



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of
Steven Ali, Fire Captain
(PM1136S), Paterson

Examination Appeal

CSC Docket No. 2016-2681

ISSUED: **OCT 25 2016** (RE)

Steven Ali appeals his score for the oral portion of the promotional examination for Fire Captain (PM1136S), Paterson. It is noted that the appellant passed the subject examination with a final score of 78.180 and his name appears as the 77th ranked eligible on the subject list.

It is noted for the record that this two-part examination consisted of a written multiple-choice portion and an oral portion. Candidates were required to pass the written portion of the examination, and then were ranked on their performance on both portions of the examination. The test was worth 80 percent of the final score and seniority was worth the remaining 20 percent. Of the test weights, 31.35% of the score was the written multiple-choice portion, 22.49% was the technical score for the evolving exercise, 7.53% was the supervision score for the evolving exercise, 4.28% was the oral communication score for the evolving exercise, 19.23% was the technical score for the arriving exercise, 7.53% was the supervision score for the arriving exercise, and 7.59% was the oral communication score for the arriving exercise.

The oral portion of the Fire Captain examination consisted of two scenarios: a fire scene simulation with questions designed to measure the knowledge of safe rescue tactics and procedures to safeguard citizens, supervision of fire fighters and the ability to assess fire conditions and hazards in an evolving incident on the fireground (evolving); and a fire scene simulation designed to measure the knowledge of safe rescue tactics and procedures to safeguard citizens, supervision of firefighters and the ability to plan strategies and tactics based upon a building's

structure and condition (arriving). Knowledge of supervision was measured by questions in both scenarios, and was scored for each. For the evolving scenario, candidates were provided with a 15-minute preparation period, and candidates had 10 minutes to respond. For the arriving scenario, a five minute preparation period was given and candidates had 10 minutes to respond.

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, firefighting 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, 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. Each performance was evaluated by two SMEs who currently are a first level supervisor or higher. If the SME scores differed by 1 point, the score was averaged. If they differed by more than 1 point, the SMEs were required to confer with each other until they agreed on a score. Scores were then converted to standardized scores.

Candidates were rated on a five-point scale, with 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. For each of the scenes, and for oral communication, the requirements for each score were defined.

For the evolving scenario, the appellant scored a 2 for the technical component, a 5 for the supervision component, and a 3.5 for the oral communication component. For the arriving scenario, the appellant scored a 2 for the technical component, a 4 for the supervision component, and a 3 for the oral communication component. The appellant challenges his score for the all of the components of the arriving scenario. As a result, the appellant's test material, video, and a listing of PCAs for the scenarios were reviewed.

The arriving scenario involves a fire in a two-story, wood-frame townhouse built in the early 1980s. The townhouse is one of four connected units, with exposures B and D as similar townhouses. It is 9:30 AM on a Monday in September and the temperature is 61° Fahrenheit with cloudy skies and a wind blowing from west to east at 5 miles per hour. Upon arrival, it is noticed that smoke is coming from the first and second floor windows on side A. Dispatch reports the caller is an occupant in the second floor bedroom who awoke to smoke coming up the stairs and was forced back into his bedroom. He is at home with two other roommates. The

candidate is the commanding officer of the first arriving engine company and is first on scene. The technical question, question 1, asked for specific actions to be taken upon arrival. The supervision question indicated that, after the incident, a rookie firefighter tells you he observed a veteran firefighter being careless with the tools at the incident. He noticed that a veteran firefighter was not properly using them and did not return them to their proper place on the apparatus. This question asked for actions to take to address the rookie firefighter's concerns. Instructions indicate that, in responding to the questions, the candidate should be as specific as possible in describing actions, and should not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to a score.

In regard to the technical component, the assessors noted that the appellant failed to assume or establish command, and to order the engine company to secure a water supply, which were mandatory responses to question 1. They also indicated that he missed the opportunity to secure a secondary water supply, which was an additional response to question 1. On appeal, the appellant states that he established a command post, sounded multiple alarms, and gave a building description.

A review of the appellant's video and related examination materials indicates that, at the start of his presentation, the appellant stated, "Okay, once the alarm is sounded, I'm gonna listen to reports and go over pre-fire planning guides. I'm gonna listen, ah, look over my CAD system reports from dispatch. Upon arrival, I'm going to describe the structure as a 2½-story wood-frame type five structure with smoke showing out of the A side first floor, second floor windows. I'd instruct the first engine to drive past the building to leave room for the ladder, ah, to get the front of the building for a full scrub area for the, for the ladder. I'm gonna, I'm gonna need um, a second alarm, right, a second and third alarm due to trapped victims being told to us." The appellant continued with calling for resources and assigning officers. He then stated, "Upon establishing all those parameters, I'm gonna have ah, I'm gonna have the engine company stretch an inch and ¾, ah, for speed and mobility." The appellant continued giving orders to companies. After fighting the fire, rescuing the victims, and replacing his Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) in the staging area, the appellant indicated he would establish a staging area and a command post on the A/D side of the structure. Thus, in his response, the appellant located the command post; however, he did not assume or establish command, which was a mandatory response. He also did not order the engine company to secure a water supply, or establish a secondary water supply. He missed the two mandatory responses indicated by the assessors and the other action as well. His score of 2 for this component is correct.

