



## DUMMY'S GUIDE TO NOMINATING SOMEONE FOR SOMETHING

Compiled by Dr Andy Pitman

The following 'Tips and Techniques' are a useful resource for anyone asked to nominate a person for an appointment, committee, panel, minor or major award. Some sections have a primary focus on highly competitive and prestigious awards where strict criteria apply but every one of these tips can be adapted to assist in the process of nominating both adult and youth members in all situations.

### 1. Read the guidelines / rules carefully

A common issue is a nominee who is outstanding in (say) 3 of 4 criteria. Their chance of success is limited as someone else is highly likely to be outstanding in all 4. The rules are normally strictly enforced so if there is a rule that your candidate does not meet, think twice about the nomination. Sometimes you can ask for a clarification or exception. Seriously, if the rule says, "nominee must be green with yellow dots" and yours is yellow with green dots, stop! Read each and every rule and read them at least twice.

### 2. Choose wisely

Many nominations come from someone who really wants a nominee to win something or to encourage them. Normally, there is a shortlisting process. To be shortlisted means you are truly outstanding – but realistically 5% of applicants will be shortlisted meaning 95% are not. Invest your time as a nominator on someone who has a reasonable chance of being shortlisted. There are exceptions to this – where the process of nomination is helpful, perhaps via an interview that gains experience for a more competitive application next year. You might also nominate someone who is not competitive because you want them to know you think they are wonderful. That is okay but manage their expectations.

It might be worth quietly talking to a few trusted people about a nominee – does everyone agree that they are exceptional?

### 3. Buy a Thesaurus.

There are words that attract attention – such as, *outstanding, visionary, leader, transformative, "the best in a generation"*. However, do not over use any specific word. Words like "capable", "good", "one of the best" are never ever to be used.

### 4. Choose referees / letter writers with care

Nominations commonly require several letters to support a case. That requires effort by the nominator – to line up letter writers, to make sure the letter writer has the details to hand, make sure the letter writer knows how to write an unambiguously fantastic letter and to ensure the various letters are consistent and yet very different. The following two sentences are completely different:

“David is a really strong leader of our Venturer unit and has helped many young Venturers do some great things” and

“Donna is an outstanding leader who has transformed our unit by engaging and encouraging many young Venturers to move beyond their comfort zone, to exceed their personal limits and to excel”

If your letters contain the first sentence, your nominee will lose to someone with letters containing the second sentence. This is not something to leave to chance.

**5. Opaque language kills**

Keep the language in the nomination simple. An assessor might be reading 50 so keep it short, keep it *precisely on message*, write nice plain English but with unambiguously positive prose. Do not ramble. Address the selection criteria only, not what you think is important. If you do not have much to say about a nominee, you likely have a non-competitive person. Keep sentences punchy.

**6. Worry about presentation**

If you are allowed, worry a lot about how you present information to ensure it is clear and the reader is drawn to the key messages you want to communicate. Do not overuse colour, bold etc but used sparingly it can really help.

**7. Proof read with care**

If you do not know your whether from your weather, or your which from your witch find someone who does and get them to edit.

No one can write a nomination that is not improved by a second pair of eyes.

**8. Make it tight**

A good rule of thumb is; if you have to write 100 words, write 200 and then edit to the word limit without losing information. However, remember not to make the text too dense or opaque. A good way to do this is to be sure every single sentence *directly* addresses the selection criteria you are writing to.

**9. No all-nighters**

You cannot deliver excellent nominations if you start the day before. It is best to get all the information together and draft a nomination well in advance. Perhaps set yourself a nomination completion deadline a few days in advance. Then have a final read a day or two before the real deadline. Then submit – do not submit the day of the deadline because your internet and computer can sense your stress level and will die just before you click “send”.

#### **10. Failure is not failure**

Nominating someone for something is normally a 95% failure rate even if you do everything right. The review committee might not agree with you, they might read your words and think you mean something different or they might skim your nomination late one night and miss things. Perhaps your wonderful nominee is not quite as wonderful as someone else's. This is not "failure" – it might lead you to reflect on your nomination but that is good – but critically, do not give up. Try again. Talk to your nominee if a case has failed and sympathise of course, offer support.

#### **11. Stealing is not a crime**

Well, actually it is, but getting hold of previous nominations for people and looking to see how things are written, what was submitted and so on and borrowing strategies is perfectly legitimate. If you can find experienced nomination writers, or people who have been on assessment panels then use them for advice or help in writing the case. Do not be offended if they say "no" – they may be conflicted, or they may not really think your nominee is competitive. This tells you something important.

#### **12. Make it personal**

If you are able to provide 'additional information' try to add a photo of the nominee, copies of certificates and other awards and newspaper clippings if any are available. These things bring the person to life in the eye of the assessor and can be helpful when shortlisting.