

THE PUBLIC SERVICE PUZZLER

JULY 2025

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THAT WAS HARDER THAN THE LSAT

Welcome to another edition of what is, by default, the #1 most popular municipal ethics-themed puzzle newsletter in America: the **Public Service Puzzler**! Last month, we told the story of three very ethical public servants: Arthur, Beowulf, and Calliope. Big fans of [Chapter 68 of the City Charter](#), these coworkers met up after work to brush up on some of their ethics knowledge; before starting, though, Calliope posed a question — a brain-teaser, really — to get everyone’s thinking caps working:

“My birthday is one of these dates,” she said.

May 15, May 16, May 19
June 17, June 18
July 14, July 16
August 14, August 15, August 17

Calliope then tells Arthur the *month* she was born. She tells Beowulf the *day*. Arthur replies, “**I don’t know when Calliope’s birthday is, but I know Beowulf doesn’t know either!**” Which prompts Beowulf to state, “**at first I didn’t know when Calliope’s birthday was — but I know now.**” Finally, Arthur responds, “OK, well, then I also know when Calliope’s birthday is.”

The question was: when is Calliope’s birthday? We received an unprecedented number of submissions, but there could be only one winner. In this case, [NOWSHIN FARA](#) of [COMMUNITY BOARD 17 IN BROOKLYN](#), who was randomly selected from among the correct answers of [July 16th](#). How’d they get July 16th?

Answer: Puzzles like this rely on not just the information that each person in the puzzle knows, but **what they know about what the other person knows**. Arthur is the first to speak and, knowing the month, says “I don’t know when Calliope’s birthday is, but I know Beowulf doesn’t know either!”

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So how can Arthur know that Beowulf *doesn't* know when Calliope's birthday is? To answer that, you'd have to know how Beowulf (who only knows the day) could know when her birthday is if he doesn't know the month. **The only way he could know** is if the day is one that only appears once in the entire list. So, for instance, if Calliope's birthday were **May 19th** or **June 18th**, Beowulf would know exactly when her birthday was just from the date alone. Since Arthur knows that Beowulf doesn't know when her birthday is, it must be because her birthday is not in **May** or **June** (and thus cannot be the **18th** or **19th**).

Easy, right? Let's keep going.

In the second step, Beowulf says, "At first I didn't know when Calliope's birthday was, but now I do." For that to happen, **there must be a day that only appears once in the remaining months**. This means that her birthday can't be on the **14th**, because Beowulf still wouldn't know which month it was. So it must be the **15th, 16th, or 17th**, because Beowulf could pick the exact month based only on the day.

At this point, Arthur says, "Then I also know when Calliope's birthday is!" The only way he could know that is if there's only one date left in the month that he was told by Calliope. So her birthday must be **July 16th**!

Congratulations to everyone who was able to figure out the correct answer, even if you weren't this month's winner! The good thing about the Puzzler is there's always another opportunity to sign your name forever in the **JONATHAN HOFFMAN + PETER KONTOGIANNIS HALL OF ETHICS AND EXCELLENCE**. And this month we've got an entirely different challenge for you!

Imagine, if you will: five public servants meet up during lunch to discuss Chapter 68 of the City Charter and all the great training materials produced by the New York Conflicts of Interest Board. I'm told this is a thing City employees do all the time, and as such this is a realistic scenario.

Anyway, each City employee takes a seat at the table and pulls out the training materials they've brought along, which fall into one of three categories: **printed materials** ([The Annual Report](#), [The Plain Language Guide](#), [Chapter 68](#), and the [Tabletop Roleplaying Game](#)), **silly COIB videos** ([The Advice Line](#), [The Attorney of the Day](#), [The MuniciPALS](#), and [Alex Runs for Office](#)), and **serious COIB videos** ([The Public Hearing Archive](#), [Ethics Express](#), [It's All About Ethics](#), and [An Overview of the Law](#)).

