lose. I either win or learn.'

Quite simply, you have everything to gain by taking the awards plunge. Many awards even give direct feedback on your entry so you can see where the benchmarking

ranked you against your competitors, and the judges' feedback will help you identify gaps to fill which will be very helpful in the growth of your business, and will raise your chances of winning the next time you enter the award.

Nelson Mandela is reputed to have said, 'I never lose. I either win or learn.'

I work with many businesses that use awards as an annual tool for measuring where they sit in their industry, giving them new insights to work with and goals to aim towards. The truth is, sometimes you need to take an objective look at your business and to be challenged in order to improve, which is what awards will do for your business. They will challenge you to work smarter, think harder, do more and be better. As ambitious entrepreneurs and inspirational leaders, don't we all need that challenge?

Yes, it takes courage to put yourself forward to be 'judged' but the momentum that recognition creates around your business will propel you forward faster than anything else. Think of awards as a vehicle to get you to your bigger goals; all you need to do now is be confident and trust in the process.

This chapter will help you prepare to win awards by overcoming awards imposter syndrome, growing

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your confidence and by shining the spotlight on your passion and purpose. It will also give you a deeper understanding of how awards judging works, why every point counts in the judging process and how you can make marginal gains to push you into the winning position.

Your awards confidence

Being ready to win awards is all about confidence at this stage. Too confident and you might leap into awards too quickly and find you were not quite ready to win. Not confident enough, and you might waste time submitting a weak entry, or even hesitate too long and miss out on an award you could have been in the running to win.

Imagine there's a sliding scale of awards confidence. If you had to enter an award right this second, before you've read this book, how confident are you that you would win?

As you work through this book it's important that you monitor and grow your confidence so that you launch your awards journey at the right point, which I would recommend is at a minimum confidence score of seven:

Awards Confidence Score

(Low) 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (High)

Who wins when you win?

If you don't believe in yourself, it will be extremely difficult to make the judges believe in you and crown you the winner. Therefore, to make sure you have left any awards imposter syndrome at the door and you are fully on board this awards bus, I have one question for you...

Who wins when you win?

Winning awards might feel all about you, and that's what triggers imposter syndrome. But it's not. You couldn't do what you do without the people around you. Being recognised for your achievements also recognises your family, your colleagues, your partners, mentors, suppliers and your community. Without them you wouldn't be here, and without you, quite possibly neither would they. Business is a team effort, even when you feel like it's all down to you. Recognition is about rewarding that 'team' by using your success as a platform to inspire, motivate and drive others to achieve more, too.

You have a responsibility to achieve the recognition that will empower you with more authority, credibility and resources to help others; it will help you make a huge positive impact in the world. Take the emphasis off awards being all about you by making your 'Who wins when you win?' pact now.

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Who will share in your success when you win? Will you celebrate by treating your team? Sharing your time with someone who could benefit from your expertise? Donating funds to a good cause or charity close to your heart? Volunteering in the community? Mentoring a young entrepreneur? Or something else?

Currently, every time one of our clients wins an award we make a donation to one of our charity partners who connects with our chosen sustainable development goals. Focus on the good that you can do for others and tell everyone who you will reward if you win. This way, you will enter the awards with a whole new drive to win.

Set out your 'Who wins when you win?' promise now and everyone will be a winner!

ACTIVITY: WHO WINS WHEN YOU WIN?

Do you have 'awards imposter syndrome'? List anything that puts you off entering awards in your Roadmap to Recognition awards planner here:
<https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-awards-book/>

Now list everything that winning awards could help you to achieve in that document.

Who wins when you win? Complete this promise and share it with your team:

When we win an award we will share our success by ...

Luck or judgement?

After years of directing, planning, writing, reading and judging award entries, presentations, feedback and criteria, I can tell you that actually winning the awards you enter comes down to around 95% strategy and 5% luck.

The bad news is that you can't control your luck. The good news is that you can control your strategy.

Luck comes into play every time you enter an award, and depends on who else is in it too. The reality is you are not competing with the whole world, you are only competing with whoever else happened to enter the same competition, in the same category, at the same time. At best, entering a niche or less popular award and category means you might have around ten companies to beat. At worst, in a very large, very popular award and category, you'll need to beat perhaps 50 or 100 competitors. Lots of awards will be somewhere between these extremes.

If you happen to enter a competition with the hottest business/entrepreneur/charity on the block at that particular time, luck might be against you and you might struggle to win. That's just down to your 5% luck factor (which can be good as well as bad). However, you can still gain a lot of benefit by even being a finalist in the competition, shouting about it on social media and aligning your brands publicly – so it's not all bad.

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The good news is, that leaves you with control over around 95% of your chances of success, but only if you enter awards strategically, like the most successful awards persona we have found, the Athlete.

Become an awards athlete

Imagine how Olympic athletes plan, prepare and train to win, to give themselves the best chance of success. Gold medal-winning team GB Paralympian Neil Fachie MBE is a perfect example. He has won twenty-seven medals at major championships to date, twenty of which were gold. This included gold and silver at the London 2012 Paralympic Games and gold at the Tokyo Paralympics 2021. As a full-time athlete and now co-founder of a business performance-coaching company, Neil often shares his thoughts on the similarities between sport and business.

One theory that I believe crosses over between sport and business is the famous 'marginal gains' philosophy developed by Sir David Brailsford. This has created outstanding results for many gold medallists like Neil and for sports legends like Sir Chris Hoy. 'Brailsford believed that, if it was possible to make a 1% improvement in a whole host of areas, the cumulative gains would end up being hugely significant.'¹¹ This means analysing absolutely everything that could impact upon performance, from the material of the clothing the athlete wears, to the comfort of the bed they sleep on which influences the amount of rest they get at night.

Everything that could make a marginal difference to performance and results is assessed and improved before they compete. On their own, these differences may seem meaningless, but put together they add up to give this cyclist the best advantage over their competitors, making a tiny points-of-a-second difference in their completion time, and giving them a better chance to win.

But it's not just vital to analyse your business as you work towards your first award, but also to reflect and review when you don't win, and use the feedback you get to become better and stronger for your next awards challenge. Remember that analogy – you either win or you learn. Neil recently spoke to me on my podcast, and here's how it works in action. Neil says:

'To be successful in the long term, you constantly have to evolve who you are. As an athlete, you can't train the same way for over a decade and expect to just keep improving, you have to make adjustments and changes otherwise things just become really stale and progression plateaus off to nothing.

'At the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio, we were world favourites to win but we came away with a silver. To me that was as good as a failure and I had a lot of fear that it was the beginning of the end of my career.

'I decided I would have one last attempt at gold, and we made a lot of changes to the way

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we approached training and what our focuses were. My performance started going through the roof and eighteen months later I competed in the World Championships, which happened to be back in Rio on the velodrome where I lost that gold medal, and then again two weeks later at the Commonwealth Games in Australia's Gold Coast.

'In the space of two weeks, I'd won two golds at both events, four golds in total and broken a world record in the process. All because I'd taken that step back, looked at the bigger picture and realised that I needed to evolve slightly the way I trained.

'And it's easier said than done. Because when you're in the thick of it, and you feel like you just need to work hard every single day, the time to just step back and just look at the bigger picture is not always there. However, the learning experiences I've had throughout these challenging times have always been the greatest and have paid dividends in my career. Just think about the few little tweaks you can make to create an advantage.'¹²

Every point counts

Contrary to popular belief, the difference between an award entry winning or losing is very often less than one point. Yes, that's right. Less. Than. One. Point.

The difference between an award entry winning or losing is very often less than one point.

Awards entries are often so good that there is rarely a gaping difference between the highest-scoring entry and the lowest-scoring one in an awards final. At the UK Customer Experience Awards recently, in one category I judged, the top four entries (gold, silver, bronze, nothing) were in a fierce competition to win, finishing only 0.2 to 0.4 points away from each other. That competition really was anyone's to win, and on another day maybe the people who left with gold, and the people who left with no award at all, would have been completely different. Fortunately, because of the robust judging process and feedback the finalists received, the competitors were able to see how they scored, read the judges' comments and learn what they need to do to win next time.

Neil Skehel, CEO of Awards International, the organisers behind some of the world's most popular and highly sought-after awards – such as the global Customer Experience Awards (CXA) programmes,¹³ and the Employee Experience Awards,¹⁴ among many others – explains how their judging works:

'Our role is to quality check the process. We can see every judge's score for every question on every panel. This enables us to look at patterns

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and ensure that the scoring is consistent, and, if it is not, we investigate, talk to the chair or the particular judge to ensure we understand. Since we have the scores, we can then provide those, alongside those of the other entrants in that category, and the judges' comments, as part of the feedback report. You see, every single point achieved and every marginal gain that can be made truly matters in these competitions.¹⁵

When I'm judging an award that is designed to recognise the best place to work, for example, I'll also be looking for marginal gains and the special elements that nudge the winner ahead. For example, I'll look beyond the direct impact of a project to understand the indirect impact too. Even just pushing ahead in one tiny area here could earn you the extra fraction of a point you need to win.

Summary

In this chapter, you have discovered the importance of becoming an 'Awards Athlete', why you need to be at your most confident before you enter awards and why every single point matters. You have found out how the 'aggregation of marginal gains' theory can give you a greater chance of winning, and why it's vital that you review and reflect on your performance at every award to improve at every stage. Now it's time to get strategic about which awards to enter.

THREE

Create Your Awards Strategy

Do you think your business is too small to win an award? No matter what the size or shape of your business, if you can prove your results and impact (and you only need one case study, or around one year of sales to do this), you can win awards. However, before you go throwing yourself into the first competition you find, if you want to increase your chances of winning, you need to start with an awards strategy. This strategy will become your Roadmap to Recognition, guiding you all the way to your winning destination.

Now, as an entrepreneur myself, I know that slowing down for a bit of planning and preparation may feel boring, and it definitely doesn't fit with our blue-sky-

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thinking entrepreneurial brains. If that's you, I get it and that's fine, off you go to carry on being creative... just please make sure someone else does this part for you so you don't reduce your own chances of winning by entering the wrong awards programmes, in the wrong categories, with the wrong stories. You will be able to use your awards strategy year after year. The more thought you put in now, the better the results will be at the end.

Step 1: Evaluate your performance

Awards cannot recognise or reward you for what you *haven't* achieved yet. They can only recognise you for what you *have* already achieved. In order to evaluate when you are ready to enter awards, you need to consider your *past*, your *present* and your *future* achievements. If you would like an award now but don't have what it takes to win it yet, don't worry; awards generally operate on an annual calendar, so if any awards are a bit aspirational at the moment, you can plan to enter next year.

Your past

Most business awards want to know about your commercial performance (turnover and profit) from the past one to two years. This should prove that what you are doing is working and it's growing your business. Past performance is the simplest way to compare

businesses, but it's not the only way, so don't worry if you've hit a financial bump, there are many awards you could win without showing any commercial figures and focusing only on projects and case studies.

Also, be aware that the higher up the awards ladder you climb, the more financial results the judges will want to see. For example, at the top of the awards ladder The Queen's Awards for Enterprise could ask for two, three or six years' complete financial results (full years' accounts) depending on the category you enter.

A client case study from the past one to two years will be perfectly capable of winning you a general industry award, but an older example might be too late for recognition. When considering your past performance, think about how many complete years of commercial results you have, what current case studies you can put forward, or when a stand-out project started and finished, and check the timeline requirements of the awards before you add them to your awards strategy for this year.

Your present

You can also enter awards for what is happening right now in your business, so long as you can show some proof of impact. This means you don't have to wait until next year to raise your profile, you can start using awards to strengthen your business relationships and sales instantly. I'll explain this in more detail in Chapter

WIN!

Four, but a quick example could be a digital agency who started a new website project just three months ago. As long as they can show some tangible results so far (eg increased website click-throughs and a tangible rise in conversions since launch) there is a chance of success.

Taking a look at where your business is at present can also highlight opportunities to strengthen current client relationships. Entering awards together with your clients can even motivate clients to renew a contract and help you win your next pitch to future clients.

However, you're unlikely to win an award for a project you have not yet delivered; that would need to wait until some impact can be shown, but it could be planned into the awards strategy a bit further down the line. In Part Two of this book you will discover our award-winning methodology, the Six Pillars of Awards Success, and the Impact pillar will help you to identify what is, or isn't, likely to win an award right now.

Your future

This is the most exciting part of your awards strategy. This is about your bigger personal and business goals and how you can use awards to shape your future.

Think about what you want to achieve in the next one to three years. What are your goals for the business and who do you need to get in front of to make them

happen? Do you want to raise some finance or investment? Do you want to increase your value before a sale? Do you want to work with a particular client or partner? Do you want to attract more new clients in a particular sector? Do you want to recruit more talented employees?

No matter what your business goals are, the right awards strategy can help you achieve them.

No matter what your business goals are, the right awards strategy can help you achieve them. Remember, though, you can't win awards purely based on predictions of what *might* happen. Entrepreneurs who have raised investment often learn this the hard way. Awards judges want to see proven results, so feel free to make educated and sensible forecasts, but think like a Dragon and be ready to prove how they will be met. No one wins on forecasts alone.

Summary of Step 1

Now that you understand the importance of your past, present and future performance in awards, evaluate your results and record them in your awards evaluation activity. Revisit this part of the process every year to reflect on, review and refine your awards strategy for the year ahead.

ACTIVITY: YOUR AWARDS EVALUATION

Answer these questions about your past, present and future performance and use them to shape your awards strategy and achieve all your business goals.

Past:

How much has your business grown?

