

B-49



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of Richard Casella,
Fire Officer 3 (PM1698S),
Jersey City

CSC Docket No. 2016-1720

Examination Appeal

ISSUED: **DEC 21 2015** (RE)

Richard Casella appeals his score on the examination for Fire Officer 3 (PM1698S), Jersey City. It is noted that the appellant passed the examination with a final average of 86.500 and ranks fourth on the resultant eligible list.

The subject promotional examination was held on April 28, 2015 and 13 candidates passed. This was an oral examination designed to generate behaviors similar to those required for success in a job. The examination consisted of four scenario-based oral exercises; each was developed to simulate tasks and assess the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) important to job performance. These exercises covered four topic areas: 1) Incident Command – Non-fire Incident, 2) Supervision, 3) Administration, and 4) Incident Command – Fire Incident.

The candidates' responses were scored on technical knowledge and oral communication ability. Prior to the administration of the exam, a panel of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) determined the scoring criteria, using generally approved fire command practices, fire fighting practices, and reference materials. Scoring decisions were based on SME-approved possible courses of action (PCAs) including those actions that must be taken to resolve the situation as presented. For a performance to be acceptable in the technical component for some scenarios, a candidate needed to present the mandatory courses of action for that scenario. Only those oral responses that depicted relevant behaviors that were observable and could be quantified were assessed in the scoring process.

This examination was given using the chain oral testing process, and candidates were given ten minutes to respond to each question. Candidate responses to each question were rated on a five-point scale (1 to 5) from nil response through optimum according to determinations made by the SMEs. Oral communication for each question was also rated on the five-point scale. This five-point scale includes 5 as the optimal response, 4 as a more than acceptable passing response, 3 as a minimally acceptable passing response, 2 as a less than acceptable response, and 1 as a much less than acceptable response. The appellant received the following scores for the technical component for each question, in order: 5, 5, 5, and 3. He received the scores of 4, 5, 5, and 5 for the oral communication components.

The appellant challenges his scores for the oral communication component for the Incident Command – Non-fire Incident, and the technical component for the Incident Command – Fire Incident scenarios. As a result, the appellant's test material, audiotape, and a listing of PCAs for the scenario were reviewed.

For oral communication component for the Incident Command – Non-fire Incident, the assessor noted that the appellant's occasional use of "um" and "ah" detracted from the overall presentation. On appeal, the appellant states that he spoke clearly and concisely with no disruption in the flow of his response, and he had a smooth transition and a step-by-step approach in problem solving. He states that he spoke with conviction and confidence, and was not distracted by the 2-minute warning.

In reply, there are many criteria for the oral communication component including several of those described by the appellant, such as clarity, organization, and confidence. Nevertheless, the weakness cited by the assessor is in word usage/grammar. This factor is defined as using appropriate words and sentences that are grammatically correct. It was not acceptable to present many distracting verbal mannerisms, such as "ah." This was an examination setting where candidates were given scenarios, and a question or questions for each scenario, and were required to provide direct answers to those questions and, in this setting, candidates are required to maintain the flow of information. There is a well-known phenomenon of hesitational disfluency that can afflict a speaker trying to cope with the pressures of immediate processing, and some level of disfluency is acceptable when it does not affect the continuity of a presentation. At some point, however, the use of distracting verbal mannerisms is not acceptable.

A review of the audiotape and related examination materials reveals that the appellant spoke quickly and continually, but the rate of speech was not a distraction. However, while trying to formulate responses, the appellant used distracting verbal mannerisms within quickly-spoken words, and made grammatical errors. For example, the appellant stated, "I also want the

Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, because we could have ah a problem with the chem..., ah chemicals and gasoline going into the environment. Ah, tow trucks are going to be essential. Ah, there's a lot of cars. We're gonna need several tow trucks on the scene. Um, I want utility companies in case we need to control any gas, water and electric in the area," "We need to separate this into a triage for, start triaging people, then we need to start setting up treatment s... ah, areas for treatment, and then transporting them to local hospitals," "Ah, we could also use a fog nozzle to suppress, suppress any vapors for the gasoline. I have a rescue and re... ah, RIT team group to get any people that are trapped in the cars, the overturned vehicles," and "Um, I'll medically monitor my men before I return them to duty. I would ah, um, secure the scene." The appellant's presentation had a minor weakness in grammar, and his score for the oral communication component for this scenario will not be changed.