In regard to the supervision component, the assessors assigned a score of 4, but failed to give any notation. On appeal, the appellant states that his score of 4 was unjust as there were no notes.

In reply, a review of the appellant's presentation and scoring materials indicates that he did not interview the other crew members, or inspect the tools/and apparatus used at the incident. Thus, he took no action at the scene to verify the rookie's opinion. He stated he would interview both firefighters, so he had each firefighter's opinion, but he had no objective proof or witness statements to verify either opinion. He also interviewed both members together, and gave both of them an oral reprimand. The rookie firefighter should not be interviewed together with the veteran firefighter, and he should not be given a reprimand for reporting an observation and told that he was being held accountable for future violations. The appellant's score for this component will not be changed.

In regard to the oral communication component, the assessors noted weaknesses in specificity and organization. They indicated that he lacked specificity in his actions, and gave general responses. For example, he started a 1¾ inch line, but he did not state who was stretching that line, and he provided a second hose line, but he did not say who was stretching that line or where they were going. As to organization, the assessors indicated that he jumped around from action to action, with frequent pauses. On appeal, the appellant asserted that he clearly stated that the first hose line was from the first engine company going between the fire and the victims in protecting the stairway, and the second hose line from the second engine was ordered to the second floor to locate, confine, and extinguish the fire.

One factor in oral communication is specificity, and a weakness in specificity is a response that is general or lacking the detail necessary to fully address PCAs. As to specificity, the appellant did not indicate that the first hose line was from the first engine company. Rather, he stated that, "...I'm gonna have the engine company stretch an inch and ¾, ah, for speed and mobility." And then spoke about donning PPE, SCBA and activating PASS devices before entering the structure. The appellant then mentioned the ladder company, which he split into two teams, and he ordered them to ladder the building and vertically ventilate. After giving orders to the ladder company, the appellant said, "Our interior teams. Engines and trucks are gonna bring the hoseline to protect the victims. Locate, confine and extinguish the fire. We'll place the fire, we'll place the hose between the fire and the victims first." This is a general response which does not provide any indication as to who is bringing the hose line in and where it is going. The fire is in the kitchen on the first floor, while there are three victims upstairs, two in bedrooms on side C, and one in a bedroom on side A. He said that a secondary hose line was going to protect the stairway and secondary means of egress, but he did not state that this was an order to the second engine company. The appellant referenced first

and second hose lines, but it cannot be assumed that these hose lines were used by the first and second engine companies. He went on to explain that the first line went to the kitchen fire. The appellant was providing correct information, but portions of his response included general information that lacked specificity.

Another factor in oral communication is organization, which is defined as presenting ideas in a logical fashion, stating a topic, and providing supporting arguments as well as a conclusion or summary. The appellant provided information out of order. For example, as noted above, he established a command post and a staging area after rotating RIT personnel. He also repeated information already given, and had inappropriate pauses. At one point, the appellant was giving information and his voice just trailed off and he paused before resuming. He stated, "Um, we ventilate above, above the, above the fire, for life. There's a lot of smoke on the second floor. There should be a cockloft in this structure so we definitely have to check the cockloft for fire, fire spread. First floor kitchen is on fire. We have to um, seek vent, ah, seek secondary means of egress. Once in the structure I would ventilate with the ladder company nearest the fire first and opp, opposite the protecting. Force the rear door of this structure, the rear, the rear (mumbles)... Okay. Protect our stairway. Secondary means of egress. Hydraulically ventilate all windows if possible with the hoseline. Ah rescue and remove all victims with the ladder company and the rescue company. Once out, the victims have to go to ah, my triage area to, for treatment and transport. (22 second pause while he mumbles to himself)." The appellant's oral communication had at least two weaknesses, and his score of 3 for this component is correct.

CONCLUSION

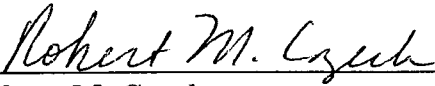
A thorough review of the appellant's submissions and the test materials indicates that the decision below is amply supported by the record, and the appellant has failed to meet his burden of proof in this matter.

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 19th DAY OF OCTOBER, 2016



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