



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of Thomas Holder,
Battalion Fire Chief (PM1510T),
Union Township

Examination Appeal

CSC Docket No. 2017-1419

ISSUED: **DEC 23 2016** (RE)

Thomas Holder appeals his score on the examination for Battalion Fire Chief (PM1510T), Union Township. It is noted that the appellant failed the examination.

This two-part examination consisted of an integrated system of simulations designed to generate behavior similar to that required for success on the job. The first part consisted of 70 multiple-choice items that measured specific work components identified and weighted by the job analysis. The second part consisted of three oral scenarios; a Supervision, Administration and Incident Command scenario. All candidates received the same multiple-choice exam, but differing versions of the oral exercises were given based on the day the oral exam was administered. The examination was based on a comprehensive job analysis conducted by the Civil Service Commission, which identified the critical areas of the job. The weighting of the test components was derived from the job analysis data.

For the oral portion, candidates had 60 minutes to prepare for all three scenarios and had 10 minutes per scenario to present their response. For all three oral exercises, the candidate was to assume the role of a Battalion Fire Chief. Candidates were scored based on the content of their response (technical) and the how well they presented their response (oral communication). Both of these dimensions were scored on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating.

Each candidate in a given jurisdiction was scored by a team of three different Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), who were trained in current technical and oral communication scoring procedures. Each SME is a current or retired fire officer who

held the title of Battalion Fire Chief (or Fire Officer 2) or higher. As part of the scoring process, an SME observed and noted the responses of a candidate relative to the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that each exercise was designed to measure. An SME also noted any weaknesses that detracted from the candidates overall oral communication ability. The SME then rated the candidate's performance according to the rating standards and assigned the candidate a technical or oral communication score on that exercise.

In order to preserve the relative weighting of each of the components of the examination, the ratings for each portion were adjusted by a well-recognized statistical process known as "standardization." Under this process, the ratings are standardized by converting the raw scores to z-scores, an expression of the deviation of the score from the mean score of the group in relation to the standard deviation of scores for the group. Each portion of the examination had a relative weight in its relation to the whole examination. Thus, the z-score for the multiple-choice portion was multiplied by a test weight of 36.53%, the oral technical scores were multiplied by a test weight of 53.91% and the oral communication scores were multiplied by a test weight of 9.56%. The weighted z-scores were summed and this became the overall final test score. This was weighted and added to the weighted seniority score. The result was standardized, then normalized, and rounded up to the third decimal place to arrive at a final average.

For the technical and oral communication components of the Supervision, Administration and Incident Command scenarios, the appellant received scores of 2, 3, 2 and 4, 5, 5, respectively.

The appellant challenges his score for the technical component of the Supervision scenario. As a result, the appellant's test material and a listing of possible courses of action (PCAs) for the scenario were reviewed.

The Supervision scenario concerned two subordinates of a newly appointed Battalion Fire Chief. Captain Clark and Captain Zuniga have been having trouble working together and differ on many points about how duties should be divided among the companies, such as how and when the station should be cleaned and what groceries should be brought in and by whom. These problems seem trivial, but they have started the spill over into other areas of work. For example, they fail to coordinate training sessions when both companies should be training together, and there have been disagreements at emergency scenes. The candidate has spoken to both of them informally about the need to get along, but now the situation is out of control. The candidate walks into a lunchroom where they are in a shouting match in front of several fire fighters. Captain Zuniga calls Captain Clark a very strong expletive and Captain Clark retaliates by calling Captain Zuniga a racial slur. The scenario asked candidates to answer the questions based on the text *Managing Fire and Emergency Services* and their experience. Question 1 asked for specific actions

to be taken now and in the future. Question 2 indicated that, after preliminary actions, relations have not improved between the two Fire Captains. In fact, it seems that the situation is worse because now there are problems between the members of their respective fire companies. Question 2 asked for specific actions that should now be taken based on this new information.

For this question, the assessor noted that the appellant missed the opportunities to review the Fire Captains' personnel/training records (question 1), interview the Battalion Fire Chief [formerly] assigned to his tour (question 1), and to schedule the members of both companies for sensitivity training (question 2). On appeal, the appellant stated that he said he would speak to each of the firefighters that witnessed the occurrence and previous occurrences and other work associates and try to gather more information.

In reply, the instructions in the scenario tell candidates to be as specific as possible and not to assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to a score. This was a formal examination setting, and candidates were required to specifically state the actions that they would take in response to the questions. In this case, the appellant did not indicate that he would interview the Battalion Fire Chief formerly assigned to his tour, who may or may not have witnessed previous occurrences. If the appellant was aware that he needed to have spoken to the former Battalion Fire Chief, he was to indicate that verbally in his response, but he cannot receive credit on the assumption that he would have done so for having spoken to the members who witnessed the occurrence and previous occurrences. The appellant missed the actions noted by the assessor and his score for this component will not be changed.

CONCLUSION

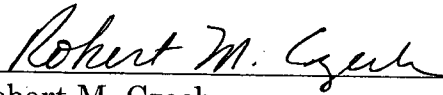
A thorough review of appellant's submissions and the test materials indicates that the decision below is amply supported by the record, and the appellant has failed to meet his burden of proof in this matter.

ORDER

Therefore, it is ordered that this appeal be denied.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
THE 21st DAY OF DECEMBER, 2016



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