- Year 1...%
- Year 2...%
- Year 3...%

List the best case studies or projects from the last two years that you could put forward:

- Case study 1
- Case study 2
- Case study 3

Present:

Who are you working with now that you could partner in an award entry?

Which of your projects is already showing an impact?

Which of your products/services are making sales and supporting your growth?

Future:

What are your business goals for the next year/next three years/next five years?

What are your personal goals for the next one/three/five years?

Who are your ideal clients or customers?

Who do you need to connect with to make your goals happen?

Step 2: Align awards with your goals

Across the world, there are many awards you could enter, but only a small selection of them will help you to achieve your specific business and personal goals.

In this section you will discover how to decide the awards to enter and prioritise them by the wider impact that you want them to achieve for you. There is no doubt that entering awards can create a lot of extra work in your business during the process, so it's extremely important to make sure that time is not wasted and the awards you choose for your strategy will continue to work hard for you for years to come.

I have listed ten top examples of popular awards goals below. Take these as your initial inspiration, then write out your own goals in the activity at the end of this section.

Note: it's tempting to think of all of these as important goals – and they are – but not all at once. If you have too many goals you won't know which to focus on first and will end up trying to target too many awards, which will result in awards fatigue. Prioritise your awards strategy by selecting your top three goals for this year.

WIN!

Ten top awards goals

1. *Raise your personal profile*

Winning awards will instantly raise your profile, increase the value of your personal brand and position you as a thought leader. If you would like to become a Key Person of Influence, attract personal opportunities and partnerships, be asked to give keynote speeches at events, be invited to be a podcast or webinar guest, attract media interviews and press more easily, be invited to join a professional board and so much more, having some credible awards behind you will accelerate your opportunities and increase your value.

Winning individual awards as an entrepreneur and leader will also fast-track your networking opportunities and put you in front of judges like Dragons and other respected business leaders without having to even enter a den. And if you're still not sure whether this should be a top goal, remember that it only takes one award to be named an 'award-winning entrepreneur and business leader' and once you've won that award, your title will stay with you forever.

2. *Grow your revenue*

One obvious goal is to help you grow your revenue. Ultimately, if you can increase your sales and grow your revenue, you'll have more money in the business to give your team more opportunities, develop more

products, enhance your service and use your time and resources to help others. In short, money makes the world go round, and awards can help you grow it.

3. *Strengthen client relationships*

Another very popular goal is to strengthen client relationships. This works particularly well if you offer a B2B service. If your client's brand is bigger than yours, you can leverage their success by joining together in awards (they generally accept if you offer to do all the work), while if they are smaller than you, you can create a case study that showcases the huge impact your work has had on their project. This is great for brand alignment and showcasing your impact on your clients to more potential partners.

4. *Target new clients*

You can use awards to target new clients in a specific sector. For example, imagine you run a digital agency that builds e-commerce websites. During the pandemic, you helped traditional retail shops to get online and sell their products. These clients have proven to be ideal for your business, and you can show what you have helped them to achieve. Now you would really like to become known for what you can do and attract more retail customers.

As well as entering awards for your digital marketing achievements, you could also enter e-commerce

WIN!

awards and awards in the retail industry as a service provider. This would put you firmly in front of your target audience of potential customers, both at the ceremony and on the awards website, social channels and media partner sites. It could also achieve goal 2 by giving recognition to both you and your customer, which will strengthen your relationship and help you win all your sales pitches – win-win!

5. Attract a wider range of customers

Demonstrating that you give your customers a great service through the awards you win can help you to attract an even wider range of customers and grow your business. It can also help you to attract the right employees who will want to make your customers happy.

Customer experience or service awards work well for both B2B and B2C businesses because, as customers ourselves, we know that we all want to feel valued, and the brand that makes us feel that way will keep our loyalty. If this is one of your goals, consider entering awards that specifically showcase your customer focus as they will help new customers trust you, and buy from you – faster than ever before.

6. Gain finance and investment

Awards can fast-track your ability to raise finance and investment. Credible awards will reassure potential future investors about your results, especially if they

know the awards you have won have been robustly judged. Many awards have key financial brands as sponsors, judges and partners, who are all scouting for the best businesses, leaders and innovative projects to work with after the event.

Some awards even offer direct finance and investment as a prize, or offer alternatives like a cash prize or to work with a mentor after the event. This can create a huge boost for your business and accelerate your journey faster than seeking out the opportunities by yourself. Fast-growth awards lists can all be good for showing how you compare to your competitors and reassuring investors that you are the one to back.

7. Reward, retain and recruit employees

Rewarding, retaining and recruiting employees is an important part of your business's success and a very popular awards goal for growing businesses. Awards can have a hugely positive and motivating impact on your culture and workforce and enhance your opportunities when it comes to attracting new talent.

In a recent Gallup survey, employees ranked 'public recognition or acknowledgement via an award, certificate or commendation' as the most memorable form of recognition they could receive, even higher than a pay rise, and thought it boosts productivity and retention.¹⁶ And I am often told that winning a 'best company to work for' or an 'employee experience' type of award raises the quality of applications in recruitment campaigns.

WIN!

In fact, the relationship between giving a great employee experience, a great customer experience, and winning awards is really close. If you are not achieving one of these, it's really hard to achieve the others. On a recent podcast, Ian Golding, chairman of the UK Customer Experience Awards, certified customer experience professional and author of *Customer What? The Honest and Practical Guide to Customer Experience*, told me:

'If you want to sustain your organisation, in the long term, the immediate priority is to ensure the stability of your employee experience. The most important thing right now is the way you're treating your people. Are you listening to them? Are you giving them a voice? Are you looking after them in the way that they need to be? Are you demonstrating empathy towards them, because if you even have an aspiration of being customer centric, and winning awards for being a great brand, it is not going to happen, until you have created an environment for your people, where they feel that they're at the centre of everything you do. That is without question the priority right now.'¹⁷

8. Expand overseas

Business expansion is another goal that often leads entrepreneurs to choose particular awards. If you're planning to expand overseas, or already have, awards in new territories can help to build your brand name and raise your profile in that region. Overseas awards

can also make your brand look and feel that it has a wider global reach, attracting more global clients. You don't need to be trading internationally to win an international award, so if you're not yet or you only occasionally work for international clients, think about awards and territories that could support your brand expansion.

9. Create a new product or service

Continuing to innovate in your business will help you to survive the test of time and stay ahead of your competitors. Continuous innovation often means you need to apply for grants, set up research projects and get experts on board to support your design and production processes or to help you win a tender. Winning awards for your innovations so far will enhance your ability to raise funding and support for your next big ideas. Look for government-led awards with funds connected if this is one of your three vital goals.

10. Start a movement

No matter what your passion or purpose, awards can help you start a movement or spread your message further. Whether you are focused on sustainability, the environment, diversity and inclusion, or charitable or social impact-led movements, awards can help you further your cause, get in front of influential figures, raise funds, change policies and make a positive impact on your community and the wider world.

WIN!

Overcoming a crisis with awards

One exceptional goal can come up at any time and should shoot straight to the top of your awards goals list: that is to overcome a crisis.

Many businesses experience bad news, difficult PR, unhappy reviews, competitor-bashing, financial crisis and more. This can even be a regular occurrence in some industries: par for the course. Have you ever noticed that certain industry sectors people love to publicly moan about, like rail companies and banks, are actually the most prolific entrants of awards? Why do you think that is?

Awards put them in control of their destiny. They empower the brand to drive the conversation and control what's being shared about them in communications. This counteracts complaints while reassuring customers, employees and stakeholders that they are not all bad. There are even awards specifically for complaints handling because anyone can make a mistake, and big businesses often make thousands, but it's the way that they are dealt with that matters and *that* can win awards.

I often work with large companies to create an awards strategy that focuses on their strengths and steers away from their weaknesses, with great success. For example, a few years ago I supported a well-known travel

company seeking to slow their customer desertion and settle shareholders' nerves by helping them win awards for the great way they were looking after their people (no financial information required for those awards).

Another client was in a legal war with a competitor about who was the first to create a particular product they both now sold. The competitor was constantly bashing them online, and no matter how much they tried to ignore the bashing, it was really getting the entrepreneur down because customers didn't know what to think, and confused or nervous customers naturally don't want to buy from you. It was getting nasty and casting a very negative shadow on an otherwise very successful business. On examination, I felt they had a very strong case to win a prestigious award based on the evidence we'd seen of all the great work they were doing, both in their business and in the community. It was a case of being patient while the competition played out, but eventually we were all delighted when they won the award. Funnily enough, their competitor piped down quite quickly once they put the award emblem all over their website.

Awards can help you to overcome a multitude of challenges and put you back in control of your business. However, when trying to do this, I have some clear rules, which you would do well to follow:

WIN!

1. **Be honest.** What is the actual problem and how has it arisen? Judges will Google you, and whether you like it or not, you are who Google says you are. What you say on social media can follow you around for a long time. If you are the victim of competitor-bashing, have you fuelled the fire and retaliated or have you kept your public communications above the line? If you've steered clear of any fights and retained your dignity there is no reason you can't just focus on all the great things you are doing, enter a host of awards and shift the focus to all your positive news, overcoming this issue.
2. **Know your biggest strengths and biggest weaknesses.** Let's say your shareholder value has plummeted due to an issue in the business and you need to get investor confidence back. This is possible by entering awards that focus only on your other strengths, like your products, customer service, social impact or company culture and do not examine financial performance.
3. **Don't be tempted to fake it until you make it.** If you know you have a weakness in the business the best thing you can do is either face it and talk about it right from the start of your award entry, or avoid it completely by carefully selecting awards to leave out of your strategy. Awards judges are business people too. We know that things don't always go to plan and we actually

love it when an entrepreneur tells us what's been challenging, and how they have innovated or pivoted to overcome that challenge; it might even score you points. However, if you try to pull the wool over the judges' eyes your story will unravel very quickly when they Google you, or when they pick your brains during your second-stage awards presentation. This is your reputation at stake, so please don't risk it.

Summary of Step 2

By aligning your awards goals to your business goals every year, you will create an awards strategy that not only works to your current strengths but also drives the business in the right direction.

ACTIVITY: YOUR AWARDS GOALS

Which awards goals appeal to you most right now? If you're not sure, trust your instincts and start with the three goals that immediately connected with you. Perhaps you have goals not even listed here. Whichever it is, you will see now how awards can directly connect to what you want to achieve in your business and fast-track your success as you complete the awards goals activity.

Highlight your three immediate goals and focus on awards in those areas for year one.

WIN!

My goals for the next year are to win awards that will help me to:

- Raise my personal profile
- Grow my revenue
- Strengthen client relationships
- Target new clients
- Attract a wider range of customers
- Gain finance and investment
- Reward, retain and recruit employees
- Expand overseas
- Create a new product or service
- Start a movement

Other...

Step 3: Run in the right race

Your awards strategy is now well under way. You have evaluated your awards potential and selected your top awards goals, now the next stop on your Roadmap to Recognition is to identify exactly which *categories* of award you have the best chance of winning. I call this ‘running in the right race’.

It is vital to pick both the right *awards* and the right *categories* if you really want to increase your chances of winning. To do this, let’s start with a simple sporting analogy. Imagine a competition called ‘The Best Runner

in the World Award'. Usain Bolt and Sir Mo Farah both want to enter the competition. Here are some of their credentials:

- Usain has an average running speed of 27 mph.¹⁸
- Mo has an average running speed of 17 mph.¹⁹

Who do you think will win the award?

Does their average speed make a difference in who will be crowned the 'best runner'? No, of course not. We haven't even considered whether distance is a requirement for this award or, if it is, for how long they could keep these speeds up. These are two very different athletes, with a common goal but very different skills and abilities. They have both been incredible at what they do, but Mo is a long-distance runner and Usain is a sprinter. Not only do they have different strengths and weaknesses, they know it and would never pit themselves against the other in a serious race. Usain is the fastest runner in the world, but only up to 200m; somewhere beyond this distance, Mo takes over.²⁰

Mo and Usain made sure they only competed in the races that highlighted their strengths, and that's exactly what you need to do too, if you want to win. It is vital that you know your strengths *and* weaknesses, know your USP, focus on *your* goals, understand the competition (but don't get distracted or put off by it) and run in the right race right from the outset of your awards journey.

WIN!

I judge hundreds of awards, all year long, and in my experience, many of the entries that *don't* win could have won a different award or category, if they had entered. These entrants never had a chance of winning the award they entered because they were in the wrong race. They either didn't fit the judging criteria well enough to have the best chance of success, or they didn't admit their weaknesses or communicate their strengths in a way that would win.

Are you really in the right race?

Sadly, often these people don't even realise that's why they lost, they just think they weren't good enough to win (or that they were robbed and it's all a fix). They don't know that they could have won another category instead, and just leave, feeling disappointed.

It's also very disappointing to me, as a judge, when I see a brilliant entrepreneur with a great business miss out because they just didn't understand the criteria and fit themselves perfectly to a category. That's why I ask you to put yourself in my shoes when you enter an award. Are you really in the right race?

Put yourself in the judges' shoes

A few awards personas – such as the Tourist and the Party Animal – are notorious for getting in the wrong

awards and wrong categories. They often skip the strategic part of the awards process and just rock up into random awards, whenever the feeling takes them. However, this is not a good plan. These people often end up choosing awards just because their friend/neighbour/partner entered that award once. They think: 'Oh that sounds good, I'll enter that too.'

But why? How do they know they are the right fit for that award or category? Do they have exactly the same business, customers, experiences and achievements as their friend/neighbour/partner? Do they both have exactly the same goals for their business?

