

# THE PUBLIC SERVICE PUZZLER

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## OK, EINSTEIN

The life of an Education and Engagement Specialist for the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board can be challenging but also rewarding. People like talking about ethics, it seems: they like to tell you about a thing that happened in the news and say, “Now *that* should be a conflict.” They like to raise their hands when you ask “Has anyone here ever taken a bribe?” and then act like they didn’t mean to raise their hand and now have been caught in some corrupt scheme — which is pretty funny, actually, when graded against the curve of “jokes told under conference room fluorescence.”

Sometimes, when I’m explaining a particular prohibition in the City’s conflicts of interest law, people will interrupt me to shout out things they find funny. “What is the word for when someone provides something of value to you, but now you gotta take action on their behalf?” I ask, beginning to illustrate the temporal difference between a bribe and a gratuity. “That’s called marriage!” someone will yell — a joke I still do not understand but usually allow on account of it usually provoking a seven-minute standing ovation from the attendees. It’s good when the attendees at an ethics training enjoy themselves, I think.

But that’s not always guaranteed. I’ve just received the roster for a Chapter 68 training I’m doing next week and so, as usual, I’m building a *complex and penetrating psychological profile of every single one of my attendees* to maximize pedagogical joy — this is just standard practice in the space, by the way, and not what’s problematic. No, what’s bothering me is I simply cannot get these particular New York City public servants figured out! I want to provide a maximally comfortable space for them to learn and laugh, but all their files are half complete and I can’t make heads nor tails of it.



I’ve got *a lot* of information here: the attendees’ respective **City agencies**, **drink of choice**, **favorite New York sports team** — I even know the **section of the Conflicts of Interest Law they are most likely to ask about!** But there’s some glaring holes in the data I need filled; specifically, I need to know **which public servant prefers to drink water** and **which one is coming to class ready to ask about the One Year Post-Employment Communication Ban**. Only then will I have a complete picture and be ready to teach the class. Anyway, here’s what I know about the next Chapter 68 training and the City employees attending it:

1. There are five chairs available.
2. The City employee from the Law Dept likes the red chair.
3. The Parks Dept employee is most interested in learning about *Misuse of Position*.
4. Coffee is consumed in the green chair.
5. The FDNY employee drinks tea.
6. The green chair is immediately to the right of the white chair.

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7. The Knicks fan wants to hear about *Moonlighting Waivers*.

8. The Yankees fan sits in the yellow seat.

9. Milk is the preferred drink of the person in the middle chair.

10. The DCAS employee sits in the first chair.

11. The New York Mets fan sits in a chair next to the employee who wants to hear about the *\$50 Valuable Gift Rule*.

12. The Yankees fan is sitting in the chair next to the employee who wants to hear about the ban on *Superior/ Subordinate Financial Relationships*.

13. The New York Liberty fan drinks orange juice.

14. The DOI employee is a fan of the Brooklyn Nets, somehow.

15. The DCAS employee sits next to the blue chair.



In the interest of clarity, it must be added that each of the five chairs at the training (it's a small, bespoke training, okay?) is a **different color**, and the City employees in those chairs are from **different City agencies**, are interested in **different parts of Chapter 68**, drink **different beverages**, and root for **different New York sports teams**. One other thing: in statement 6, *right* means your right.

So, for the love of all that is ethical and municipal: can someone please tell me, specifically: **WHO DRINKS WATER? AND WHO CAME TO HEAR ABOUT THE ONE-YEAR POST-EMPLOYMENT COMMUNICATION BAN?** I am just trying to create what the philosopher Plato would call a “perfect” ethics training here, and I just can't figure it out. If you can figure it out, [shoot us an email with the correct answer](#) for a chance to be named to the Public Service Puzzler HALL OF CHAMPIONS. You will stand beside such greats as Eugene Massey from DOHMH, who won last month's challenge and as such will live forever in PDF form on the next page of this mighty document. That sound appealing? Well then, you're exactly who should play!

## Last month's answers, by the way:

*For those who serve with extra flair,  
Going way above their duty,  
A New Yorker may wish to show they care,  
With a sadly prohibited **gratuity**.*

*When rules are strict but might need a bend,  
On this process a City employee can depend:  
A formal nod to an otherwise prohibited behavior,  
The restricted becomes permitted with a **waiver**.*

*When personal stakes might cloud one's sight,  
Chapter 68 demands a slight removal:  
A step back, taken to make things right,  
This action is called **recusal**.*

Thanks again to everyone who played — both those providing accurate and well-intentioned answers, and those public servants who chose, instead, to send comedically inaccurate and more silly-intentioned replies. Both types are an indelible part of the rich tapestry that is New York City public service, and I'm glad to have received so many replies! Let's do it again!

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