

Judging and Ethics

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The American Orchid Society is comprised of a group of orchid enthusiasts who affiliated to promote the love and betterment of orchids. As a major part of that program, knowledgeable members set up a judging system which involves detailed standards for each orchid group and award offered. The Society also licenses (accredits or approves) individuals who have met certain requirements to judge orchids. A person who reaches the "accredited" stage of judging has been given a tremendous honor and at the same time has accepted a weighty responsibility. American Orchid Society judges occupy a position of trust in the Society; i.e., as a judge, he or she will uphold AOS rules, regulations and standards. The judge is also expected to represent the AOS and its high standards. The behavior of a judge, good or bad, clearly reflects on the Society.

Each judge also occupies a position of public trust. The competitors in an AOS show or monthly judging session trust that the judges will perform their duties in a fair and equitable manner and in accordance with AOS rules, regulations and standards. The public has a right to expect that AOS judges will judge plants solely by AOS standards and not allow any personal biases or considerations to enter into the process.

It is for these reasons that understanding ethical standards is a very important part of becoming an AOS judge.

Ethical standards are ideals for intent and behavior. They delineate what is right and wrong; what is and is not acceptable behavior.

The AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, 9th Edition, Section 4.8, pages 18 and 19, specifies standards for the conduct of judges. Points 4.8.1, 2, 4, 6 and 9 particularly address ethical issues. The language of this section is extremely broad and all encompassing so that the following jingle is wise advice: When in doubt, OPT OUT!

It is better to err on the side of caution than to inadvertently violate or give the appearance of violating the ethical standards put forth in the Handbook.

Another piece of sage advice is to remain aware of how your actions might appear to others.

The Handbook does not specify particular concerns, nor does it give examples of ethical concerns. The following list of major ethical violations is not exhaustive; it is merely meant to assist you in understanding the ethics and standards applying to judging more clearly.

KEY CONCEPTS IN ETHICS

(Definitions taken from The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd Edition, Unabridged, Random House, NY, 1987.)

1. Bias - (a particular tendency or inclination, especially one that prevents unprejudiced consideration of question; prejudice; a strong inclination of the mind or a preconceived opinion about something or someone. A bias can be favorable or unfavorable.)

It is impossible for anyone to be totally objective. Each of us by virtue of our physical uniqueness, and the singularity of our history, perceives things from our own point of view. In some sense this is a bias. It's like viewing the world through colored glasses. This is not the bias of which we are speaking. The bias that constitutes a violation of judging ethics is one in which you as judge may be influenced by conditions which are not related to the standards by which we are to judge. For example, if I judge a plant belonging to a close friend of mine, I may be predisposed to judge the plant favorably because I like its owner, or unfavorably because I don't like its owner.

Even if I believe I can judge the plant fairly, people who know I am close friends with the owner may feel that I cannot be fair. This gives rise to the appearance of impropriety, which the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, Sect. 4.8 warns judges to avoid.

It is also often the case that when you are called on to render judgment on a friend's plant, you may "bend over backward" not to show bias, so you judge the plant by more severe standards than you otherwise would. This is equally unfair. For these reasons it is wise to practice: When in doubt, OPT OUT!

2. Prejudice - (implies a preformed judgment even more unreasoning than bias, and usually implies an unfavorable opinion.)

Prejudice is a more severe form of bias and usually implies an unfavorable opinion. This would be illustrated by a judge judging a plant owned by a person whom the judge intensely disliked. The appearance of impropriety here could exist if this judge is now judging a plant owned by a person with whom he or she had a strong public disagreement, or if the judge had been adversely affected by some action of the plant's owner (such as firing the judge from his job.)

Again, be aware of how things might appear, and when in doubt, OPT OUT!

3. Bribery - (a bribe is money or other valuable consideration given or promised with a view to corrupting the behavior of a person, especially in that person's performance as an athlete, public official, etc.)