No? Then they're probably not going to get the same results, are they?

As everyone's mum once said: 'If Tommy told you to jump off a cliff, would you do it?' No. The message here is stay in your own lane. Don't copy other people's awards (unless you make a proper assessment of why that award should be in your strategy) or you'll find it's your results that jump off a cliff.

The exceptions to the rule

There are two exceptions to my 'run in the right race' rule: competitor analysis and aspirational awards.

WIN!

Competitors' awards

The first is competitor analysis. Checking out the awards your competitors have won will give you some insight into their plans and projects, and help you understand the awards trends in your industry.

By investigating which awards are being given out, to whom and for what reason (which you can usually find in a company announcement or on the awards website) you'll have a better understanding of what you've got to beat. If you're feeling confident, entering someone else's race could actually be part of a wider strategy to expand your audience or make a brand alignment.

Aspirational awards

The second exception is to investigate which awards are being won by entrepreneurs and businesses that you admire and find aspirational. Take a look at the awards and categories they've won and examine the criteria to see how you could work towards achieving these in the future.

Awards criteria are a good indication of 'best practice' so aiming high and including some aspirational awards in your strategy will stretch you and drive you forwards. If you feel really daring you could even add these to your strategy for this year to start the ball rolling, with the understanding that if you're not quite ready you might not win, but you could still get

a huge amount of benefit out of just being in the race, especially if you become a finalist.

Choose your category

Your awards category is the topic and focus of your award entry. It is the category that empowers you to make your strongest argument for winning against all other competitors. And to give you the best chance of winning, it should be the topic that is the closest fit to your awards USP, which we discovered in Chapter One.

There are hundreds of categories available across awards programmes, and they can be sliced and diced in many different ways: for example, to enter as an entrepreneur, a business, or in partnership with a client. Many of these are also filtered by industry and/or region. I go into detail with examples of many awards in later chapters, but for now here are some example categories:

1. Entrepreneur of the Year
2. Small Business of the Year
3. Innovation
4. Customer Experience
5. Agency of the Year
6. Women in Business

WIN!

7. Coach of the Year
8. Business Enabler
9. Growing Business
10. Start-Up/Scale-Up of the Year

There are thousands more categories...

In 'awards' lingo, we call the overarching award name or industry type the 'vertical' and the category the 'discipline'. Understanding this helps you to work out whether you will be competing against others like you in your industry (apples vs apple) or completely different businesses (apples vs pears). For example, a digital agency could enter The International Digital Experience Awards (*vertical*) in the 'Best Digital Marketing Campaign' category (*discipline*).

This competition compares apples to apples *and* apples to pears. For example, entrants could include:

- A marketing agency that has created a digital marketing campaign for a client, eg *Joe Bloggs's Digital Marketing Agency*
- A marketing agency that has created a digital marketing campaign for a client and enters in partnership with them, eg *Big New Bank with Joe Bloggs's Digital Agency*

- A brand in any sector that has a digital marketing campaign, eg *Big New Bank's fabulous marketing campaign*

Partnering for success

You can get a lot of benefits by entering an award together with your client if they agree. This way, you both get recognition, you both get to shout about your award-winning work and the judges can see both parties' perspectives. But even if they don't agree to enter with you, you can still use their case study in your own entry so long as you gain permission from the client, or even anonymise if they do not offer it.

Summary of Step 3

Ultimately, picking a winning category is about analysing the USP for every project, understanding what impact you can show, checking who is willing to be involved, then, and only then, deciding which is the strongest race for you in each and every competition. By following the advice in this chapter you will vastly raise your chances of winning, and enjoy the process so much more, than if you enter the wrong race and find yourself outpaced by your competitors.

WIN!

Summary

Congratulations! You have completed Part One of the book and your Roadmap to Recognition is now well under way:

- You have analysed your awards persona.
- You have identified your awards USP.
- You have made a solid promise to share your success when you win.
- You have chosen three business goals to achieve with awards this year.
- You have evaluated your past, present and future performance.
- You have recorded projects and case studies that you could enter for awards.
- You have even discovered which awards races you could win.

ACTIVITY: GENERATE YOUR AWARDS LIST

To bring all your hard work together you can now enjoy creating your very own awards list by using our exclusive Awards Generator.

The Awards Generator is a tool that I have developed using my awards experience and insights. It is not an exhaustive, and exhausting, list of awards, it is a bite-size, actionable starting point for getting your awards strategy underway.

The Awards Generator will analyse your existing achievements and assess your wider goals, delivering a taster list of awards that will help you to achieve your goals and tell you your awards persona. And remember, the awards you could win will change with your current goals and achievements, so you can keep coming back to the generator to test yourself and generate a new list any time you like.

Please visit <https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-awards-book> to generate your own awards list.

Once you have done so, make a note in your Roadmap to Recognition of the awards suggested. Part Two of this book will help you to self-evaluate your individual strengths so that you can choose exactly which categories of these awards to focus on now, and what type of content you should include in your entries to help you win.

PART TWO
THE SIX PILLARS OF
AWARDS SUCCESS

FOUR

Get Awards-Ready

Now you have completed Part One of this book, your Roadmap to Recognition is well under way and you're on the way to achieving awards success. Now it's time to navigate the twists and turns of awards criteria and content to reveal exactly what the judges are looking for in your award entries and presentations.

In Part Two, we will take a deep dive into your story, your business strengths, your people, your products, your projects and initiatives as we visit the Six Pillars of Awards Success – these are the six key, predictable, winning factors that I have identified over the years as having the biggest impact on awards outcomes. They are all essential features on your roadmap.

WIN!

The six pillars are: *Impact, Inspire, Influence, Innovate, Insight* and *Improve*. Each pillar is explained in full in the following chapters along with case studies, winning examples and personal stories. As you work through each chapter, you will evaluate and record your achievements, and at the end, you can generate your own Six Pillars of Awards Success feedback report to ensure you discover your individual ‘awards-ready’ score.

But beware: it would be easy to speed past the pillars that feel more challenging, but this won’t help you reach your destination. To win an award you need to be honest in your self-evaluation and enjoy discovering your current strengths and revealing the weaknesses you need to build on to achieve your goals. The more you act on the advice in here, the wider the variety of awards you will be able to win.

Are you ready? OK, let’s go...

Pillar 1 – Impact

Definition: ‘Have a strong effect on someone or something.’²¹

I can’t deny it, Impact is one of my favourite pillars, and it’s also one of the most important to understand and get right if you want to win.

The golden rule is the bigger the impact, the bigger the chances of winning. The impact you and your business have on your customers, colleagues, community, industry, town, city or region makes a huge difference to which awards you can win. Unfortunately, impact is also very often misunderstood or left unevidenced in awards, which leads to failure, so understanding how it can be measured, evidenced and presented will be transformative for your awards results.

To start thinking about the impact you have, read the case study below, then answer the questions in the activity at the end of this section.

CASE STUDY: CLOSE BROTHERS RETAIL FINANCE

In 2016, Close Brothers Merchant Bank branched out with a new start-up business in the group, Close Brothers Retail Finance (CBRF). The business started to gain momentum, but they recognised the need to raise their profile and stand out as a new contender in an established and crowded marketplace. They needed a strong awards strategy to shine a light on their brand and support them to reach new customers and partners. What happened over the next two years was transformational for the brand.

First, let me explain what the brand offered. Retail finance allows retailers to provide payment plans (eg interest-free credit) to their customers, via a bank or financial provider putting funds into their pot first. Therefore, a consumer buying one of the retailer's

WIN!

products doesn't have to pay the full cost up front but can spread their payments, while the retailer can bear the cost and risk of providing credit for a small and predictable fee.

Getting to the heart of the business

It was clear to me from the first meeting with CEO Alex Marsh and his team at CBRF that they were working hard to look after customers, and that they were providing services that went above and beyond the call of duty. However, they were so focused and close to their work they didn't see how special their service was, and in turn, what their business and awards USP could be. Like many people, they were giving all the kudos to the technology behind the product, and not really focusing on the collective impact they were having on customers.

At the time, they were working with major chain retailers and independent shops on the high street. To understand their impact, first I needed to learn about their customers. I asked for one example of a small retailer they were working with and they told me about 'Nigel', who had a shop on the outskirts of Alton selling white goods...fridges, washing machines, freezers, that kind of thing. They explained the problem small businesspeople like Nigel were having.

Customers walked into Nigel's shop, looked at his fridges and freezers, often asked his expert advice gleaned over twenty years in the industry and then said 'We'd like to buy it, but we don't have the money now; can we get an interest-free deal?' Before CBRF came along, Nigel had to say No.

So what did that customer do? They got on their phone (often still in his shop and having looked at his products) and searched for the same product at 0% finance. And that was that. No sale for Nigel and another sale for his big-brand competitor, whose showroom they hadn't even visited. It was destroying Nigel's business and his dreams.

Solving the customer's problem

Alex and his team saw the difficulty this caused for Nigel and all other small businesses and entrepreneurs and set out to help. First, they set up finance provisions and trained Nigel and his team to confidently offer interest-free credit deals to his customers. Then they supported him to grow his business online (eg by understanding how his Google ranking worked) and improved the SEO on his website so anyone looking online could see that he offered these great finance deals, too. Nigel's problem was solved almost overnight, and his dreams were alive once again.

Over the next year, Nigel's sales grew so much that he even expanded with another shop. The impact of this finance product and service on Nigel and his business was transformational. This was one of hundreds of retailers that CBRF was doing the same for. We investigated their whole customer base and multiplied up their customers' growth results (quantitative evidence), gathered customer feedback and stories (qualitative evidence) and saw the huge, wide impact they were having on the economy and on entrepreneurs across the UK.

WIN!

Define the impact to develop the awards USP

The CBRF awards story changed from being about technology and innovation, to being about a defined impact on the customer as a trusted business advisor. The team and their product were supporting entrepreneurs to grow and enabling the Great British High Street to thrive once again. They were truly changing lives for the better through their product and service. *This* was their true impact. *This* is what made them awards-ready. And *this* is what changed their future.

Within just a few months, CBRF started to see the benefits of their hard work in the awards they won, which included Best New Product at the UK Customer Experience Awards, Best New Business Launch at the Corporate Entrepreneur Awards and Finance Provider of the Year at the British Small Business Awards. This was just the start of their awards journey; next they became back-to-back winners at the Lloyds Bank National Business Awards, winning Business Enabler of the Year and the Customer Focus Award – proving just how much they had enabled and empowered other businesses to grow since their launch.

All eyes on the award-winning retail finance provider

Such was the success of our awards strategy, and their impact, that CBRF became the talking point of their sector, as their raised profile attracted a lot of attention. As a result, in 2018 they were acquired by Klarna, the Swedish fintech and payment provider, and are now flourishing together.

Today, the former Managing Director of CBRF, Alex Marsh, has become the Head of Klarna UK. This is what he had to say about what winning awards did for the business:

‘We had the benefit and pleasure of enlisting Donna’s expertise at CBRF in securing a number of major industry awards. Donna’s unique skill-set and naturally engaging advice have transcended these award wins, ultimately helping us to identify and shape the USPs of business, thus influencing our strategy, proposition and marketing. We are hugely grateful for Donna’s partnership with our business and the life-changing impact of supercharging team morale, retailer awareness of our business and bottom-line growth.’

To this day, Alex says he wouldn’t be where he is now if it wasn’t for the way awards showcased CBRF’s true impact.

Summary of Pillar 1: Impact

What’s your true impact? I want you to really dig deep and think about the real impact you are having on your customers (or on your colleagues, community, or something else), and how you can use it to strengthen your ability to win awards. If you don’t have quantitative evidence yet, think about creating a survey to ask people what’s improved since they worked with you, or gathering Google or Trustpilot reviews with star ratings. Answer the questions below to start

WIN!

evaluating your biggest impact and think about how you can prove it with both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

ACTIVITY: IMPACT

Who are your customers?

What problem are you *really* solving for them? Dig deep!

Draft one case study or example that shows your impact qualitatively (with a customer testimonial to prove it).

What data or metrics could you use to prove your impact quantitatively? (eg customer impact survey results, growth results, reach results etc).

If you multiply the impact you have had on one customer by all of your customers over time, what bigger social impact have you created?

Make notes in your Roadmap to Recognition, using these headings as a guide.

Pillar 2 – Influence

Definition: 'The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.'²²

It has been proved time and time again that the more influence you have on your industry, your customers,

your employees and your community, the more easily you will be able to prove your worth and win business awards. Today this could be called thought leadership, but in simple awards terms, it's influencing someone, somewhere, for the better.

In any award that you enter, the judges will be looking to see how your influence is making a difference to others. That might sound like a big responsibility, but the good news is you don't even have to be in the room with people nowadays to have an influence. If you've written a book, if you've published a podcast, if you're hosting webinars, writing white papers and sharing valuable content out in the world, you're being a thought leader and having an influence even when you're not physically present.

In any award that you enter, the
judges will be looking to see
how your influence is making
a difference to others.

If you're not doing any of the above, that's OK too, but if you want to start winning awards, now is the time to start. Remember, you are who Google says you are, and your personal brand is heavily linked to the influence you have on others. But don't panic, I'm not asking you to be the next Kim Kardashian, I am simply asking you to have an awareness of the influence that you have, or

WIN!

that you could have, and what a difference this could make to others, as well as to your own profile: 'A single spark can start a prairie fire.'²³

Sometimes we can have an influence and not realise it at the time. It's only when we look back and reflect that it becomes apparent that our words or actions had an effect on someone or something. Let me give you a personal example, during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. When lockdown was announced in March 2020, there was naturally a lot of worry among awards organisers. Ceremonies had to be cancelled, sponsors pulled out of events, hotels pulled in deposits and for a while, it was utterly frantic. My heart went out to all the amazing awards organisers we support and partner with.

