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# How a Rising Star nomination transforms careers

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Everyone who is nominated for the AFA Rising Star of the Year Awards seems to benefit.

Confidence is the keyword for these three 2015 AFA Rising Star finalists, who share their stories with Nigel Bowen.

# Kath Cairns

I'm a working mum. My mum battled ovarian cancer and I'm a West Australian married to a Kiwi. So I target those niches – busy women, expat Kiwis and families dealing with a cancer diagnosis. I didn't believe I was doing anything special until my nomination, when I thought, "this is pretty big".

I'm not someone who's naturally self-confident. So respected industry figures saying "this girl is on the right track". It took away the self-doubt I used to have, especially when sitting down with clients. I'm sub-authorized but essentially running my own business. So it was valuable to find out not just what I was doing right but to have highlighted what areas of the business could be improved.

After going through the nomination process, I made big changes. We improved the functionality of office admin processes. I also began always charging a fee for advice rather than sometimes giving it away for free.

The nomination has raised my profile and opened doors. For example, some influential senior financial advisers sent me to discuss industry concerns with WA-based politicians. I was honoured to potentially have a positive impact on the future of our industry by doing that.

I've also had job and partnership offers and there's now talk of me buying the business I'm sub-authorized to. These days I really value myself and what I can bring to the table. That's got a lot to do with being a Rising Star nominee.



**Kath Cairns**

Peel Wealth Financial Planning

# Mark Richardson

I was nominated for Rising Star after winning the AMP Young Financial Planner of the Year award for being one of the top planners in the dealer group. I'm based in Coffs Harbour, so I hadn't had much opportunity to network and see how other advisers operate. Thanks to the nomination I got to hang out with the five other exceptionally talented finalists. Even now, we all stay in touch through LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter and act as a support group for each other.

I left school in year 10. While I realise education is important, I'm not impressed by the number of letters someone has after their name. But being recognised by my peers means a lot to me. It can be confronting at the time but having to go into a room and explain how and why you do things in front of industry leaders teaches you a huge amount.

My employment situation didn't change much as a result of winning the award. What did change was having the confidence to decide to back myself, to go out and start my own business. I'm just about to launch it. When I do, I'm sure I'll leverage having been a Rising Star nominee, as I've been doing in one way or another for the past 12 months. It's a fantastic ace to have up your sleeve.



**Mark Richardson**

Duncan Financial Advisers

Declan Doolan

My parents are financial planners. After trying out a few other careers, I went into the industry and was nominated for the Rising Star for three years in a row. I made it into the final six in 2015, the same year my boss was nominated for Adviser of the Year. We attracted attention because our business was shifting from a commission to fee-for-advice model. I think the judges were also impressed by how I was using video content on social media to promote the business.

When a big organisation such as the AFA, and a reputable brand such as ANZ, are effectively endorsing you that boosts your confidence. It also gives you a lot of credibility with customers.

The industry is being disrupted so it's valuable to have the chance to see how other businesses are responding to that. It was also reassuring to have people who know what they're talking about say, "yes, you're making a smart move by transitioning away from the conventional, commission-based approach".

It's amazing how much attention you get. There were 64 media outlets at the conference the nominees attend. That translates into lots of positive, free publicity for the business you work for. It doesn't do your personal brand any harm either. It's something that you can put on the business's social media platforms as well, which leads to a lot of positive feedback from clients. Both you and the business you're part of seem to get a lot more opportunities flowing your way after the nomination. Last but not least, my parents were stoked with me being nominated!

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So what advice do Kath, Mark and Declan have for others considering nominating? "Go for it," says Kath. "You'll learn so much and it will open so many doors."

"It's 100 per cent worth doing. The feedback you get is invaluable and it's an accolade that looks great on your resume," says Declan.

"What's the worst that can happen?" asks Mark. "Even if you don't win you'll have a great experience. I know it's one I wouldn't change for the world."



**Declan Doolan** Mr Insurance

Declan Doolan

Mr Insurance

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