

Etiquette in Orchid Judging

By Reneé Gerber

Published in September 1997, Vol. 28, No. 3, Awards Quarterly

“Rudeness may be the new national pastime,” said Miss Manners recently. We have allowed the hectic pace of life in the ‘90s to control many of our actions to the point of excluding consideration for others. We seem to encounter rudeness in our everyday lives: driving on our freeways, out in the business world, at markets and department stores, on television talk shows and sadly, yes, in the orchid world and on the judging floor. As orchid judges, we are highly visible representatives of the American Orchid Society and we should remember that people are watching us. We should be conscious not only of our ethics, but also of our etiquette. There are some common practices, harmless in intent, that are not wrong but are simply not up to the standards of behavior that we as orchid judges must set and live by.

When an invitation to judge an orchid show arrives, we should respond in a timely fashion; this helps in the meal count if a judges’ luncheon or dinner is planned and also in the composition of teams. Many times the host society encloses a return postcard along with the invitation; this is indeed a thoughtful gesture which facilitates our response and should not be ignored. Sometimes in our busy lives, it is difficult to make definite plans ahead of time, but we should commit as early as possible. A note jotted on our orchid calendar can be a timely reminder. An early response which might have to be changed is better than no response. If a last minute change is needed, that is acceptable. Should we register for a show? The answer is yes, certainly for a larger show, such as a trustees’ meeting or regional show. No doubt there may be occasions when it is not inappropriate to appear only for judging. However, when registration is called for, there are several points we need to consider. Obviously, funds are needed to operate orchid shows. Judges are often carried away with the idea of “providing a service.” It is true we are providing a service, but in many ways we have our own payoffs in prestige (yes, there is some prestige in being an AOS judge) and in the sense of satisfaction that comes with fulfilling responsibility and a job well done. Then there is the everpresent “perception” situation: how are our actions perceived? These are some of the unspoken realities of judging that are not outlined in the handbook.

Once we have accepted an invitation to judge, we should consider what clothing to wear. Like it or not, we are judged by our appearance. When dressing for work, jury duty, church or a funeral, we put some thought into our wearing apparel. We should take the same approach with orchid judging. Are we judging in New York, Hawaii, Florida or Lafayette, Louisiana? Is it a show, business meeting, or monthly judging? We should weigh all these points and dress in a manner that is comfortable, appropriate and indicates some standards.

What about purses and briefcases? These things are just as inappropriate on the judging floor as they are banging around the greenhouse. Purses and briefcases can be hazardous to plants. Usually these items can be safely checked nearby, perhaps at the registration

table or in a cloak room. Or we might consider wearing a money belt or a “fanny pack” or a shirt or blouse with large pockets.

Once judging teams are assigned we should give the team captain our undivided attention and stay with the team until dismissed. Our judging system allows for each team captain to function in a slightly different manner, but a thoughtful team captain informs the other team members of how judging will be conducted and what is expected of everyone on the team. On the judging floor we need to think about what we say and how we say it. The same idea can be expressed either constructively or inappropriately. Remember, non-judges may be nearby and our comments should reflect a positive attitude even if we are disagreeing. We should be considerate of other teams and other people. When viewing an exhibit or plant, we should make our decision, then stand aside to make way for the next team. Conversely, if we are waiting to see an exhibit or plant and another team seems to occupy that space for an inordinately long time, there is an appropriate way to ask if they are through.

If someone from another team is needed, approach him or her through the team captain. Frequently, we must share reference books. If another team is waiting for the one we are using, we should try to finish quickly and pass on the reference material. Otherwise, the reference books or slides should be returned to the proper person or place so as to be available to the next group who needs them.

Clerks are also important people at orchid shows. (Didn't we all get our first task of judging as a clerk?) Once a clerk joins the team, the team captain should get that person's name (perhaps jot it down to help remember), and introduce him or her to the other team members. Sometimes a clerk new to orchids is shy and we should make judging a pleasant and instructive experience. If time permits, encourage questions or offer to spend a few minutes with the clerk after judging. A simple thank you to the clerks as well as the other team members can end even the most arduous judging session on a pleasant note. A thank you to the show chairman or society president is another courteous gesture.

In orchid judging, we need to be considerate professional team players. By setting, practicing and maintaining high standards of behavior, judges can make orchid judging a more positive and pleasant experience.

Reneé Gerber is an accredited judge in the Houston Judging Center.