

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

KEVIN A HANS

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 11A-UI-02307-LT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WAL-MART STORES INC

Employer

OC: 11/28/10

Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the February 16, 2011 (reference 01) decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a telephone conference hearing was held on March 24, 2011. Claimant participated. Employer opted not to participate.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having heard the testimony and having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant most recently worked full-time as a sales associate for three years and was separated from employment on December 2, 2010. The employer told him he was fired because of being tardy on November 16 but night supervisor Rodney told him he could leave early. There were no instances of absences or tardiness thereafter. Claimant had complained to co-manager Jerry Driscoll earlier that week about a coworker harassing him and calling him derogatory names because of his sexual orientation.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

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 employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. IDJS*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988).

In an at-will employment environment, an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job-related misconduct as the reason for the separation, employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. Since claimant had been granted supervisory permission to leave early on November 16, the conduct for which claimant was discharged was apparently the complaint about coworker harassment. A retaliatory discharge is not disqualifying. Benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The February 16, 2011 (reference 01) decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed. The benefits withheld shall be paid, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

Dévon M. Lewis
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/kjw