

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

BRENDA M HOFMAN

Claimant

APPEAL NO: 07A-UI-05978-DT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WELLS FARGO BANK NA

Employer

**OC: 05/20/07 R: 02
Claimant: Respondent (2)**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. (employer) appealed a representative's June 4, 2007 decision (reference 01) that concluded Brenda M. Hofman (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on July 2, 2007. The claimant participated in the hearing. Debra Hawk appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from one other witness, Sara Caldwell. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

After a prior period of employment with the employer, the claimant most recently started working for the employer on November 28, 2005. She worked full time as customer service representative at the employer's West Des Moines, Iowa home mortgage service center. Her last day of work was May 18, 2007. The employer discharged her on that date. The stated reason for the discharge was not paying sufficient attention to calls and callers resulting in disconnection of calls.

The claimant had been placed on a performance plan on March 16, 2007 which emphasized the need for the claimant to give callers her full focus and not to be doing other things while she was handling calls and indicated that the claimant's job was in jeopardy if there were further problems. In subsequently reviewing the claimant's performance, Ms. Hawk, the customer service supervisor, found there had been two calls on May 14 in which the claimant had apparently not been focusing on the statements and answers being made by the callers, as she had to have the caller repeat basic information at least four times. She then indicated to the callers that she would transfer the call, even though there was not a more appropriate

department to which the call should have been transferred, the claimant then disconnected the calls a few seconds after placing them on hold.

An analysis of the claimant's computer revealed that at the time the claimant was handling the calls she also had an email window open for reading and for at least a portion of the time had been typing an email response. As a result of the claimant's handling of the calls on May 14 and doing email while on the calls after the prior performance plan which emphasized the need for her to be fully focused on the calls, the employer discharged the claimant.

The claimant established a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective May 20, 2007. The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits after the separation from employment in the amount of \$2,460.00.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. Cosper v. IDJS, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982); Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

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.

871 IAC 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.

The focus of the definition of misconduct is on acts or omissions by a claimant that “rise to the level of being deliberate, intentional or culpable.” Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa App. 1986). The acts must show:

1. Willful and wanton disregard of an employer’s interest, such as found in:
 - a. Deliberate violation of standards of behavior that the employer has the right to expect of its employees, or
 - b. Deliberate disregard of standards of behavior the employer has the right to expect of its employees; or
2. Carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to:
 - a. Manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design; or
 - b. Show an intentional and substantial disregard of:
 1. The employer’s interest, or
 2. The employee’s duties and obligations to the employer.

The claimant's failing to focus on the calls by doing email while handling the calls after being warned shows a willful or wanton disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has the right to expect from an employee, as well as an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer discharged the claimant for reasons amounting to work-connected misconduct.

Iowa Code § 96.3-7 provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which the claimant was not entitled. Those benefits must be recovered in accordance with the provisions of Iowa law.

DECISION:

The representative’s June 4, 2007 decision (reference 01) is reversed. The employer discharged the claimant for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance benefits as of May 18, 2007. This disqualification continues until the

claimant has been paid ten times her weekly benefit amount for insured work, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account will not be charged. The claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$2,460.00.

Lynette A. F. Donner
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

ld/pjs