

# THE SMART APPLICANT'S GUIDE

for the 2015  
ATD BEST Award

Practical Advice and Surprising Insights from the Writer of the  
#1- and #2-Ranked ATD BEST Submissions

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the Association for Talent Development (ATD)  
or the ATD BEST Award.*

## How to Use This Guide

Welcome to *The Smart Applicant's Survival Guide to the 2015 ATD BEST Award: Practical Advice and Surprising Insights from the Writer of the #1- and #2-Ranked ATD BEST Submissions*. The Association for Talent Development (ATD) describes this award as recognizing companies who show they are BEST at **B**uilding talent, **E**nterprise-wide, **S**upported by the organization's leaders and fostering a **T**horough learning culture.

Now you can benefit from my 20+ years of experience writing persuasively in a wide range of marketing communications contexts, my MBA in marketing and management and my success applying that experience and knowledge to help clients win more than 70 prestigious learning awards (and counting). In fact, clients of mine have moved up in the ATD BEST ranking from #32 to #1 in one year, from #37 to #2 in two years and from #20 to #7 in one year. My clients have also ranked #1 on the CLO LearningElite, Training Top 125 and Learning! 100 awards. See the end of this document for my complete win record.

In working with dozens of learning professionals to develop these award-winning submissions, I've seen that what is obvious to me as (an expert in persuasive communications) isn't necessarily obvious to the learning expert (whose expertise is, naturally, learning). Everything in this Guide is based on my experience collaborating with these very talented learning leaders and their wonderful teams.

This Guide is a companion to the *Smart Applicant's High-Impact Workbook for the 2015 ATD BEST Award*, described below. The four key sections of the Guide are:

- **ATD BEST: An Overview.** This section describes the general approach of the ATD BEST award and will help you uncover for the judges and yourselves the measurable impact you are making on your organization.
- **What's New in 2015.** This year ATD has changed some language and added a question. I'll help you understand what they're looking for.
- **The 9 Most Common Misconceptions Held by ATD BEST Applicants.** By dispelling these myths now, my goal is to save you time and worry later. All of these misconceptions came up as client questions over the past five years. Now you can benefit from those queries.

## ATD BEST: An Overview

Through this award, the folks at ATD basically want to know two things: does the learning function impact company success, and can you prove it? Yes, there's clearly more to it, but at the end of the day, these are the key questions to answer. And if you think that's obvious, I will show you a multitude of draft responses from (otherwise very savvy) clients who don't answer either question. These drafts describe program innovation, attendance, participant evaluation ratings and many other topics not at all related to impacting company success and proof thereof.

### How can this be?

Learning professionals are so close to what they do that it's often difficult to take a step back and really evaluate overall impact. Smile sheets, test scores and certifications are important, but they don't indicate business impact on the enterprise: revenue, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, productivity and so forth.

Measuring impact can be a challenge, to say the least. Companies that rank high on this award meet that challenge. It's my belief that applying for this award (and others) challenges you, the learning leader, to aim higher, raise your standards, adjust your metrics, capture new data and expand your reach. Your ranking on this list, if disappointing, may guide you on where you need to adjust and focus.

### Why I wrote this Guide for you

To do well on this award, you can't just be great. You have to *prove* on your application that you're great. I developed this Guide because I have seen many training professionals who are outstanding at what they do, but who lack the time, resources and/or understanding of what's required to develop an outstanding submission. They do superlative work, but they are not getting credit for it because their award submissions don't reflect their true impact.

I hope that this Guide will help you show your learning organization in the best possible light. You deserve to be recognized for your hard work and accomplishments. And with everything else you have on your plate, you deserve some guidance that will save you time and stress.

### The bottom line

The ATD BEST judges want to know that training matters at your company and that you are having a positive impact on your organization—not just that you have successful programs, but that the learning function is systematically improving performance, driving results and supporting corporate strategic goals. Always bear this in mind, both in this application and as you strive to make a difference.