At our end of the awards industry, it wasn't quite so hard; we could carry on creating awards strategies, writing entries and keeping clients on course. It was easy to pivot to online working for us – we'd been using Zoom for meetings and client preparation for years – and both our writing and operations teams could work from home. However, for the people running awards events it was much harder. They wondered whether they could run their live events, and when, and many didn't know what to do. Would anyone still want to enter awards? Should they shut them down for a while? Should they try to pivot online and keep them running? So many unknowns were hard to manage while also feeling fear of the virus, maintaining their people's

wellbeing and navigating looking after children who were off school, among many other hurdles.

A single spark can start a prairie fire.

I contacted every organiser we support to see how we could help, and the response that I kept getting was ‘I don’t know whether we should keep the awards open or not. Donna, what’s everyone else doing?’ I heard this from people at every size and type of award, right across the world. Of course, I didn’t know the answer any more than the next person, but I was there to talk to and bounce ideas off. I had a deep intuition that we could get through it if we pulled together, and an even deeper intuition that awards now needed to adapt, fast. Almost overnight, life as we knew it had changed. My survival instinct kicked in on their behalf.

Knowing that award entries are either sent in by email or via an online platform, I said, ‘Right, you’ve already got half the process online, so you’re already halfway there. From what we are seeing, people still want to enter awards; none of our clients have cancelled, and in fact, we are busier than ever. You just need to get the judging and the ceremony online and you’ve got a complete show.’ Then I publicly shared my feelings on how the industry needed to change what it was recognising people and businesses for. It could no longer be about growth, it must be about people looking after people, and about survival – in life and in business. It was

WIN!

more important than ever to motivate, recognise and reward the people and the teams who were overcoming huge challenges to get their businesses through the pandemic. We needed to celebrate the entrepreneurs who were innovating because they'd lost their jobs and were having to start something new. We needed to celebrate the incredible COVID Champions and Heroes of the pandemic.

Many of the biggest and most prestigious awards agreed and started adding COVID Champion and Pandemic Pivot categories to their awards. Then the whole industry followed, and so did the entrants. I was so happy to discover, over the next six months (the toughest many of us had ever known), that the awards programmes that had adapted and adopted new practices and approaches had more entries than in any previous year. The shift in focus from 'performance' to 'people' during the pandemic gave businesses the opportunity they needed to recognise and celebrate each other, and that gave them the motivation, morale lift and drive to keep going. I was delighted to judge these new categories and the entries and presentations were absolutely stunning. Here are a few examples of pandemic award winners:

The Learning Awards: Run by the Learning & Performance Institute (LPI). We judged entries from key workers, from supermarkets, schools and hospitals whose HR and Learning & Development teams had created the incredible online learning programs to get their people fully trained and ready to jump into ac-

tion to help us, the public. I'll be honest, I had tears of pride and emotion all the way through those awards presentations. Every single entrant was amazing, and our COVID Champion that day was Guys & St Thomas' Hospital, which had had to train the nurses and employees wherever they were – on the bus, on the hospital wards and many other places.

The UK Customer Experience Awards: Run by Awards International. These are aspirational awards for businesses who want to demonstrate how well they look after their customers. I judged the 'Customer Experience during the Crisis' category and again beamed with pride as I listened to presentations from wonderful teams who had created outstanding ways to support their customers and their people during 2020. Our winners that day were Aspen Healthcare, who had moved mountains to support both patients and employees throughout the crisis. Noleen Turner, director of marketing at Aspen Healthcare, explained what having this opportunity to be recognised for the team's work during the pandemic meant to them all:

'This award means more to us than any other award we have won. It's been a crazy year and I want us to celebrate this award with our staff and recognise all their hard work with them. Everything we do at Aspen is about caring for our patients and customers, but we also care about our team and we couldn't have got through the last year without them.'

WIN!

Throughout 2020 and ever since, awards have been celebrating the heroes of the pandemic, changing criteria to recognise business survival and not just growth, and focusing on social impact more than ever. Thousands of people who deserved recognition for their efforts have been thanked and lifted up, thanks to awards programmes who recognised their achievements.

Summary of Pillar 2: Influence

Sometimes it just takes an idea, a proposition, a new way of looking at things, or a challenge to the status quo to start the conversation that snowballs into an industry change. Think back over the past year. Has your stance on a subject influenced others? If so, this is not about saying ‘I wrote a blog’, it’s about saying ‘I changed my industry’.

Perhaps your influence has been on the way things work in your community, or in an area of life you are passionate about. Whatever effect you have had, your influence matters, so don’t let it go unnoticed. Provide evidence of your influence with feedback from others and metrics (see Step 1) or even social media shares that prove the changes you have made have influenced your audience. This could be the vital pillar to your application; this could get you to the winning post, so don’t let it pass you by because you are too humble to acknowledge your achievements.

ACTIVITY: INFLUENCE

What influence are you having on your industry, employees, customers or community? Reflect on recent years to identify your influential stories and the impact you have on others, and list evidence you have to prove it in your Roadmap to Recognition.

List any awards you have won, reached the finals in, or been nominated for ...

Write down the title of the article/blog you have written that has proved most popular, and the responses you have had to it.

How do you share your expertise? List your book/podcast/webinar/research/speaking events etc.

Which social channels are you most influential on and what are your follower numbers?

List your further qualifications and any leadership or advisory position (paid and voluntary).

List your professional qualifications or what makes you an authority in your field.

List any feedback you have received or someone you could ask for quotes to use as evidence of your influence.

FIVE

Change The Game

Pillar 3 – Inspire

Definition: 'Fill someone with the urge or ability to do or feel something...' ¹²⁴

The most successful and prolific award winners are truly inspirational. Whether they are an entrepreneur, leader or part of a team, they have passion and purpose, and they motivate others to achieve their goals. I know, because when I'm judging an award I am waiting to be inspired by the entrant. I want to feel moved. I want them to ignite a spark in me that drives me to select them as my winner.

We're all inspired by different people throughout our lives. Over the years, different people have inspired me in different ways. For example, I'm a big music fan and I have a pretty eclectic taste; as a result, my fashion and beauty choices over the years have also been inspired

WIN!

by music. I went from wearing ra-ra skirts and being a bit Bucks Fizz as a child and Doc Martens and bandanas in my Guns N' Roses stage to a varying selection of haircuts and questionable wardrobe choices inspired by Madonna, the Spice Girls and All Saints as I moved through my teens into my twenties.

The most successful and prolific award winners are truly inspirational. They have passion, purpose, and they motivate others to achieve their goals.

I think I've finally grown out of that now, but I'm still so inspired by music that I even have a 'Donna's winners' Spotify playlist I have been known to play at events to get the audience into a winning mindset.

Who tells your story?

My most recent inspiration is still encapsulated in music, but this time it's more about the story than the fashion. I first watched *Hamilton* the musical in 2020 and I was fascinated by the story, the writing, the lyrics and the music. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the incredible creator, has a way with words and music that is simply genius. One song in particular, 'Who lives, who dies, who tells your story',²⁵ inspired me to see how sharing my own story could help others – something I'd never done before.

From that one seed of inspiration, I explored my own story and allowed myself to connect more deeply with my purpose and my goals. That, in turn, inspired me to think about how I could use my business to help others reach their potential, and I formed a charitable partnership with The Girls' Network to see how we could support them to help young girls who, like me many years ago, felt lost or uncertain of their future.²⁶ I am delighted that they are now one of our charity partners for our Who Wins When You Win? campaign, which means every time our clients win an award we share their success by making a donation to charity. This doesn't just inspire me to work hard, it inspires my whole team to give their all to every entry they write and presentation they create, knowing that when it wins it will also contribute to changing a life.

What has this got to do with awards? As I said in Chapter One, your biggest USP is you, and although you don't need to tell the judges your whole life story (unless it's particularly relevant to the award) they want to understand your purpose and they are waiting to be inspired. It's worth taking the time to explore and understand what inspired you to do what you are doing now, and how you inspire others so that you can communicate this effectively in your award entries.

Who has inspired you?

Was it a legendary business leader, like Richard Branson or Anita Roddick? A parent, a teacher, one of your

WIN!

children? It could be a colleague or a client. It could be an author, a celebrity, an actor or a musician. It might even be a character – Harry Potter or Princess Leia, anyone? It could even be a particular life event that inspired you to make a change or take action, or possibly even to start your business. It doesn't matter who has inspired you, or what the event was, just think about *why* you were inspired. What is it that connected with your heart, and how are you demonstrating that in your purpose now?

Who have you inspired?

This is a tough one for us naturally humble human beings. It's hard to put yourself in those big shoes and claim to be an inspiration to someone else, but the truth is there are people you have inspired, too. Perhaps someone was a little bit stuck somewhere and you inspired them to move forward? Or maybe you have a story that could inspire someone in the future?

Summary of Pillar 3: Inspire

If you can connect the dots between what's inspired you in life, and how you inspire others, you will have another incredibly powerful element that will make your award entries stand out above all others, and you will inspire the judges to choose you to win. Complete the *Inspire* activity to strengthen your awards story even more.

ACTIVITY: INSPIRE

The more you are doing to inspire others, and the more you can connect with what's inspired you, the better you will be able to communicate your purpose and inspire the judges to choose you to win.

- Who has personally or professionally inspired you?
- What do you find inspirational about them?
- What did they inspire you to do, and how does this connect to your purpose?
- Who have you inspired?
- What did you inspire them to do?
- Who would you like to inspire in the future?
- What would you like to inspire them to do?

Record your stories in your Roadmap to Recognition.

Pillar 4 – Innovate

Definition: 'Make changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods, ideas or products.'²⁷

'Innovation' is possibly the word most often used in award entries, and the most overused and misunderstood. When I'm judging awards entries, I often read 'We innovated X' and I think, 'Well that already exists so how have you innovated it?' What the entrant

WIN!

actually means is that they are doing something a bit differently; but proving that it is truly innovative is a different matter.

There are all sorts of different technical theories and hierarchies that can be used to define ‘innovation’ but, to simplify a complex subject, in this pillar I’m going to focus on what innovation commonly means, just for the purpose of awards. By working through this pillar you will be able to identify innovations in your business and utilise them to strengthen your ability to win awards.

What is an innovation?

There are three main types of innovation we come across in awards, and I will give you examples of each type and case studies of how these have won awards as you work through this pillar. As your business evolves, revisit this pillar and re-evaluate your innovations – you may be surprised how quickly they change.

Innovation purpose: product, service, business model

From an awards perspective, the purpose of your innovation will be to form a product, or a service, or a business model. It could be all three, or just one or two. Mind-blowing, I know. The fact is, the purpose behind one innovation often leads to the creation of another, and within the process of creating your product, service

or business model there could be even more hidden innovations making it work.

Innovation types: disruptive, continuous, adoptive

Ultimately your business will be driven by one or more of three types of innovation: *disruptive*, *continuous* or *adoptive*. Below I explain and give an example of different types and purposes of innovations. As you read through, think about any similarities you can see in your own business; you may have made an innovation that you haven't identified yet or that could become your winning story.

1. Disruptive innovation

A disruptive innovation is something that comes along and changes a market. It can even create a whole new market. To understand this one, think about the film industry and how you watch your favourite movies.

In the 1980s and '90s we watched films by going to video rental shops, hiring a video-cassette tape for forty-eight hours, taking it home and watching it on repeat to get our money's worth, then returning it. Then, around 1997, DVDs came along and disrupted the home movie industry. Over the next decade, we said goodbye to big black tapes from Blockbuster, and hello to shiny round discs from Amazon. The market had been disrupted by an innovative way to watch films.

WIN!

A few years later along came Netflix,²⁸ which moved swiftly from being a subscriber service that sent out DVDs in the mail to a streaming service that allowed users to watch films and series online. In 2007, the film industry was disrupted again and a whole new marketplace was created. We didn't say goodbye to getting our films from Amazon, they just added streaming to their Prime service, and the industry grew. As we speak, Today, Hulu, Disney and many more providers offer TV and film streaming services on every device, and our children don't believe we once had to go to the shop to get a film to watch!

Uber is another great example of a disruptive innovation. We already had the concept of a taxi at the end of a telephone, but in 2009 Uber changed all that with its tech-based taxi ordering, tracking and payment system. It disrupted the industry and now has competitors itself, as a whole new market for the taxi business model has opened up.

On top of that, the disruptive taxi service is now behind another disruptive industry change with the likes of Uber Eats. Alongside Deliveroo and Just Eat, this disruptive business model innovation took an existing concept – takeaway food delivered to your home by independent food outlets – and turned it into a new business model and an industry all of its own.

These examples are all big names, but don't be intimidated; some of the most disruptive innovations today

are being made by small businesses and individual entrepreneurs. Therefore, it's possible that you have created a disruptive innovation or a way of selling a product that has changed the marketplace, you just haven't focused on that change yet.

A good example of this is the leading UK bathroom products company, HiB. From humble origins selling mirrors from his North London home in 1990, HiB chair Warren Ginsberg spent almost thirty years growing a thriving family business while challenging the status quo of the bathroom industry. In 2014, HiB became the first bathroom products manufacturer to embed colour temperature-changing technology into bathroom mirrors, pioneering an entire subindustry. In 2020 we were delighted to support HiB in their nomination for a Queen's Awards for Enterprise in Innovation, and even more delighted when they won.

