

The OBS celebrates excellence at its 2020 Awards

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The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them. - Ernest Hemingway

We are living in a world that is in a constant state of disruption. In this world, trust becomes a vital component of any relationship.

The banking industry is built on trust. Consumers not only have to trust that their bank is applying internationally accepted best practice principles when managing their funds, but they also have to trust that if there is a dispute that needs resolution, their bank will be applying a similar approach.

“The dynamics in resolving banking related complaints are different each year, therefore the effort required to address them may differ with each financial cycle. The amendments to certain laws and regulatory frameworks make up this variance. It is vital that we celebrate banks that go out of their way to resolve disputes in a fair and equitable manner,” says Reana Steyn, the Ombudsman for Banking Services (OBS).

The annual awards were held on 20 November 2020 in Johannesburg.

Judging criteria

The main criteria that the OBS considers when adjudicating these awards is the banks' cooperation with the OBS office in resolving bank customer disputes.

“We set measurable standards for the banks which reflect our values to enable us to honour our promise to deliver free, impartial and speedy dispute resolutions,” says Steyn.

There are two categories for the Best Dispute Resolution Banks. Category A consists of the major South African banks. The criteria for this category includes:

- The quality of the written response of the bank to the office in response to a specific complainant;
- the response time of the bank in settling a dispute, and
- the overall fairness of the response.

Category A included Absa, FNB, Nedbank, Standard Bank and Capitec,. The winner of this category in 2020 is Absa.

Category B includes all of the smaller banks that are outside of the Big Five (major banks). Based on the same criteria, the winner for the Best Dispute Resolution Bank in the Smaller Bank Category is Discovery Bank.

MVPs

While it is a team effort when it comes to resolving these disputes, there are a few stand out individuals at banks who go out of their way to resolve these disputes in an appropriate manner.

“Individual effort is also recognised with an award for bank staff members who impressed with their consistent excellent service,” says Steyn who added that, in this category, the following criteria are applied:

- treating all complainants with equal dignity/respect and affording all complaints the necessary level of attention;
- providing prompt and efficient service to the complainant and the OBS;

- initiating and/or improving measures and/or service level agreements to enhance their bank's level of service in complaints handling; and
- the individual must be knowledgeable about their bank's products, service and processes, including internal complaints handling mechanisms as well as those of the OBS.

The winners of this category in 2020 are Karen Jonker from Absa Bank, and Aimee Capuzzimati from Investec.

Special care

It is also important to remember that these disputes are stressful and recognition needs to be given to individuals who not only put their best effort into resolving disputes, but take special care to constantly communicate with complainants.

"For the very first time, a new special award was introduced by the OBS and presented to a well deserving Designated Officer, Priya Rajah from FNB. This award was introduced after both the OBS staff and management recognised the pivotal role Priya is constantly playing in the application of her job. She is dedicated to customer care and goes above and beyond to make sure that complainants are treated fairly," said Steyn.

The A-Team

While the banks are at the front line when it comes to disputes, there is a lot of work that goes on at the OBS to ensure that the banks receive the level of support that is needed to resolve disputes in a timely manner.

"The awards now include an award for an OBS staff member. This award is given to the employee who represents the OBS internal and cultural values. It is also awarded to an employee who is judged by their peers to go the extra mile to assist his fellow colleagues. This award goes to Emmanuel Kwakye-Agyekum," says Steyn.

She added that this is always a highlight because this nomination is about the OBS employees recognising one another. "It is about the team member, as voted for by the team. Mr Kwakye-Agyekum joined the OBS in 2019 and has certainly enriched the culture and atmosphere at the office," Steyn concludes.

Complaints

In as much as the OBS functions as an independent non-profit organisation (NPO), and the banks recognise the authority of the OBS, the work that this office does cannot be fully accomplished without the co-operation of all the banks involved. This cooperation extends to consumers; it is vital for consumers to remember that they need to raise a dispute with their bank before lodging a complaint with the OBS.

This can be done by following a very simple process:

- lodge a formal, written complaint directly with your bank's dispute resolution department;
- ask for a complaint reference number from your bank;
- allow the bank 20 working days in which to respond to your complaint; and
- obtain a written response from your bank

Consumers can contact the office of the OBS for free assistance if they experience any banking problems or would like to lodge a complaint against their bank.

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