



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

In the Matter of Robert Underhill,
Battalion Fire Chief (PM3384C),
Harrison

**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

CSC Docket No. 2023-1875

Examination Appeal

ISSUED: March 20, 2024 (ABR)

Robert Underhill appeals his score on the promotional examination for Battalion Fire Chief (PM3384C), Harrison. It is noted that the appellant passed the examination with a final average of 87.460 and ranks second on the eligible list.

The subject promotional examination was held on May 19, 2022, and six candidates passed. 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 multiple-choice items that measured specific work components identified and weighted by the job analysis. The second part consisted of three oral scenarios: Supervision, Administration and Incident Command. 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. It is noted that candidates were told the following prior to beginning their presentations for each scenario: "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."

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. Candidates were also assessed by three Commission employees trained in oral communication

assessment. 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 assessor also noted any weaknesses that detracted from the candidate's overall oral communication ability. Each assessor 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.

On the Supervision scenario, the appellant scored a 4 on the technical component and a 2 on the oral communication component. On the Administration scenario, the appellant scored a 4 on the technical component and a 4 on the oral communication component. Finally, on the Incident Command scenario, the appellant scored a 4 on the technical component and a 4 on the oral communication component.

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

The Incident Command scenario involves the response to a report of smoke at a local food mart that is part of a strip mall. Question 1 asks candidates what specific actions they would take upon arriving at the scene. Question 2 states that during firefighting operations, part of the roof over the fire collapses, trapping an interior crew, and the crew transmits a mayday. Question 2 then asks what specific actions the candidate would take based on this new information.

On the Incident Command scenario, the assessor awarded the appellant a score of 4 based on the appellant's failure to identify several additional PCAs, including, in part, the opportunity to gain control of communications (switch fire operations to another frequency). On appeal, the appellant argues that he addressed this response at a specified point in his presentation.

CONCLUSION

In the instant matter, upon review of the appellant's presentation, the Division of Test Development, Analytics and Administration agrees that the appellant should have been awarded credit for the additional PCA of gaining control of communications (switch fire operations to another frequency). However, it indicates that, even with the award of credit for this PCA, based upon the other PCAs that the appellant failed to identify, his score for the technical component of the Incident Command scenario remains unchanged at 4. The Commission agrees with this assessment.

ORDER

Therefore, it is ordered that the appellant's score for the technical component of the Incident Command scenario remain unchanged at 4, but that any appropriate agency records be revised to reflect the appellant's identification of the above-noted PCA.

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 ON
THE 20TH DAY OF MARCH, 2024

Allison Chris Myers

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