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THE RULES

1. The group has 12 different training materials.
2. Each City employee has exactly four different materials.
3. Each training material is owned by at least one City employee.
4. Only *one* training material is possessed by four City employees.
5. Only one employee has all three *types* of training materials.
6. Only one employee has all four examples of a training material *type*.
7. The Plain Language Guide is only held by the employees in the first and last chairs.
8. Paul sits in the middle chair, with no Overview of the Law.
9. The employee who brought The Public Hearing Archive doesn't have any silly videos.
10. The City employee with the Ethics Express video does not have the Attorney of the Day video.
11. The City employee with the text of Chapter 68 also has the MunicipALS and Attorney of the Day videos.
12. The City employee in the first chair has the Annual Report and Tabletop Roleplaying Game.
13. Only two City employees have the Tabletop Roleplaying Game.
14. Sam has Alex Runs for Office and the Tabletop Roleplaying Game.
15. Luke has exactly two *types* of training materials.
16. The It's All About Ethics video is held by only two employees.
17. The Annual Report is held by a single employee.
18. Only one employee sitting next to Nick has the Attorney of the Day video.
19. Sam's seat is not the first or last.
20. Hank has no silly videos and does not have a copy of the Public Hearing Archive.
21. Paul has exactly three silly videos.

So who brought what training materials? [Get your answers in by August 22nd](#) for your chance to be a big, ethical winner! And if you've got an ethics question before then? Remember that the COIB is always available to help on our Attorney of the Day Advice Line (212-437-0707) or email us at AOD@coib.nyc.gov!

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THE JONATHAN HOFFMAN + PETER KONTOGIANNIS

HALL OF ETHICS AND EXCELLENCE

LUKE SZABADOS – BUILDINGS

AMY HOM – DFTA

ELISABETH TOPALTZAS – DORIS

CHRISTOPHER LYNCH – LAW DEPT

HUNTER IGOE – LAW DEPT

HEATHER MURAKAMI – HONOLULU ETHICS COMMISSION

MELISSA HESTER – ACS

MARY LANE – FINANCE

KATIE MILLER – TIC

EVA GAMBINO – FINANCE

TOBY SINGER – DEP

ROBERT ROLANDI – FINANCE

JAMES TOBACK – OCME

FLORENCE MALETTE – FINANCE

SHAWNORA GULLEY – BUILDINGS

MELINDA CALDERON – OCME

IVAN SANTIAGO – DSS

WILLIAM FLETCHER – NYPD

STYLIANI KARPADAKIS – OCME

BERNARD BRAUN – LAW DEPT

NIGEL C.O. MANUEL – BUILDINGS

MICHELE SIMENSKY – LAW DEPT

NANCY SULTAN-LORMIL – BUILDINGS

SHIVAJEET CHAKRABORTY – TIC

CHARLOTTE YIH – COMPTROLLER

JONATHAN HOFFMAN – DEP

MICHAEL GREENE – DSS

JACK SHVARTS – EDUCATION

GARFIELD S. SCARDER – SCA

SARAH ROBERSON – PARKS

KIMFA CARRINGTON – DOT

VINCENT RIVELLESE – BRONX DA

YVONNE CHOW – DSNY

SIMONE KING – DOT

ALEXANDER YELLEN – NYCHA

LISA BRANDQUIST – FDNY

KELLAN STANNER – PARKS

PUI CHING – SBS

SANDRA COLLYMORE – FINANCE

JAMES DAVIE JR. – BUILDINGS

ROLANDA OSBOURNE – FINANCE

EUJEAN PARK – SBS

CHRIS K. PAPA – ACS

KATHY TUZNIK – DDC

MONICA DOYLE – FINANCE

DIANA HERRERA – FISA-OPA

MARIE SAMPLES – OCME

LAURA GODFREY – DCA

JOHN RAYALL – FINANCE

TORREY FISHMAN – MOIA

MICHAEL LEVARIO – APPOINTMENTS

PETER KONTOGIANNIS – DEP

EUGENE MASSEY (2X) – DOHMH

CINDY CHEN – DOT

VALERIE WALD – EDUCATION

NOWSHIN FARA – CB 17 BROOKLYN