

Standards of Conduct for AOS Judges

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Each one of us who is connected in any way with the American Orchid Society's merit judging and awards for orchid plants must be aware that we are carrying out a public trust. In selecting superior orchid flowers and bestowing AOS awards, we establish the very standards which the orchid world uses for future development. This is a serious responsibility for all of us. The public must have absolute confidence in the American Orchid Society Judging System or else AOS awards will be useless. So let us discuss some of the things that the public wants to know about.

Conflict of Interest: The rule is simple that an AOS judge should disqualify himself from participation whenever he or she has any personal interest in an exhibited plant. But just how far shall we carry this? We can say, without argument, that disqualification is called for whenever we own a clonal division to be judged, but what about owning a crop of hybrid seedlings with that clone as a parent? My answer: disqualify. Of, for another instance, an AOS judge has a business affiliation, or perhaps he used to work for the owner of an award candidate, what then? Disqualify. Or, in the case of the plant being considered was bred in your nursery or by a member of your family? Disqualify.

The public may even see a conflict of interest in a future ownership, and some might even say that an AOS judge voted for an award with the intent of profiting from future breeding. I cannot accept such an extreme and "iffy" proposition. Surely we judges are human: we do have future ambitions and we may see worthwhile possibilities for breeding. Still, the public can be rightfully suspicious when an AOS judge buys or negotiates for a newly-awarded plant when he served on the judging panel making the award. Perhaps we need a restriction patterned after the dictum that an employee of a US government regulatory agency should not take a job with any company regulated by this authority for one year.

Judicial attitude: This calls for a "calm and rational" manner, and we can all agree that AOS judges should reach an agreement without obvious conflict. But it is not so simple. To be worth our salt as AOS judges, we must form an opinion of our own, but we must also act as a member of a judging team or panel. We must learn to respect the viewpoint and opinion of the other judges on the panel. There can be a problem between well-known AOS judges of long experience and recently qualified persons. It is equally wrong for an old-timer like me to think that a newer AOS judge lacks sufficient experience as it is for the new judge to question whether I have kept up with the new trends and achievements. Very important for proper attitude as AOS judges is that we listen to one another's comments to understand different perceptions of the orchid judging entry. There needs to be mutual respect – with no subservience and no domination.

A "never, never" is to disparage the decision of another AOS judging panel. This is a difficult assignment when we have slide shows for educational programs or lead discussion of the display table at an orchid society meeting and a photograph is poor or

an entry poorly grown. You should direct attention to the fine points that may not be apparent, but do not say that you disagree with the AOS award, whether you served on the panel or not. AOS judges simply must accept one another's decisions – or we cannot hope for the public to trust the whole process.

Favoritism and prejudice do exist and we must guard against them. Try never to think about who owns a plant under consideration. Even if the AOS orchid show staff carefully conceals all owners' names, we often know the owner nevertheless by the method of potting and growing, labeling, parentage of the plant or other clues. If the ownership is apparent to you, disqualify yourself if there is any conflict of interest possible. In no case should you, as an AOS judge, discuss ownership with other members of the judging panel.

It is very likely we all have our individual likes and dislikes about orchids as to color, style, size, presentation or other qualities. As an AOS judge, try to disregard yourself. Play down your personal preferences for certain features in orchids in order that these do not make your scoring of any particular orchid entry biased.

Finally, believe in the value of AOS judging. It is as fine as you personally can make it. Try to advance, to build up the reputation of the American Orchid Society – and not yourself. Remember that AOS judging is a valuable service that you as an AOS judge are able to perform for the orchid world.