Robert Ginsberg, Managing Director, told me how important their innovative approach is to the whole business, saying:

'We are delighted to have won The Queen's Awards for Enterprise in the Innovation category. Product development is at the heart of our business vision and our design teams continuously drive the company forward with new, inventive concepts to benefit the wider community.'

WIN!

If your product, service or business model has created an entirely new way of doing things, or if you see other businesses copying and competing with you (or expect this), then you know you've got a truly disruptive innovation.

2. Continuous innovation

Continuous innovation is taking a product or service or a business model and adding a new function to it, helping it evolve into something new. For this example, I want you to think about how your car works.

In the 1990s cars only ran on petrol or diesel – until General Motors launched the first electric car,²⁹ which proved that a different power source could be used. Then Tesla went further and created an electric car with the longest range yet. Suddenly, using electricity to power a car instead of petrol or diesel became a viable option for drivers.³⁰ Now, that's what you call continuous innovation: taking an existing product, the car, and adding a new process or function to make it better or change its purpose or performance.

Of course, electric vehicles have disrupted the marketplace as well. You could also call this a disruptive innovation – it would depend on whether you were one of the first to market like GM, or a follower who is also continually innovating in developing their own products, like Nissan and other electric vehicle manufacturers.

Another example of continuous innovation can be seen in your TV and mobile phone. Every year, new features and functions are added to make the latest and best new device. TVs and telephones get smaller, smarter and more powerful every year as Apple, Samsung and all the electronics brands make new and iterative changes to their products to compete in their fierce markets and give us innovative ways of watching, calling, communicating, photographing and recording etc. This is a good example of a business that is taking something that already exists and continuously innovating to improve it.

Since 2020 there has been a huge amount of innovation because we have had to innovate across all businesses and industries to digitally transform our products, services and business models so we could pivot online during the pandemic. For me, that meant moving my Awards Accelerator from a face-to-face training programme in a conference room to being an online digital training programme. For you, that may have been something similar, or something completely different.

If you have continuously innovated your products or processes, this could be a great strength in your award entries. If you have developed something proprietary to make that happen (eg new software, an app, a training process etc) then you have an even stronger innovation, as it is unique to you.

WIN!

3. *Adoptive innovation*

An adoptive innovation is taking something that exists and giving it a new use. For this example, I want you to think about what has been possibly the biggest and fastest adoptive innovation of our time, the coronavirus vaccine.

The vaccine was created, tested and rolled out so quickly because it was based on existing vaccine technology. As explained in the *STAT* online journal, ‘when Chinese scientists published the SARS-CoV-2 genome sequence on the internet on Jan[uary] 10, 2020, multiple vaccine programs were started within days because existing vaccine design methods could be repurposed.’³¹ The technology behind the vaccine was already in existence, but some incredible scientists adopted it, adapted it and it got a new use in the fight to protect us from a new virus. As new strains of the virus come into play, it will be continuously developed to meet the newest need.

Other adoptive innovations could be as simple as taking something from one industry and applying it to another. For example, during the pandemic, when lockdowns and virus risks meant that personal trainers, gyms and boot camps had to close, gym owners and fitness professionals had to adopt new digital training practices and take their previously face-to-face training online. The technology was already in existence, as was fitness training, but the adoption of a new delivery method was game-changing.

As I said, none of these types of innovation are mutually exclusive, they often interconnect and move from being one type to another. For most awards you won't need to document in detail the type of innovation you have made, but if you want to win an award for innovation it is important that you understand and can communicate exactly what your innovation actually is.

Product, service or business model innovation?

It can be easier to identify an innovative product or service than it is to identify an innovative business model. However, if the methodology that sits behind your business model drives your performance and is innovative (new and unique), you could win an award based on the impact of that alone.

I recently supported a large business to win a significant award for a business model that was all based on an acronym. They wanted to improve their customer journey so they created a methodology and used an acronym to spell it out (let's say it was HAPPY). Using each letter of the word to lead the journey, they created employee training programmes, new processes, new systems and offered new products and services that all linked directly back to the HAPPY method. This simple little word became the absolute cornerstone of their business model over the next few years and we were able to demonstrate how it had created outstanding impact on the business by improving their customer

WIN!

journey, and in turn the commercial success of their business by creating exceptional growth – winning them one of the most prestigious awards in the world for their work.

Investing in innovation

Investing in innovation is certainly worthwhile, but getting investment is not enough of an achievement on its own to make you awards-ready. Judges need to see the real, tangible results your innovation has created to know that it is worth being recognised at this stage, otherwise, it could be yet another good idea that turns into a money pit.

Think like a Dragon

When it comes to investing in an innovation, imagine you are in the Den, and think like a Dragon. How can you prove the investment has been worthwhile? If your innovation is still at the concept stage, or has not yet generated sales, you'll get the best awards results if you wait until you have some impact to show – like revenue and customer feedback – before you enter it into awards. Even if you just have a few months' worth of impact, it's better to be able to show something than nothing, to prove your innovation is more than just a good idea.

Summary of Pillar 4: Innovate

No matter which type of innovation you have created, the same principle applies to every award you enter. Put yourself in the judges' shoes – it's not about being overly technical or filling your award entries with jargon and tech talk. This is all about clarity. Take some time to understand what type of innovation you have and it will be easier for you to communicate its impact, and for the judges to understand what you have achieved – only then are you ready to be recognised with an award.

ACTIVITY: INNOVATE

Do you have an innovative methodology or business model?

Do you have an innovative product?

Do you have an innovative service?

Have you protected your innovation's intellectual property with a trademark or patent (where possible)?

Who are your closest competitors? If they are doing something similar to you, how can you prove that your product/service/method was first to market or is unique to you?

Has your innovation proved its commercial success by growing your sales?

Has anyone invested in your innovation? If yes, when do you expect to have fully recouped the investment?

SIX

Go Back To Go Forward

Pillar 5 – Insight

Definition: 'The capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of someone or something.'³²

Insight can be an extremely powerful tool in your awards story, yet this is one pillar that often gets forgotten. It's the extra level of insight that helps the judges to understand how and why you do what you do. It helps them to understand how and why you run your service the way you do, or develop your products the way you do, and how you know that your employees, customers or community benefit from the way you do things. Your insight demonstrates why your business works, so by working through this pillar and completing the activity in detail, your insight will also help make you win over the judges.

WIN!

To give you an example of how your insight can help you tell your story and win awards, let me take you back to my first business. In this story, look out for the industry insights I had that underpinned the type of business I developed, and the personal insights into my character that underpin the way I do business now.

Filling a gap

At the age of sixteen, I started working as a dental nurse. It wasn't in my grand plan, but it became the starting point for a business I never knew I'd build. This was back in the early 1990s, and the way dental practices worked hadn't changed for many years; the dental nurse prepared everything for the dentist before, during and after each patient's appointment. Often, nurses also worked on reception, taking calls and booking appointments as they juggled their duties. They were, and still are, an essential part of the process, and you will often hear a dentist say they can't work without their nurse. But, back then, dentists tended to have only one full-time nurse (or a couple of part-time nurses) per dentist, which works well when everyone is at work, but when a nurse is off sick or on holiday it becomes very difficult for the dentist to manage.

In my experience, when one nurse was off, all the other nurses ran around as fast as they could trying to be in multiple places at once all day; it was exhausting and stressful all around. Back then, dentists didn't *have* to

work with a nurse, but they definitely preferred to, so they could be pretty grumpy when their nurse was off.

As the years went on, dental standards and expectations changed, and by the mid-1990s dentists were advised that they needed to always have a nurse present in the surgery as a chaperone, record keeper, witness and assistant. Dental nurses now had to achieve a formal qualification and General Dental Council registration, too. The role became more important than ever.

I was nineteen years old and a fully qualified dental nurse by this stage, and that's when I spotted a gap in the market. Dental practices needed a nurse who could 'fill the gaps' when another nurse was on holiday, off sick, on maternity leave, or when a new, unqualified nurse needed to be trained. We needed a dental nurse agency.

We didn't have the advantages of Google back then, so I did my local research and found no dental nursing agencies around the local area. This was my opportunity to start something of my own. I didn't have a big business plan, just some ideas on a notepad, feedback from dentists and nurses I'd spoken to, and a deep insight into how the industry worked – paired with an even deeper intuition that it was the right thing to do.

I handed in my notice at my job and started planning immediately. I called the business DNA (for Dental Nurse Agency) – but this is a well-known abbreviation

WIN!

used in dentistry for ‘did not arrive’, which would be written on a patient’s card if they missed an appointment.

Next, it was time to advertise. I designed some business cards and leaflets on a Word document – very fancy for the 1990s. We didn’t have Google Maps or sat navs back then, so I bought a whole range of little red street-map books for all the towns across Sussex, opened the Yellow Pages and set to work highlighting every dental practice, in every street, in every town, in Sussex.³³

I bought myself a suit and started my version of direct marketing – which meant every week I would get in my little old red Peugeot 205 and drive off to find a new dental practice and offer my services to it. I’d walk into reception with a leaflet, a business card and a great big smile, stick out my hand and say ‘Hello, I’m Donna, I run a dental nurse agency. I can fill in for your nurses when they are on holiday, off sick, or on maternity leave, and I can train all your new nurses.’

I was always met with a little surprise and a lot of interest, and that got me through the next stage, which was to ask to meet either the dentist or the person who held the purse strings. When I met them and explained my service they’d say, ‘Oh that’s brilliant! We didn’t know how we were going to cover [Janet’s] holiday next month, and we didn’t want to cancel the patients. Can we book you in now?’ My little business was an immediate success. I was oversubscribed from day

one. I operated an ongoing cancellation list that was filled as soon as any space became available, and I had work booked in my diary for over a year ahead. From Monday to Friday I would split my days across different practices to help cover everyone I could – driving to one in the morning, to another in the afternoon and sometimes a third in the evening. My business grew and grew and I gave work to other dental nurses I trusted and valued.

Without realising it, I had become a Key Person of Influence in my niche, and my reputation began to speak for itself. Even ten years after I left the business to focus on raising my daughters, I would still get phone calls from practices asking if I would come and work for them.

How my insights influenced all my future business decisions

Can you see where the insights I had enabled me to make my business decisions? My personal insights from my experiences as a dental nurse fed directly into the structure of the business I created, and that knowledge was the reason it was an instant success and I was oversubscribed. I knew exactly what each practice needed, which pains I could solve, and I offered a simple and affordable solution. I also learned a lot during that first flutter of entrepreneurship, and some of those insights now feed into the business I run today.

WIN!

In looking back at this story, I can also give you personal insights into my values and principles. These have always really mattered to me, and even in my first business I couldn't and wouldn't compromise them for anyone. I picked where I worked carefully, often seeking to work with good dentists with good reputations. I knew then that the culture of a workplace and the behaviour of its leader was fundamental to the happiness of the people working in it, and that hasn't changed. It has helped me make decisions later in business, too.

Other insights into how my first business helped me as an entrepreneur are that I learned to be fast, agile and adaptable, and to identify working patterns and create systems and processes that kept me ahead of the game. I learned a lot about managing people's fears and expectations, and how storytelling could distract people from even the most unpleasant procedures and leave them feeling positive. I learned that I loved the business of business; the ideas behind it, the planning, the advertising, building relationships, teaching and learning. I even learned to love bookkeeping. I loved all of it.

But most of all, I learned that I was a good listener and that I could spot untapped potential in everyone I worked with, from the shyest new nurse whose confidence and skills needed to be nurtured, to the most frustrated and exhausted dentists who shared their business struggles and challenges with me during

our lunch hour. I learned that, as an outsider looking in, I could see the solution to their problems, and I could give them an objective opinion that would help them to run more efficiently and to grow. That was my favourite part of my business. That insight still motivates me – albeit with a different business and a different toolkit.

Summary of Pillar 5: Insight

So that's the story of my first business, and you will have your own story about valuable insights that you have used to achieve your goals. Now imagine that I wanted to enter an award for that particular business; telling the judges about my *industry insights* and *personal insights* would help them know my capabilities and how I have used them to create my business. If I wanted to enter an award for entrepreneurs, some of these insights would help the judges to understand my journey and how I got where I am today.

It's not all about your history; there are many ways to gain insights now that will help you further your business in the future. These can become great evidence for your award entries, particularly if you are entering awards for your products and services rather than your personal impact. For example, by running pilot studies, beta tests and consumer surveys you can amass quantitative data for the insights you have gathered into what your customers want right now.

WIN!

This is your opportunity and space to think about the type of insights you can pinpoint and share that will help the judges understand you, and the type of insights you could add to strengthen your story.

ACTIVITY: INSIGHT

Now it's your turn. Record all the insights that have gone into your business model and give the judges deep understanding of how you've made a success of the journey you are on today.

- What led you to start your business?
- What stories would illustrate where your industry insights came from?
- What evidence can you use to prove your insights (eg market research, white paper etc)?

If you don't have any measured insights yet, how could you get them now (eg pilot study, beta testing etc)?

Pillar 6 – Improve

Definition: 'Make or become better.'³⁴

Improving life for your customers, colleagues and the wider community is one of the greatest impacts you can demonstrate in awards; if you can show that by improving life for others, you are improving your own business too, then that's a huge amount of awards material you've got at your disposal.

This pillar will show you how to identify, communicate and demonstrate the improvements you are making in a way that will impress the judges and help meet their criteria.

Improving life for customers

The best way to prove how you are improving life for any type of customer is to ask them. Simple! Ask your customers directly for feedback on what you have helped them to achieve, and ask them to measure their own improvements since working with you or buying from you.

