

Ethics and the Conduct of Judges

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The purist treasure mortal times afford is spotless reputation: that away, men are but gilded loam or painted clay. – William Shakespeare, Richard II. Act I, Sc. 1

As with most things, Shakespeare said it best. Without our reputation, we have nothing. The most visible representatives of the American Orchid Society are its judges. We are the Society's ambassadors to its general membership and the public and are judged by our integrity and reputation, not only as individual but also as an organization. Our conduct and demeanor either validates or disparages the Society and the judging system as a whole. The highest standards of ethics and conduct ensure the credibility of the AOS and its awards. We are fortunate that the expected behavior is far and away the case. The AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition addresses ethics and the conduct of judges in necessarily general terms, requiring that we act in word and deed that will maintain the highest standards and that will reflect credit upon the system and the individual. Interpretation of specific ethical requirements is, with several exceptions, left to the individual and the judging community. The broad approach taken in the Handbook is probably both adequate and appropriate given its scope and the impossibility of addressing all eventualities. Recognizing that there is a broad spectrum of opinion as to what constitutes proper ethical standards, several areas might benefit from discussion.

RECUSAL A judge should withdraw from participation whenever a relationship exists that might generally be construed as interfering with his impartiality. Certainly this refers to any situation in which a judge has an ownership or monetary interest in an entered plant. Additionally, a judge should recuse himself if he believes that he is for any reason unable to judge without bias for or against the plant or its exhibitor. While knowledge of an entry's ownership should be avoided, and the judging chair should take reasonable steps to maintain its anonymity, such knowledge alone should not constitute sufficient reason for recusal. Many judges, through long experience and association, are often able to recognize an entry's owner simply by the way it is potted and grown. Should a judge recuse himself if he was the originator of the cross in question but has no personal interest in the clone being evaluated? The answer to this question seems very much in doubt dependent on who we ask. Some feel that recusal is in order in every instance and others feel that as long as there is no current ownership or financial connection that it is acceptable.

LOBBYING Only the assigned team judges a plant. Unsolicited judgments or comments offered by others not assigned to the team while judging is in progress are out of order and potentially could fatally prejudice individual judges or the entire team. Opinions requested by the team captain of persons adjudged to be experts as to a plant's correct identification or perhaps its health status may be appropriate under some circumstances. Judges should, however, be competent to accurately diagnose disease or other conditions that might automatically exclude an entry from judging. Comments regarding one's own entry made in an effort to influence its nomination or merit prior to judging are also out of order and are a blatant and serious ethical breach. Such comments include statements as to the entry's alleged value or purchase price. Judges who are lobbied by exhibitors

should recuse themselves and bring this behavior to the attention of the judging chair. This should not be construed to limit general conversation about one's plant, but refers specifically to comments made in close time proximity to judging. As a matter of practice, entries should probably not be commented upon by the exhibitor or anyone having an interest in an entry on the day judging occurs and certainly not at the time of judging. Once judging is completed the results are final. Attempts to change or alter the results by anyone other than the Judging Committee are prohibited.

CONDUCT Judges should conduct themselves in a calm and rational manner that will permit the harmonious resolution of differing viewpoints and judgments. A calm and rational manner means just what it says. Certainly we may disagree, but we must do so calmly without emotional scenes and accusations of terminal ignorance and stupidity. Judges are required to formulate an unequivocal opinion about an entry's merit and translate this into a point score while avoiding both passive acceptance and aggressive rejection of the opinions of others. American Orchid Society judging is essentially a subjective exercise that should allow for widely, if not wildly, differing viewpoints. Our point scoring scheme is designed in such a way with its six-point maximum spread and a mechanism to send an entry back to the chair for reassignment and reassessment should reasonable accommodation not be possible. If a judge feels his score accurately reflects his evaluation of an entry, he is absolutely under no obligation to alter it if it exceeds the six-point maximum spread and his fellow judges are unable to diplomatically convince him of his error, as they perceive it.

All reasonable efforts should be made to facilitate the judging process and allow the efficient and unrestricted nomination and scoring of entries. Any comments or behavior that impedes the process should be avoided. Comments made to limit nominations in the interest of time are out of place and bring into question the individual's commitment to judging.

CRITICISM At the conclusion of judging, most centers allow time to review results and discuss the disposition of entries. In most cases, the team captain or the designee will explain the team's consensus and both positive and negative aspects of the entry. This is a particularly valuable exercise that benefits everyone involved. Comments made should be appropriate and never be made in a fashion that could be offensive to other judges or the exhibitor. The same is true of comments made during judging. Criticism of other judges or their decisions should be avoided. If criticism is necessary for training or similar situations, it should be carried out as appropriate for the circumstances. In all cases criticism should be dispassionate and constructive.

We grow and show orchids because we enjoy and appreciate their marvelous beauty. Our motivation for becoming judges is, or should be, to further this personal enjoyment and to formally recognize the better forms taken by these wonderful flowers. Conducting ourselves in a manner that avoids any question of unethical behavior will insure the system's continued integrity.

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