The Incident Command –Fire Incident scenario pertained to a call for a fire at a two-story taxpayer of ordinary construction. It is 7:00 AM, 17° F, and there is little to no wind. The first floor of the fire building contains various stores such as a liquor store, nail salon, barbershop, and mini mart. The second floor has four occupied apartments with a common cockloft. A battalion chief, two engine companies and the ladder company have been operating on scene for 10 minutes. On arrival, the candidate observes heavy fire from the first floor across all the stores, and hears a radio transmission from Engine One stating that they have hooked up to a frozen fire hydrant. The attack can go no further because they have exhausted that their on-board water supply from the engine. The scenario asks the candidates to answer the questions based on the text *Fire Officer's Handbook of Tactics* and their experience. Question 1 asked for specific actions to take to address the incident. Question 2 indicated that the candidate receives a radio report from a truck company that fire has entered the common cockloft and is also spreading to both exposure buildings. The question asked for specific actions that should now be taken based on this new information.

For this incident, the assessor noted that the appellant failed to vertically vent exposures B and D. This was a mandatory response to question 2. They also indicated that he missed the opportunity to assign an exposure supervisor to exposures B and D, which was an additional response to question 2. On appeal, the appellant argues that he assigned chiefs to the B and D Divisions for supervision.

In this scenario, certain responses to the situation presented are mandatory. That is, mandatory responses are responses that are requirements for a performance to be acceptable (a score of 3). Sometimes, a candidate states many additional responses but does not give a mandatory response: however, the SMEs cannot provide a score higher than a 3 in those cases. All mandatory responses must be given in order for a performance to be acceptable, whether there is one mandatory response or five of them. It is not assumed that candidates receive a

score of 5 which is then lowered for lack of responses. Performances that include mandatory responses get a score of 3, and those without mandatory responses get a score of 1 or 2. Additional responses only increase a score from 3 to 4 or from 3 to 5.

In reply, question 2 provided the new information that fire has entered the common cockloft and is also spreading to both exposure buildings. The SMEs determined that based on this information, exposures B and D should be vertically ventilated. The appellant responded to question 1 and in doing so, he went into defensive mode. As part of his actions, he set up master streams, and set up a collapse zone. He then stated, "I'm also going to assign different chiefs, an A division, a B division, a C division, and a D division, to be my eyes and ears around this building. It's a large building. I need to know what's going on completely around it." After each question was read aloud by the assessor, he stated, "In responding to the questions, be as specific as possible. Do not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to your score." The appellant clearly assigned different chiefs for the four sides of the fire building in order to provide him with information regarding the fire building in case of collapse. Nevertheless, he did not state in question 2 that he assigned exposure supervisors. The information that candidates give in their presentation is not taken out of context and considered as "buzzwords," giving credit for simply stating the words. In this response, the candidate was showing concern for the fire building, but not the exposures.

However, it was expected that he would be concerned with the exposure buildings in response to the stimulus material provided in question 2, and vertically ventilate exposures B and D due to fire in the cocklofts of those buildings. In response to question 2, the appellant vertically vented the fire building, which was another mandatory response, but he did not vertically vent the exposures. He also did not assign exposure supervisors to Exposures B and D. Toward the end of his response, the appellant stated, "I want to get to whatever exposures aren't affected yet to make sure that fire isn't ah, going horizontally into those exposures." This response makes it clear that the appellant missed the facts given in question 2. The assessor asked the appellant to be more specific regarding vertical ventilation, and the appellant explained how he would vertically ventilate the fire building. The appellant missed the mandatory response, as well as the additional response, noted by the assessor, and his score for this component is correct.

CONCLUSION

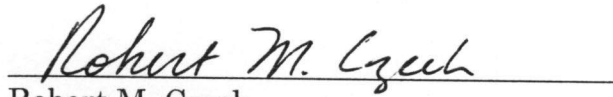
A thorough review of appellant's submissions and the test materials indicates that the decision below is amply supported by the record, and the appellant has failed to meet his burden of proof in this matter.

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 16th DAY OF DECEMBER, 2015



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