The best way to prove how you are improving life for any type of customer is to ask them. Simple!

Improvements you have made for others can be demonstrated at different levels for different types of customers. For example, if you are a business coach, trainer or work with individuals one-to-one, this could be achieved by taking a 'temperature' test of how they feel across different areas before you started working together, and another test of how they feel after you have worked together. Using our 'awards confidence score' as an example (see Chapter Two), if you started this book at a level 3 and finished at a level 9 then you have improved your confidence by six points. That's a direct improvement of 200%.

WIN!

Surveying customers

My business doesn't simply look at internal 'win rates' to see how well we have done over the year; we often survey our clients to understand and analyse the impact of awards on their business and identify the improvements these have meant for them.

Our clients have different targets when they set out on their awards journey; some need to raise their brand profile, some need to help raise investment, some need to show their leaders why they should be given an internal budget for their next project, some need to recruit, some want to get more customers etc. After ascertaining the specific need for awards we also look for the wider improvements they bring to the business. Recent survey results told us that:

- 100% of our clients said working with us had been a good investment.
- After winning awards:
 - 67% of our clients saw an increase in turnover.
 - 83% of our clients saw an improvement in their employee morale.
 - 80% saw their brand awareness improve immediately afterwards.

The verbatim feedback shared with us proved the improvement we'd helped them achieve. When we

asked what improvements their awards had prompted we received comments like:

- ‘Kudos and credibility when prospecting new clients and in our sales literature’
- ‘Investment and finance opportunities’
- ‘Helping us acquire new business and appeal to a wider pool of talent when recruiting’

All this data came from one simple survey of clients and is exactly the kind of evidence of improvement the judges would be looking for in your award entry. If you do the same to show the improvements you have made for customers, you will immediately have evidence to prove you should win the awards you enter.

CUSTOMER CASE STUDIES

Another way to demonstrate improvement is to create customer case studies that bring your work to life and directly show the improvements you are making for them. You only need one good study to win. Look back at the CBRF case study in Chapter Four for inspiration. The following structure will help you to set out the case study, but don't forget to include a timeline, the budget and the current and future potential impact of your work:

Problem – What problem is your customer having that they need your help with, or what problem have you helped them solve for their customers? Include any baseline measurements for context.

WIN!

Solution – What actions have you taken to develop or support the solution to the problem? Include any specific targets set.

Result – What has improved as a result of your work? Include measurements that compare with the baseline and provide direct evidence of the growth or change.

Improvements for employees

In many larger organisations, widespread improvements need to be made to keep employees up to date, change processes, aid compliance or solve internal issues. Often these improvements can be hard to measure as they are ongoing, but a great way to demonstrate them is through what has been reduced as a result.

For example, if you run a training and development company that has helped a client to move their training online during the pandemic, you might be able to measure:

- **Improved cost efficiency** – saving the client money by moving face-to-face training online
- **Improved engagement** – more people signing up or engaging with training, completing it faster, better outcomes
- **Improved employee happiness** – lower attrition and higher overall engagement

Improving life for others

This might seem like a big ask, but you are probably doing more of this than you realise.

Do you have a product or service that is a better or more cost-effective version of something else on the market? Do you know how or why it improves life for others? Perhaps you don't know what they do with the product – you just sell it and they buy it. Could you ask for customer reviews, using a system like Trustpilot to gather and measure scores and see what's making a difference for your customers? If you offer a service, is it improving life for others in some way or solving their problems?

Being altruistic

Are you improving life for others by your business doing something that shows you care about someone or something and doesn't simply benefit your bottom line? Being altruistic is the best way to do business; it shows you have a real interest in the impact you have on people, the planet and the causes close to your heart, and that you are doing what you can to make a difference.

A good example of an award-winning entrepreneur giving back to society is Joe Wicks MBE. In 2015, Joe won a Lloyds Bank National Business Award for his

WIN!

achievements as The Body Coach.³⁵ Five years later, two things had changed about Joe; his profile had grown considerably, and he earned Membership of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). During the pandemic, we all watched as Joe used his passion to get the nation off their sofas and jump around their lounges, to lift the nation's spirits, wear out the kids and give us all some much-needed exercise while we were stuck in lockdown. He ended the year with a 24-hour live workout, raising over £1.5 million for Children in Need.³⁶

You don't need to be famous like Joe to make a difference and improve life for others, but you do need to be passionate about what you do to sustain those improvements.

Summary of Pillar 6: Improve

So many entrepreneurs use what they already have to change the world for the better. If you're not already doing so, you still can. You already have the tools, it's what you do with them that counts. This is the last pillar in my series, but by no means the least when it comes to awards success. Record all of the ways you have already improved life for people around you, your customers, colleagues and community, and think about how much more you could do when you become the spotlight for your mission by winning awards. Are you doing all you can?

ACTIVITY: IMPROVE

How are you already improving life for others? What one thing can you do today, with what you already have at your fingertips, to change the world?

- How have you improved life for your customers?
- How have you improved life for your colleagues?
- How have you improved life for your community?
- Have you improved results for partners and suppliers?
- Are you improving life for people less fortunate than you in any way?

Congratulations! You have worked your way through the Six Pillars of Awards Success and should now have a much deeper understanding of what stands out in your business that could help you to win an award.

The next step is to find out your Six Pillars of Awards Success score and to analyse your results. Just visit <https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-awards-book/> to get your personal score.

A high score in any of the pillars shows you that this is the strongest current area of focus for your award entries, but a low score in any of the pillars does not mean you can't win awards, it just means this is not the best area to focus on right now; there is more work to do.

Once you have your free awards report, note down your score for each pillar. High scores (70 or over) show that this is a strong pillar, scores of 50–70 show an average strength, and scores below 50 are your weaker areas, which can be improved upon. Write your scores in the table below.

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Bonus activity: The Six Pillars of Awards Success

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Score</i>
Impact:	
Influence:	
Inspire:	
Innovate:	
Insight:	
Improve:	

Now, look at your highest and lowest scores.

Think about how you could use your highest-scoring pillar to start winning awards. Next, select your three lowest scores and write one action to improve each score that you can take in the next three months. Set yourself deadlines and share these with a friend, partner or team member who will hold you accountable:

Action plan

I am going to improve my score in the three pillars by:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
1	1
2	2
3	3

Record your answers in your Roadmap to Recognition.

PART THREE

INSIDE AWARDS

SEVEN

Begin To Win

You have so much knowledge now on how and why you can begin to win awards; it's time to start choosing awards to enter and there are thousands of different awards and categories available globally. It's important to refine your awards strategy and understand your strengths in the six pillars *first*, so you choose wisely and don't reduce your chances of winning by entering the wrong award or category.

It's important to understand your strengths so you choose wisely and don't reduce your chances of winning by entering the wrong award or category.

WIN!

The last stop on your award-winning journey is to discover the types of awards you can enter, and align these with your strategy and strengths. In this chapter, you will bring your knowledge together and refine your awards strategy further to enter the awards that will deliver a real return on your investment.

To start understanding how to make awards choices and begin to win, let me explain how awards work in detail. However, please be aware that anyone can set up and run an awards programme, so awards can vary widely. Here I summarise the way awards generally work; there will always be some that work differently.

Types of award

Award types ('verticals') are the broad areas that awards tend to fall into, and there are five of them. Let's compare them to fruit, for simplicity:

1. Industry-specific awards for your sector (apples vs apples)
2. General awards for a range of different businesses (apples vs pears)
3. Individual awards for entrepreneurs and leaders (lots of varieties of apple)
4. Awards for a region/geographical area (local apples vs local pears)
5. Women in Business awards (one variety of apple)

All of the awards can extend further, and be judged on a local, regional, national or international scale.

In an ideal world, your awards strategy will include a balance of awards across the various types, and it will lead you to gradually try for more difficult awards. However, your awards goals might want to focus on certain types of awards in order. I summarise my five types of award below; this list is not exhaustive but will give you a general idea why to pick certain types of award before (or instead of) others.

1. Industry-specific awards

When you enter industry-specific awards you will be competing against others from your own industry sector or technical area. Therefore, a retailer entering the retail sector awards will compete against other retailers (apples vs apples). In these awards, the judges, the networking, PR and trade media opportunities and the recognition you get will be from your industry peers. This can be highly competitive, and you may even know who your competitors are likely to be, but it's a great way to show that you are at the top of your industry's leader board, or that you're in the running, and these awards will put you in front of judges who are industry leaders and can give you some specific industry feedback and credibility.

If you are a *supplier* to a sector, for example a web designer who creates e-commerce websites for retailers,

WIN!

you could enter awards in that sector if they have a category for suppliers, or enter in partnership with a client. Even by just entering, this can give you a direct line to a new audience or potential customers in your target market. It will also showcase your expertise and experience of working in that sector and being short-listed will put you onto their awards website and social channels, which can immediately strengthen your sales pitch. In an unspecified category for suppliers you could come up against all types of businesses in the supply chain, so judges will be comparing apples with pears and looking for your impact on your client and your commitment to the sector.

Pauline Saunders, Head of Events at The Learning and Performance Institute explains how the Learning Awards work:³⁷

‘The Learning Awards is a global awards event, and we’re free to enter for anybody working within learning and development both internally and externally including whole organisations, teams, individuals and suppliers. The LPI is a leading global authority on workplace learning and development, so our aim is to drive organisational and individual performance through effective learning, and the awards are a brilliant opportunity to recognise progress and impact in learning initiatives for the whole learning community across the world.’

2. General business awards

General business awards welcome entrants from every business sector, so you could be competing against anyone: apples vs pears. When you enter these awards you might be compared to businesses in a different sector to yours, but you could also find others from your sector coincidentally entering at the same time. It's not uncommon to see, for example, three utilities companies competing for the same general 'Customer Service' award alongside a supermarket brand, a telcoms operator and a finance company (apples vs apples and pears).

Generally, cross-sector awards offer a broad range of categories to capture and recognise achievements in a wealth of disciplines, from employee and customer experience, to innovation, sustainability, diversity and inclusion, export and more. Cross-sector business awards will usually offer categories that are judged via a balance of achievements across a whole business, and refine entrants by size for fair comparisons: for example, best small or medium-sized enterprise (SME), best large business etc. There will be categories for new entrepreneurs and others for established leaders, too. In short, they are a great place to be if you want to obtain recognition across a range of your achievements and meet a wide range of potential partners and customers.

Some general business awards may group by popular sector, so if they get five great entries from retailers

WIN!

and six from finance companies, they may create sub-categories, so you would be back to apples vs apples again. These awards and categories mean that you can vastly increase your chances by entering the right race: choosing a category that really shows your strengths. In any case, don't get hung up on who you will be competing against. The recognition you can achieve through a general business award offers huge scope for raising your profile to a wider audience, getting in front of some great sponsors, judges, future customers and employees, and attracting wide PR from the award's media partners.

Sarah Austin is a leading voice in the awards and events industry as the director of The Lloyds Bank British Business Excellence Awards,³⁸ a highly acclaimed general business award in the UK. In 2021, the awards celebrated the success of many exceptional businesses, leaders and organisations including the Oxford Vaccine Group for their outstanding contribution to British business in the development of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Sarah explains how the awards work:

'Our awards celebrate the resilience, innovation and creativity of British businesses – it doesn't matter whether they are big or small, an innovative new start-up or an established industry player, private, public or third sector, there is something for everyone. We are also passionate about recognising businesses that

are having a positive social impact and putting purpose above profit. Our entrants often do a lot of business at the event and go home with everything, from mentors to new partnerships and new customers! We have an outstanding panel of business minds who support our judging process, and we work hard to deliver the UK's most prestigious business awards ceremony and give all our finalists as much support as possible through a mix of media opportunities and networking opportunities.¹³⁹

3. Awards for individuals

Winning awards for your achievements as an entrepreneur and business leader can be invaluable to your business and for your personal brand. Awards in this vertical may be solely for entrepreneurs and leaders to enter, or be part of wider general or industry awards programmes with categories for entrepreneurs to enter. Either way, the credibility conveyed by winning one of these awards can help you open doors, reassure potential investors and partners of your ability, and accelerate your chances of getting paid speaking gigs, becoming an expert trade or press columnist or simply give your profile a huge uplift.

Demonstrating the value of awards for entrepreneurs, at the Great British Entrepreneur Awards ceremony in 2020 the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Ex-

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chequer, shared his appreciation for how much entrepreneurs do for the economy and each other, saying: 'What marks these awards out is the way they've fostered such an impressive, supportive community of people. That's never been more important than right now.'⁴⁰

Francesca James, co-founder of the Great British Entrepreneur Awards (GBEA) is also determined to support entrepreneurs to come together in an environment that recognises their achievements and supports their growth. In 2020, during the pandemic, the awards had more entries than in any previous year, proving how recognition was driving entrepreneurs through a very difficult time. In 2021, Social Chain co-founders Steven Bartlett and Dominic McGregor, who won the GBEA Young Entrepreneurs of the Year for the north-west region in 2017, were inducted into the awards Hall of Fame. Standing on stage to rousing applause as the UK's youngest ever Dragon, Steven said: 'For me, this is like the Grammys of entrepreneurship; there's no higher honour in our country or our industry. Thank you so much, this is a credit to our team.'⁴¹

Francesca explained to me what the awards mean to her and the entrants:

'We're far more of a community than "just" an awards programme. And while that is important to us year on year, there's never been a time in our existence when it's been so

important and needed, nor that we've seen the community so mobilised and strong.'

