And the award goes to...

As the award season heats up, Philip Newsome asks whether winning really matters

It’s that time of year again – award season. Oscars, Baftas, Golden Globes and on and on they go – and it’s not just Hollywood. I have always had a certain fascination with this phenomenon, this needy thirst for receiving the acclaim of one’s peers.

For the last three years I have been on the list of suggested candidates published by Private Dentistry’s sister magazine Dentistry as a precursor to voting for the ‘Top 50 most influential people in UK dentistry’. Mere inclusion in that initial list of 271 dentists makes me feel good, simply being recognised as having exerted some influence, however meagre that may have been. Not surprisingly, I have never made it into the actual Top 50 and I suspect there are several reasons why my appearance in pre-qualifying has never actually been translated into a place on the starting grid. The first, most obvious, and indeed most likely, one is that nobody has even the vaguest clue of who I am and even if they did, wouldn’t feel that I make the slightest bit of difference to the UK dental scene. I say that this is the most likely reason as a result of my experiences writing this very column. I have been doing so now for almost two years and have thoroughly enjoyed offering my thoughts on various aspects of dentistry and, yes, even venting my spleen from time to time. The only thing that has surprised me is the lack of feedback, good or bad, from readers. Oscar Wilde, whom I seem to quote quite often, once wrote, ‘The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about’ and never has a truer word been spoken.

This yearning for some feedback, any feedback, comes ironically at a time of year when seemingly every profession, calling and vocation is in self-congratulatory mode, lauding its high-flying members in an endless stream of award ceremonies.

But I digress. A second reason why I have never progressed is that voters might possibly have some notion of who I am and may even feel that I have contributed in some small way to the greater dental good and yet feel that by living and working nearly 6,000 miles from the UK I have somehow excluded myself from the running. I am less convinced by this argument as there are usually quite a few overseas dentists on the list, some of whom (for example, Paddi Lund) are much further away than me and always get many votes. It’s also very possible and highly likely that Paddi Lund is a lot better at what he does than I am.

The final reason I can think of is that I have made absolutely zero effort to push my case for inclusion, lobby for votes and generally put myself about a bit. I think that this is probably the main reason why I never appear in the final list.

I have the rather anarchic theory that one year it would be entirely possible to get someone into the number one spot that nobody has ever heard of and, in fact, doesn’t even exist!

Anyone who has read Timothy Ferris’ excellent book The four hour work week knows that just about anything can be sub-contracted these days and it is not beyond the wit of man for someone to come up with an ingenious plan to garner enough ‘votes’ to at least get into the top 10.

Of course, none of this really matters and I do fully appreciate that I am probably over-reacting to what is just a bit of fun, except that inclusion in the list appears to be the holy grail for some people and then once they are in there you never seem to hear the end of it. To be fair, I would probably be the same but right now I would be more than content in the knowledge that even just one person out there in deepest, darkest middle Britain is reading a single word of this. As for next year, you will know I have been up to no good when you read that Shaun the Sheep has been voted the most influential person in UK dentistry.

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