

# THE SMART APPLICANT'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

## TO THE 2025 TRAINING APEX AWARD

Useful resources, common sense advice and a few surprises about the learning industry's longest award application.

SPOT-ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

DEB ARNOLD, **ink.**

*Winning Recognition for Talent Leaders*



# CONTENTS

*CTRL+Click on an entry below to jump to that section. Return here using “Back to Contents” links throughout the document.*

I. [How to Use This Guide](#)

II. [Training APEX Award: An Overview](#)

III. [How Applications are Judged and Scored](#)

IV. [The 9 Biggest APEX Myths](#)

V. [5 Key Steps to Never Overlook](#)

VI. [Advice from the Judges](#)

[About the Author](#)

*Deb Arnold, Ink. is not affiliated with  
Training magazine or the Training APEX Award.*

# I. How to Use This Guide

Welcome! I'm so pleased to bring you insights from my 30+ years of experience in marketing communications, MBA and helping talent leaders win 200+ awards, including the Training APEX Award:

- #1 - nine times
- #2 - three times, including a leap from #41 in one year
- Improvements of as much as 93 (yes, 93) spots in one year
- 13 Best Practice Awards, 9 Outstanding New Initiative Awards

Your APEX resources are based on the wisdom of this experience. I know what works. I also know that even very talented learning leaders and their fantastic teams can use help and I'm happy to provide it.

The other sections of the Guide (CTRL+Click to jump to the section):

- II. [Training APEX: An Overview](#). This section will help you uncover for the judges (and yourselves) the measurable impact you make on your organization.
- III. [How Applications are Judged and Scored](#). Understanding—and being highly disciplined about following—the scoring guidelines is ESSENTIAL to your APEX success.
- IV. [9 Biggest APEX Myths](#). Veterans and newcomers alike can save time and worry by dispelling these misconceptions.
- V. [5 Key Steps to Never Overlook](#). Year after year, take these five steps.
- VI. [Advice from the Judges](#). These notes and highlights from the magazine's August 2019 Webinar are as valuable today as they were then.

This Guide accompanies the *Smart Applicant's Sanity-Saving Workbook*, the Word doc that came with this PDF. It contains the application questions with my comments, suggestions and scoring guidelines throughout, plus winning Best Practice and Outstanding New Training Initiative award examples, response examples and more. *Silver, Gold and Platinum packages include additional resources. To inquire about upgrading your package, [contact Deb](#).*

## Helpful hints:

- Distribute the Guide and all resources to key team members involved in the application process.
- Feel free to share these documents or excerpts from them with relevant internal Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) outside your team who will be contributing to your application.

*Thank you and good luck!*

[Back to Contents](#)

## II. Training APEX: An Overview

Over the years, *Training* magazine has increasingly required *evidence* of how the learning function helps achieve business goals. The magazine has also made the application more challenging and comprehensive. Thankfully, they're also transparent about scoring guidelines, so if you've got the right stuff, AND you adhere to these guidelines, your score and rank will reflect it.

### A chance to benchmark

Measuring impact can be a challenge. The companies that rank high on this award meet that challenge. I believe—and have seen ample evidence—that applying for this award (and others) challenges you to aim higher, raise your standards, adjust your metrics, capture new data and expand your reach. Your rank on this list can potentially help guide you to 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 must *prove* you're great. And I have met many outstanding L&D professionals who do superlative work but don't get credit for it simply because they lack the time, resources and/or familiarity to develop award submissions that reflect their true impact. I hope 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 - with less effort and stress.

### The bottom line

The Training APEX 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 business goals. Always bear this in mind, both in this application and as you strive to make a difference.

### Training magazine resources

- **Information:** General info, documents and FAQs are available [from the APEX Web site](#). If you haven't already, save the [official application](#) as a PDF to make quick reviews and searches possible.
- **Scoring guidelines:** *Training* supplies detailed scoring guidelines. See the next section, [How Applications are Judged and Scored](#), for links and much more.
- Be sure to read about the 2024 Training APEX winners [here](#), for inspiration and benchmarking.

### [Back to Contents](#)

## VI. 5 Key Steps to Never Overlook

These critical steps should be first on your to-do list. While they may seem obvious, I have seen otherwise savvy learning leaders skip these steps and pay the price later.

### 1. Create a schedule with clear milestones.

This application is massive. Do everything in your power to stay organized. Figure out how many people need to review the application, how much advance notice and review time they need, etc. You may need to ask an admin to block out review time(s) on a decision maker's calendar several weeks in advance. If it's essential that your marketing and/or legal team review it, determine with them the time required for those approvals. Your colleagues will undoubtedly appreciate the heads up.

### 2. Review last year's feedback report and qualitative scoresheet.

Carefully read this gold mine of information about your previous application's strengths and weaknesses, which are typically emailed to last year's application contact within a few weeks of the February award gala. Your scores will help you understand where you should focus your efforts this year. If you're a first-time applicant, pay extra attention to the scoring guidelines.

### 3. Identify your strengths.

Identify your strongest programs and successes—in terms of innovation, metrics, links to key corporate objectives, trendy initiatives like gamification, etc.—and turn them into a checklist. *Enlist your team to help you do this* so you can tap into the group's collective knowledge and truly capture all your strengths. Then you can determine the best places in the application to leverage them.

Also, take a step back and look at the big picture. In what areas have you made the greatest impact in the past year? How are you influencing employee engagement and culture? What inroads have you made with internal clients and/or senior leadership? If you had to list the key reasons your learning organization is impressive (without mentioning a single individual program), what would they be? Draw up this list and use it early and often.

[Back to Contents](#)