Andrew Scott is CEO of the Ascot group, which publishes *Business Leader* magazine for entrepreneurs, investors and business professionals. He is also the founder of the Business Leader Awards,⁴² the Go:Tech Awards,⁴³ and the Scale-Up Awards.⁴⁴ As an entrepreneur who has built a hugely successful business from the ground up, he knows exactly how it feels to be at the helm of the business, and why individual recognition is so important. He told me:

'Being an entrepreneur can be quite a lonely place. You tend to live and breathe your business, and you're so busy dealing with all the day to day issues, you don't really know how well you're doing. If you run the business really well, your growth numbers will tell you how the business is doing, but to have third-party validation on how you are doing personally, from judges who are all experts in their field, is a huge accolade. It reinforces and validates all the hard work you've done as an entrepreneur.'⁴⁵

4. Local, regional, national and international awards

All types of awards can be found on a smaller or larger geographical scale, and often the same award will be

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run both for a specific country, and at a wider international level. For example, the UK Customer Experience Awards and international versions of the award are run in Europe, the US, and other countries around the world.

Think about how entering awards in your local region could benefit your local reputation and help you meet your goals; or whether you could aim higher and compete on a national or international level. Remember, there are benefits to winning every type of award; just revisit the 'goals' section of Chapter Three for more inspiration. Note: Some of the awards listed below are run in the UK but the principles are the same for every country:

Local awards

Examples: The Brighton Business Awards, The Sussex Business Awards, The Gatwick Diamond Business Awards

These can help attract local partnerships, recruit local talent and encourage local footfall if you are a bricks-and-mortar business with local customers. These awards can also give you a bigger chance of winning as you are only competing on a local scale, and you may know your local competitors. You can also get a lot of benefit from local networking, media and partnership opportunities through local awards, which is where the national press find stories. These can be used to

scale up your PR, share your content and accelerate your next awards opportunities.

Regional awards

Examples: The North-East Business Awards, The British Chamber Awards (for each region), The Great British Entrepreneur Awards (regional heats)

Regional awards help to spread your name and networking wider and very often lead to a second-stage national competition. These can increase your chances of winning, particularly if you are not based in the most competitive areas of the country. Depending on the award, regional winners of local heats will then often compete in a national final, which gives you a second opportunity for PR and media.

National awards

Examples: The Lloyds Bank British Business Excellence Awards, The UK Employee Experience Awards, The Great British Entrepreneur Awards (national heat)

If you operate nationally, becoming a finalist or winning national awards can give your business a huge boost. Even just getting into a national final will demonstrate your business to a wider national audience and let your customers know that you operate on a large scale. Often these awards have big-brand sponsors, great media partners, well-known investors and business

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leaders on the judging panel, so getting your business in front of them can generate value in itself.

International awards

Examples: The International Business Awards (Stevies), The Learning Awards, The Global Agency Awards, The European Business Awards

International awards are available for all to enter, no matter where you are based. These can be regional (eg Europe) or global. To simplify the judging, international awards may divide entries into countries or regions, and/or by the size of business. Let's say you run a UK business with fewer than ten employees. Although you have entered a global competition based in the US you will actually compete against other businesses from your country, in your category, who also have fewer than ten employees – making your chances of winning this 'international' competition much better. Just check the entry and judging criteria as every competition works differently.

5. Awards for women in business

This type of 'individual' award is designed for businesswomen. These awards give excellent opportunities for women to gain recognition in an environment where their individual challenges and hurdles are well understood and supported. They often offer outstand-

ing networking opportunities and large communities of alumni continue to benefit from contact with one another for many years after the events.

Multi-award-winning entrepreneur Debbie Gilbert founded The Best Business Women Awards in 2015 to recognise and reward outstanding female entrepreneurs from across the globe.⁴⁶ Debbie's motto is 'When you reach the top of your mountain – throw down a rope and help someone else up', and her awards certainly give the female winners an opportunity to do that as well as to further their own success through raising their profile. Debbie says:

'It's not just the awards that help you to grow, it's all the wider impacts that make a difference: your social media reach, the speaking and judging opportunities, meeting sponsors and networking with other exceptional business leaders and entrepreneurs too.'

Summary

Now you understand the most popular types of award, make a note of the types you would like to enter and use our Awards Generator to create a relevant list of awards for you to delve into and explore further. Please note that all awards listed in this book were running at the time this book went to press, but award names and

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operating years change all the time. For the most up-to-date information and to generate your own awards list visit <https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-awards-book/>

EIGHT

Higher-Level Awards

Once you've worked harder and gone further than established industry awards can recognise you for, it's time to raise the game and be recognised for your incredible achievements with some higher-level awards. These awards are the pinnacle of recognition and are truly life-changing and aspirational.

These awards are the pinnacle
of recognition and are truly
life-changing and aspirational.

There are a few different categories of higher-level awards, too, such as awards for personal achievement, for business achievement, for social achievement and

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for industry-specific achievement. This chapter reveals how a higher level of recognition is achieved and explains a few well known and highly regarded awards.

The Queen's Honours List

I think it's fair to say that receiving an honour from Her Majesty The Queen is one of the highest official forms of recognition an individual in the UK can achieve. The honours system rewards British people for outstanding achievements, those who have shown great commitment to serving and supporting Britain and those who have demonstrated exceptional service to their industry, community or professional discipline. Each honour recognises different achievements and impact.

Who deserves an honour?

The Cabinet Office explains that honours recognise and celebrate outstanding achievements. There are always fewer honours than people who deserve them and because they are rare, they should be reserved for people:

- who have changed things especially by solid, practical achievement;
- whose work has brought distinction to British life or enhanced the UK's reputation in their area or activity.⁴⁷

Don't think that it's only the big stars in the media highlights who receive these awards. The vast majority of honours (and there are more than two thousand honours given every year) go to regular people who demonstrate great determination, innovation, altruism, compassion and purpose as they use what they have to make a positive impact on the world.

There are always fewer honours
than people who deserve them.

To give you an example of how the Honours List tends to break down, here is a snapshot of the 2021 New Year Honours List.⁴⁸ Out of 1,239 honours given:

- 65% (803) had undertaken outstanding work in their communities either in a voluntary or paid capacity.
- 15% (183) went to public sector workers including medics, police, firefighters and teachers.
- 10% (123) went to health and social care workers, including 41 nurses and midwives, as well as care home managers, GPs, surgeons, volunteers and many more who have helped to support others, save lives and gone out of their way to provide care during the pandemic.
- 9% (111) went to entrepreneurs and business leaders making an impact on business and the

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economy, many of whom are small business owners who diverted resources to help others, used their skills to teach others, or changed life for the better.

A wonderful example of an entrepreneur who has received an honour from Her Majesty The Queen in relation to inspirational business achievements is Alison Edgar MBE, because of her support of other successful entrepreneurs. Alison has pioneered culture change within her clients, which include Sky, Amazon, the NHS and the Discovery Channel, delivering her 'Intrapreneurship' methodology to enhance team-building by helping employees to think like entrepreneurs. She has also overcome dyslexia to become a successful author: her book *Secrets of Successful Sales* was described by *The Independent* as one of the top business books written by a woman. More recently she wrote *SMASH IT! The Art of Getting What YOU Want* to help individuals take control of their goals.⁴⁹ In 2020, Alison received an MBE for recognition of her long-term work within entrepreneurship and business. She was astounded but so proud when I spoke to her recently, and explained why, no matter what challenges she has faced, she has had the strength to keep going:

'If you really believe that your message is strong and that you've got something to offer and help other people with, it's your job to step up to the mark, and put yourself out there. No matter what's going on with your business,

don't let it fade, just put your foot on the accelerator and keep making that difference to help other people.'

Important notes: anyone can nominate somebody for an honour (see <https://honours.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/how-to-nominate/nomination-guidance>), but the nominee must still be actively involved in what they are being nominated for, and it takes time to verify all the elements of a nomination, so if you're thinking of nominating someone coming up for retirement do it sooner rather than later. There is no age limit to receiving an honour, and recipients range from teenagers to candidates aged over 100, but unfortunately, you cannot nominate someone posthumously.

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise are highly prestigious around the world. They are a bit like a royal honour, for a business rather than an individual. Currently, The Queen's Awards have four popular categories. These are:

- Innovation
- International Trade
- Sustainable Development
- Promoting Opportunity through Social Mobility

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Categories are also broken down further according to either ‘outstanding’ or ‘continuous’ commercial growth, which will be assessed over anything between two and six years depending on the category.

To give you an idea of the winners across the categories, in 2021, 232 outstanding UK businesses won an award.⁵⁰ There were 141 International Trade winners, 51 Innovation winners, 31 Sustainable Development winners and 9 Promoting Opportunity through Social Mobility winners.

Winners represent every region of the UK. Every year there are calls for more businesses outside London and the southeast to enter; in 2022, thirty-seven winners came from London, only nine from the northeast and five from Wales.

Your chances of winning a Queen’s Award

The awards are rigorous, as they should be, but certainly not impossible to win for exceptional businesses of all types. Many winners are small or scaling entrepreneurial businesses that are doing something a bit different, innovating, considering their social impact, and looking after their team and wider community really well whilst making commercial achievements.

Because each category has specific needs and requirements and the criteria may alter somewhat year to year,

I won't describe them in detail here, but when The Queen's Awards open each year I offer a free workshop exploring each element of each category in detail. If this is an award you'd like to win do stay up to date on what they are looking for each year when the competition opens.

SWIMTREK WON THE QUEEN'S AWARD FOR INNOVATION

SwimTrek is the world's leading provider of open-water swimming holidays, with swim tours in some of the best open-water swimming locations around the world.⁵¹

In 2000, founder Simon Murie had a dream: to recreate Lord Byron's famous swim across the Hellespont – a stretch of open water dividing Europe from Asia which was made famous in Greek mythology by Leander's nightly swims to see his lover Hero.

So off Simon went to Turkey, to attempt the swim himself, unaware of how many permissions would be required to undertake such a swim. After spending a week organising the event between the coastguard, the army, the council and a local pilot who would take him across the water, he completed the swim in just under an hour.

Simon quickly saw a gap in the market, helping swimmers to realise their dreams without having to worry about all the hard work behind organising the event. So SwimTrek was born; it has since helped thousands of people to achieve their open-water swimming dreams, safely and securely in more than

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forty places worldwide and, seventeen years later, his business became the proud recipient of a Queen's Award for Enterprise in the Innovation category.

Simon and I met by chance at a business conference in 2016. At that time SwimTrek had been growing rapidly and, like many business owners, Simon had put all his focus on his customers and his team, and had not had time to consider whether they could be ready to win some awards. We discussed SwimTrek's growth, what they did, how they did it, and all the benefits this brought to their customers, teams and locals worldwide. I identified their potential 'win theme' and suggested to Simon that now was the time for him to get some well-deserved recognition for the business. I thought his business belonged in the most prestigious awards programme in the world: The Queen's Awards.

With a busy summer ahead, Simon and his team were happy to put the process into our hands and keep their minds on their customers and their business – exactly where they should be. With our guidance and support, the right evidence was gathered, SwimTrek's commercial progress was analysed, the benefits to employees, customers, partners and the environment were assessed and we worked together to see all the rigorous and comprehensive criteria had been met. Step by step, we ensured that the outstanding work SwimTrek is doing in the adventure holidays industry shone like a beacon from the award entry pages.

Simon said:

'Winning a Queen's Award for Enterprise for Innovation means so much to me, and to the whole

team at SwimTrek. It is recognition of the ongoing effort we have made to ensure we operate at the highest possible standards, and it gives us great pride to represent the UK Tourism Industry.'

These words say it all.

Benefits of winning a Queen's Award

The benefits of winning a Queen's Award are huge. For five years following the award, all winners may use the official Queen's Awards for Enterprise winners' emblem, which represents prestige and notable achievement and is recognised globally. It's a fantastic asset to use on your website, email signature, marketing materials and packaging.

Winners are often also invited to a celebration garden party at Buckingham Palace, and the Lord Lieutenant of your county visits as a representative of Her Majesty The Queen to award the company a Grant of Appointment and commemorative crystal bowl or similar to enjoy along with the winner's emblem. This is a superb opportunity to get your employees, stakeholders, family and friends involved in a real celebration and to be part of the presentation ceremony. You can also invite journalists and photographers to the event and get some valuable news coverage and PR, letting everyone know of your success.

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Even if you don't win, you can still benefit from the helpful awards feedback, which is comprehensive and outlines where you need to focus to be successful next time around. This feedback isn't just beneficial if you decide to re-enter but is often sound business advice to take forward, improving how you run things. As I have said before, echoing Nelson Mandela, you'll either win or you'll learn; you really have nothing to lose by entering The Queen's Awards.

Other high-level industry awards

High-level industry awards are the pinnacle of your sector and take your profile up a level. Every industry has its own opinion of which awards are most prestigious, but a good example in the learning and development/training industry is the Princess Royal Training Awards.

These describe themselves as 'an award that highlights the range and quality of training that exists in industry'.⁵² It is available to employers in the UK who can prove that their outstanding training and skills development programmes have resulted in exceptional commercial benefits for their business and have been created in line with the City & Guilds Group values. With a royal accolade, it's easy to see why an organisation, department or consultancy in the learning and development or HR industry would consider these awards the epitome of success and industry recognition.

Lifetime achievement awards

These awards are not just found at the Oscars and Grammys, they can also be found within specific industry awards programmes or general awards programmes, and are often given by industry councils and membership committees. Lifetime achievement awards are often saved for a company chairman, a truly inspirational thought leader in the sector or an individual who has made a significant impact on the industry or business world in general.

