

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

SHALA DAVIS
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 15A-UI-01780-ET

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS USA INC
Employer

**OC: 12/21/14
Claimant: Respondent (2)**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge/Misconduct
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the January 30, 2015, reference 02, decision that allowed benefits to the claimant. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on March 10, 2015. The claimant did not respond to the hearing notice by providing a phone number where she could be reached at the date and time of the hearing as evidenced by the absence of her name and phone number on the Clear2There screen showing whether the parties have called in for the hearing as instructed by the hearing notice. The claimant did not participate in the hearing or request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice. Kyle Montgomery, Store Manager, participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a part-time assistant head cashier for Harbor Freight Tools USA from January 11, 2012 to December 24, 2014. She was discharged due to missing refund slips on her gift card cash out returns.

The employer sells gift cards and customers returning the gift cards and attempting to get cash for the gift card is a rare occurrence. Generally, customers are only allowed to redeem the gift cards for merchandise but if they are insistent about asking for the cash value a manager may enter her numbers to start the return process. That generates a refund slip so the employer can keep track of the gift cards as well as its cash.

In November 2014 loss prevention was called to the store to investigate another employee whom the employer believed was using gift cards and then having the claimant authorize the cash out of her gift card returns. The claimant and that employee were personal friends and had a friendship outside work. After loss prevention found the issue with the other employee

using gift card returns and pocketing the cash the employer asked it to check on the claimant and the same situation was discovered. Loss prevention looked at the paperwork for days with high dollar amounts of gift card cash outs and returns without a receipt. Each return has a receipt that has to be signed by the customer and a manager. The claimant had the authority to sign the receipts presented by other employees.

The employer determined the claimant was reprinting receipts for original items and later the same day doing a return and putting it on a gift card which she then had the authority to cash out. Loss prevention could not find the claimant's receipts for at least seven transactions with an estimated value of \$2,000.00 and concluded the claimant and the other employee were each cashing out the gift cards and taking the cash. The employer subsequently placed the claimant on administrative leave December 24, 2014, and her employment was terminated December 26, 2014.

The claimant has claimed and received unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$1,912.00 since her separation from this employer.

The employer personally participated in the fact-finding interview through the statements of Store Manager Kyle Montgomery.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for disqualifying job misconduct.

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. Discharge for misconduct. If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(1)a provides:

Discharge for misconduct.

(1) Definition.

a. "Misconduct" is defined as a deliberate act or omission by a worker which constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of such worker's contract of employment. Misconduct as the term is used in the disqualification provision as being limited to conduct evincing such willful or wanton disregard of an employer's interest as is found in deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior which the employer has the right to expect of employees, or in carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design, or to show an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. On the other hand mere inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, failure in good performance as the result of inability or

incapacity, inadvertencies or ordinary negligence in isolated instances, or good faith errors in judgment or discretion are not to be deemed misconduct within the meaning of the statute.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Huntoon v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

The employer has the burden of proving disqualifying misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged him for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a. Misconduct that disqualifies an individual from receiving unemployment insurance benefits occurs when there are deliberate acts of omissions that constitute a material breach of the worker's duties and obligations to the employer. See 871 IAC 24.32(1).

After loss prevention conducted an investigation into the claimant's practices involving gift cards and discovered several missing refund slips on her gift card cash out returns, it concluded she was reprinting the receipt for the original item and later in the day conducting a return and putting the return money on a gift card which she had the authority to allow to be redeemed for the cash value rather than store merchandise. At that point she would take the cash she had placed on the gift card. The employer found at least seven transactions where this occurred in an estimated amount of \$2,000.00. When confronted about the situation the claimant could not explain why the employer could not find any of her cash out receipts for the gift cards.

Under these circumstances, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant's conduct demonstrated a willful disregard of the standards of behavior the employer has the right to expect of employees and shows an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer has met its burden of proving disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. IDJS*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). Therefore, benefits are denied.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused

absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) “A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits,” pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer’s representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) “Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual,” as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)“b” as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

The unemployment insurance law requires benefits be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later denied benefits even if the claimant acted in good faith and was not at fault. However, a claimant will not have to repay an overpayment when an initial decision to award benefits on an employment separation issue is reversed on appeal if two conditions are met: (1) the claimant did not receive the benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, and (2) the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding that awarded benefits. In addition, if a claimant is not required to repay an overpayment because the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding, the employer’s account will be charged for the overpaid benefits. Iowa Code § 96.3-7-a, -b.

The claimant received benefits but has been denied benefits as a result of this decision. The claimant, therefore, was overpaid benefits.

Because the employer participated in the fact-finding interview, the claimant is required to repay the overpayment and the employer will not be charged for benefits paid.

The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be

recovered when it is based on a reversal on appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. While there is no evidence the claimant received benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, the employer participated in the fact-finding interview personally through the statements of Store Manager Kyle Montgomery. Consequently, the claimant's overpayment of benefits cannot be waived and she is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$1,912.00.

DECISION:

The January 30, 2015, reference 02, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Benefits are withheld until such time as she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible. The claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. The employer did personally participate in the fact-finding interview within the meaning of the law. Therefore, the claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$1,912.00.

Julie Elder
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

je/pjs