This is another violation of judging ethics. Bribery can occur in a number of ways: 1) the judge is promised a keiki from a plant if the plant gets awarded; 2) some form of money or other valuable goods are offered for a favorable judging of a plant; 3) the judge could be offered assurances of an off-shore judging invitation, expenses paid, if a favorable judging is provided.

All of these, and similar situations, are clear violations of the ethical principles of judging.

Appearance of impropriety here would arise if a judge were to receive any of the above from the owner of an awarded plant after the judging. No matter how innocent or ethical the judge might be, the acceptance of such gifts would raise the question of impropriety. When in doubt, OPT OUT!

4. Conflict of Interest - (the circumstance of a public office holder, business executive or the like, whose personal interests might benefit from his or her official actions or influence)

This is a very clear violation of ethical standards of judging. Using your official position as a judge to act in a way to benefit personally from your actions is reprehensible.

Examples (not exhaustive):

- a. Judge Q judges a plant which he owns
- b. Judge Q judges a plant he co-owns
- c. Judge Q judges a plant of a cross he created
- d. Judge Q judges a plant a person has agreed to sell him
- e. Judge Q judges a plant owned by his wife or fiancé

The appearance of impropriety here can come about in various ways. For example, after a plant is judged by judge Q and is awarded, Judge Q buys the plant. Even if he had no notion of buying the plant before or even knowing it was for sale, it might give rise to a question about judging ethics. When in doubt, OPT OUT!

5. Undue Influence/Intimidation - Undue influence occurs when a judge tries to influence other judges before judging begins or when a judge touts a plant belonging to himself. No matter how subtly this is done, it is a violation of ethical standards. The AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, Section 4.8, stipulates judges are not even to go into a show before judging begins unless they are setting up an exhibit.

Undue influence can also occur if a judge discusses plants being transported in a car with other judges who are passengers. At best, judges who ride in a car transporting plants, give the appearance of impropriety if they then judge those same plants.

Intimidation (to compel or deter by, or as if by, threats) is the flip side of bribery.

Here a judge may seek to influence others by making them feel inadequate if they do not agree with him; e.g., "Of course, anyone who knows cattleyas would know this is not award quality!" ...or, "obviously is award quality!"

Many people don't want to feel stupid, so they may succumb to such pressure.

6. Appearance of Impropriety - (an improper act)

Impropriety is an improper act. The concept here is that a judge should be careful to avoid behaving in such a manner that observers would or could think her/her actions were improper.

The AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, 5th Edition, Section 4.8 requires all judges to:

- a. Remain outside the exhibition area of a show until judging begins unless he is installing an exhibit or has other responsibilities which require his presence.
- b. Disqualify himself from participation in the judging of a plant, flower or exhibit with which he has any relationship that might in any way be construed as interfering with his impartiality.
- c. Conduct himself in a calm and rational manner which will permit the harmonious resolution of differing viewpoints and judgments.
- d. Conduct himself in a manner which will never bring his integrity into question.
- e. While serving as a judge, express himself clearly and unequivocally in his evaluation of a flower, plant or exhibit, avoiding both passive acceptance and aggressive rejection of the opinions of other judges.

- f. While serving as judge, refrain from personal comments about a flower, plant or exhibit that does not relate to the judging in progress and that might, if repeated to the exhibitor, bring into question the deportment of the judge or judges.
- g. Keep himself abreast of the developments in hybridizing, judging, growing and all other phases of orchid activity that might affect his capacity as judge.
- h. Cooperate fully with the chairman of judging and the captain of his judging team in completing the routine duties of his assignment such as signing forms, describing and measuring flowers, and remaining with the team until excused.
- i. Act at all times by word and deed in a manner which will maintain the standards of AOS judging on the highest level and reflect credit upon these judging activities and upon himself.

Clearly, the avoidance of apparent impropriety is as strong a directive as the obvious requirement to uphold ethical standards. A perfectly innocent ethical action which can be interpreted as improper can do as much damage to the public trust placed in the AOS and its duly authorized agents (judges) as a truly unethical act.

When in doubt, OPT OUT!