Bear in mind, these awards are not about age, they are about impact, influence and inspiration, which often comes at the pinnacle of a career.

Accreditations and certifications

These are slightly different to awards; you are not competing against other organisations directly, but you will need to meet specific benchmarks or criteria in order to achieve the accreditation. For example, Investors in People offers different levels of award depending on the benchmarked criteria you meet.⁵³ You can start the process and incrementally build on your success and work towards higher achievements. Investors in People also run their own awards programmes, in which you can compete against other IiP-accredited organisations.

WIN!

Another way to be ‘accredited’ and acclaimed for your success is to enter a survey-based system like Best Companies to Work For,⁵⁴ or Glassdoor,⁵⁵ or to focus on certification that recognises your achievements in a particular industry area such as the environment or sustainability, as the ISO standards do.⁵⁶ These are all exceptional ways to evidence the impact you are having and will be recognised by other awards judges too, helping to create a snowball effect in winning awards.

Summary

There really are no limits to the awards you can win, there are just rules, criteria and methodologies to put you in the best position to win. Knowledge is power in all areas of life, including awards, so build some aspirational, high-level awards options into your awards strategy and make a long-term plan to work towards these to help meet your personal and professional goals.

NINE

Money, Money, Money

Now that you have a good understanding of the different types of awards you could enter, you are almost ready to start putting your awards plan into action. However, you might just need to know a bit more about what that process involves, and more important than anything, how much it's going to cost you. I know what you're thinking...

- I don't want to pay to win!
- Should I pay for awards I didn't enter?
- Don't all the awards just go to the people who bought the biggest table at the event?

I'm glad you asked. I'll discuss these elephants in the room in order of size...

WIN!

I don't want to pay to win!

You should never be asked to pay to win. But do expect to pay to play. Awards organisations are not charities; many of them are businesses focussed on offering awards services, or are run by business associations. Just as you would pay for PR, marketing, events or advertising services, you can expect to pay for these awards services.

The organisations that run awards programmes often need to charge entry fees and ceremony costs in order to operate. Other organisations which offer awards programmes in addition to other functions, like member-based services and magazines, may get their income from elsewhere (membership fees, subscriptions, sponsorship, consultancy services, merchandise etc). Either way, everyone needs to get paid or there can't be an awards event.

You should never be asked to pay to win. But do expect to pay to play.

If you do your research you'll find there are many excellent free awards available to enter too, and a well-balanced awards strategy will typically include a mix of both paid and free awards. Many awards coordinated by the UK government make no charge to nominators, including the higher-level awards in

Chapter Eight. But whether you have to pay to enter an award or not, the entry fee on its own does not indicate legitimacy. Google is your friend here. Always investigate who operates the award, look at previous winners, partners and sponsors in your assessment. You can also look at August Recognition's lists or consult our Awards Generator to get your own list of great awards.

But remember, making a return on your investment is not about looking for freebies. Paying a few hundred pounds to enter one well-recognised award that has great social reach, high prestige, a good media partner, top-line entrants, sponsors and judges and new opportunities for networking could return thousands of pounds of business, growth and opportunities. In a study of business excellence award-winning organizations in the UAE it was discovered that 'winning companies have superior performance on share price and all the usual financial measures for up to five years following an award,' proving that the awards you win through the investment you make become valuable business assets with a huge return on investment for years to come. So that entry fee you pay could turn out to be the best investment you ever make.⁵⁷

Should I pay for awards I didn't enter?

OK, here's a word of warning. Awards are not governed by an industry body and can be set up by anyone, including you (now there's an idea!). Therefore, just

WIN!

as you would expect to do your due diligence when choosing how or where to advertise your brand, you should research the awards you enter. I'm often asked about the emails that drop into your inbox telling you that you've won something you didn't even enter, and so long as you now pay hundreds or even thousands of pounds for the privilege you'll be featured in the programme. Well, that's a bit like buying an advertorial. You can pay if you want to, can afford to, and can get some use out of it for SEO, but consider if that's the best use of your marketing budget, if it fits your business goals and needs, and compare it to the wider benefits you could get from other (cheaper or even free) awards.

Don't all the awards go to the people who bought the biggest table at the event?

How many seats you book at an awards event should *not* affect whether or not you will win. As a judge, I can promise you that I have no idea what you have booked, and no interest in it either when I'm scoring your entry. Judges typically only have access to your award entry and nothing else, and often the judging happens before the tickets are even on sale. I've often seen the biggest brands with the biggest tables lose an award to a small company who had a couple of seats at the back of the room. I like to call it the David and Goliath effect, and it happens more often than you realise.

That said, bear in mind that if no one ever booked a seat at an awards ceremony, there wouldn't be a ceremony. If you are going to enter an award you should be prepared to complete the journey by attending and being a good awards ambassador. By attending, you will benefit from networking, photos, PR and a motivational team celebration, which is all invaluable to your growth and profile. If your budget is tight you can pick an award that offers a free seat to a finalist, or even enter an online event to cut travel costs.

Please don't be the person or brand that wins, only to have the room fall silent or start grumbling when they realise no one has come to collect it. Entering awards is an end-to-end profile-raising activity for your personal and business brand – that's why you are doing it. Participating in every part of the process will get you to your bigger goals faster than dipping in and out, or not showing up to the finish. Let's face it, tumbleweed doesn't make your brand look great to those people who did make the effort to attend the event.

Summary

Now you can see how and why awards should be built into your marketing budget, plan, prepare and budget for your awards in your awards strategy and you will see how they can offer an excellent return on your investment, both directly and indirectly, for years to come.

ACTIVITY: MEASURING THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT FROM AWARDS

Draw up smart goals about what you would consider a good return on your investment in entering an award, and then measure whether or not you achieved what you wanted. For example, what is being featured on an awards website worth to you? What is the networking and potential new client opportunity worth? What is meeting a particular sponsor or partner worth?

- Goal 1
- Goal 2
- Goal 3

Potential return on investment:

Stop waiting, start winning

Congratulations! You've completed your Roadmap to Recognition and you are ready to set out on your awards journey. You have worked your way through the Six Pillars of Awards Success, you know your strengths and weaknesses, and you have an action plan for continuous improvement.

You know which stories you can tell today, which ones you need to work on, what you need to measure and who you need to survey to prove your success.

You know the types of awards that you'd like to enter, and what they could do to help you achieve your business goals. You even know if, when and why you might need to part with some cash to enter some awards and how to measure the return on investment.

It's time to stop waiting and put everything together to start winning.

ONE LAST ACTIVITY

To make sure you launch your awards strategy with confidence, take a few minutes to consider how much more confident you now feel that you can become an award winner, compared to how you felt when you started this book.

In Chapter Two, I asked you to rate your awards confidence; how confident you felt that you would win an award if you had entered it before reading this book.

Now I want you to look back at that score. With the knowledge you now have, how confident are you about winning awards? Circle a number below.

Awards Confidence Gauge:
(Low) 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (High)

If your awards confidence is seven or higher, it's time to start winning! If you score below seven reflect on which chapters you could work on to help you keep improving that score, and take our awards-ready

WIN!

test to find out which areas to build on here: <https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-awards-book>

Most importantly though, no matter what your score, never forget that there is someone out there who needs you to reach your potential and achieve your dreams so that you can help them achieve theirs. By following all the steps in this book, not only will you accelerate your own business success and achieve your own potential, you will become the spotlight for others so that they can reach their potential, too.

Free Awards Tools

Want to find out if you're ready to win awards?

The Win Business Awards Scorecard measures your potential to win prestigious business awards by analysing your performance across the Six Pillars of Awards Success. You will receive a bespoke report with feedback on your current awards strengths and top tips that will increase your chances of winning awards.

To find out your awards strengths, visit: <https://craftedbyaugust.com/win-business-awards>

Want a free list of awards to enter now?

The Awards Generator helps you to grow your profile and your business by revealing the awards that match your achievements. On completion, you will instantly

WIN!

receive a bespoke business awards list and discover your awards-animal persona. This tool is perfect if you are ready to enter and win awards but are not sure which awards are right for you.

To get your free awards list, visit:

<https://craftedbyaugust.com/awards-generator>

Afterword

What, even, is recognition? What does it mean to you, your family, your friends, your employees? Where does recognition start and where does it end?

Is it a thumbs-up on Facebook, or a heart on Twitter? Is it saying thank you to someone who's done a good job that day? Is it giving out a pay rise or a prize? Or is it something else?

Recognition means something different to every single person, but it has an impact on us all.

Recognition in childhood

In early childhood, we open our eyes and look around for recognition. We want our parents to say 'Well done',

WIN!

‘That’s great’, ‘Keep going’, ‘You can do it’. The importance of recognition continues through our school life and becomes our school grades, that time we make it onto the sports team, the medals we win at swimming, football, chess and dance – or whatever your passion happens to be. It’s all of the things we take for granted while we’re at school but that make a big difference to how we feel, how we perform and how we grow.

Recognition in the workplace

Where does recognition start and end in the workplace? As an employer, what does it mean to your employees when you recognise their effort? What difference does it make to their performance? Does it drive them forward? Does it make a difference to the way they behave towards each other and towards your customers? And does that translate into tangible, commercial results? How does recognition support employees’ mental health and wellbeing? And does a recognised team achieve more than an unrecognised team? Research tells us it does.

Recognition for entrepreneurs

When you’re an entrepreneur and you’re leading a business it’s your job to recognise others, but who gives you a pat on the back and says, ‘Well done, you’re doing the right thing. Stay strong. Keep going. You’ve got this’?

You – that’s who.

You can take control of your future, and you can put yourself in the driving seat when it comes to raising your profile.

Whether you are taking your first steps on your tiny little toddler feet, or your first steps in business, recognition will drive you forward to achieve your next big steps, in life and in business. And it’s never too early or too late to start.

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Acknowledgements

On 5 November 2020 we said goodbye to Dad.

He had lived and worked in Arundel, West Sussex, his whole life. His dad, great grandad and uncle had all worked for the Duke of Norfolk, looking after the imposing grounds of Arundel Castle. For thirty years after them he had taken up the reins as Head Gardener and, come rain or shine, he worked with the other gardeners to tend the enormous expanse of the grounds and gardens with the same love, care and pride that he would have shown if they'd been his own.

As children, we lived in one of the castle lodges. It was right at the top of the hill, hidden from view of the road, and only watched over by the towering spire and windows of Arundel Cathedral. The castle gardens were our unofficial playground, with acres and acres of grassy slopes to roll down, hundreds of trees to climb and long, sweeping tarmac roads we could whizz along on our bikes. There were open turrets to hide

WIN!

in when we'd been naughty (frequently), and fragrant honeysuckle grew up around some of the walls, which I discovered quite early in life actually tastes of honey if you eat it.

Back in the 1980s, when Dad wasn't going up or down the road in his tractor laden with brooms and rakes, or making something in the potting shed, we would watch him and his workmates scale the vast, grassy banks on which the castle stood, leaning in at 45° to strim the grass in the baking summer sun, with nothing but spikes on their boots to save them from falling 100ft down to the dry moat or roads below. They were so impressive that TV news cameras filmed them strimming, while the castle visitors stood and watched them in awe.

As I wrote in his eulogy, only a herd of mountain goats are permitted to scale those banks and trim the grass nowadays!

In testament to Dad's loyalty and commitment to the castle and its family, and to recognise his impact, a tree was planted in the grounds of the castle, which honoured him and the generations of his family who had worked in the grounds before him. This act went such a long way to helping our own healing, and the recognition of his effort and his memory will now live on forever in that oak tree.

Later, we placed a memorial bench in his favourite spot in Arundel, where all friends, family and visitors to

his much-loved town could now sit and have a coffee in his memory.

So how is all this relevant to this book?

I know that Dad would have been humbled to have been recognised by all of these wonderful gestures. But he would have also been proud.

It doesn't matter who you are, who you work for, who works for you or whether you even work at all. It doesn't matter what size of garden you tend, or whether you even have a garden at all. We are all human, and we all have a responsibility to recognise each other, and a need to be recognised ourselves.

It costs nothing to say thank you. It takes no time to tell someone you appreciate them and you recognise their effort. Young or old, friend, neighbour, relation or colleague, it's hugely important to recognise the impact others have in our lives today, because tomorrow may just be too late.

I want to take my turn now to say thank you and recognise the contributions to my life, work and book that have enabled me to be here, writing this, today.

Thank you to all the people who have been with me on my journey. My family, friends, loved ones, partners, colleagues, clients and peers in the various worlds in which I have roamed. You have all left a lasting

WIN!

impression and made me who I am today. I will never forget or stop being grateful for that. You know who you are.

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And dear reader, thank you for sticking with me.

I have just one last request.

Take a moment to recognise the people who contribute to your life in some way – big or small, whether they

WIN!

just made you a cup of tea, carried out some work for you or just made you smile today. Recognise their efforts and reward them with your appreciation. Be grateful for their time and commitment. Drive them on with the knowledge that they matter.

Recognition is the gift that keeps on giving, and it makes a big difference to people's lives, both to the one who gives it, and to the one who receives it.

Don't wait another moment. Who will you recognise today?

The Author




Donna O'Toole is the founder of August Recognition, a global awards agency and part of the Dent Global group, which helps entrepreneurs to stand out, scale up and make a positive impact in the world.

Named one of the world's top 25 customer experience influencers and an award-winning national and international awards judge, Donna has helped hundreds of businesses, brands, entrepreneurs and leaders across the world to raise their profile by winning valuable awards and recognition for their achievements.

She is renowned for achieving outstanding successes for her clients in the most highly regarded awards such as The Queen's Awards for Enterprise.

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