

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

CHRISTOPHER J BELL
Claimant

RAZ INSURANCE INC
Employer

APPEAL 22A-UI-04113-DH-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 01/09/22
Claimant: Appellant (6)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a - Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) - Voluntary Quitting
Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) - Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) - Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant/appellant, Christopher Bell, filed an appeal from the January 27, 2022 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision denied benefits for failing to follow instructions and being discharged from work on 01/11/22. Notices of hearing were mailed to the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for April 28, 2022. Employer, Raz Insurance, Inc., participated through Jo Anderson, director of agency development, and Steve Genck, director of insurance operations. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant failed to call the toll-free number listed on the hearing notice at the time of the hearing. Because the Claimant/appellant failed to follow the instructions on the notice of hearing, no hearing was held. Judicial notice was taken of the administrative record.

ISSUE:

Should the appeal be dismissed based on the appellant's failure to appear and participate?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The hearing notice instruction specifically advises parties of the date and time of hearing. It also states:

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

YOU MUST CALL the toll-free number: **866-783-7021** at the time of the hearing. When instructed, enter the PIN Number **104113** followed by the pound key [#] and wait for the administrative law judge to begin the hearing.

The administrative law judge **WILL NOT** call you for the hearing, you **MUST** call into the number provided above to participate. **Failure to participate in the hearing may result in the dismissal of your appeal.**

The back page of the hearing notice provides further hearing instructions stating, "You must call the toll-free number on the front of this notice at the time of the hearing to participate." This information also appears on the hearing notice in Spanish.

An insert was sent along with the hearing notice stating:

ATTENTION!

Instructions for participating in a hearing have changed.

Please review the enclosed hearing notice carefully and follow the instructions on how to join the call on the scheduled day and time of the hearing.

As a courtesy to the appellant, the record was left open for a minimum of 15 minutes after the hearing start time to give the appellant a reasonable opportunity to participate. Holding the appellant in default for failure to appear and participate during a 15-minute window after the hearing start time is reasonable considering the time allocated for unemployment hearings.

The representative's decision denying benefits remains in effect.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedure Act at Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) provides in pertinent part:

If a party fails to appear or participate in a contested case proceeding after proper service of notice, the presiding officer may, if no adjournment is granted, enter a default decision or proceed with the hearing and make a decision in the absence of the party. The parties shall be duly notified of the decision, together with the presiding officer's reasons for the decision, which is the final decision of the agency, unless within fifteen days, or such period of time as otherwise specified by statute or rule, after the date of notification or mailing of the decision, further appeal is initiated. If a decision is rendered against a party who failed to appear for the hearing and the presiding officer is timely requested by that party to vacate the decision for good cause, the time for initiating a further appeal is stayed pending a determination by the presiding officer to grant or deny the request. If adequate reasons are provided showing good cause for the party's failure to appear, the presiding officer shall vacate the decision and, after proper service of notice, conduct another evidentiary hearing. If adequate reasons are not provided showing good cause for the party's failure to appear, the presiding officer shall deny the motion to vacate.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) provides:

(7) If a party has not responded to a notice of telephone hearing by providing the appeals bureau with the names and telephone numbers of the persons who are participating in the hearing by the scheduled starting time of the hearing or is not available at the telephone number provided, the presiding officer may proceed with the hearing. If the appealing party fails to provide a telephone number or is unavailable for the hearing, the presiding officer may decide the appealing party is in default and dismiss the appeal as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.12(3). The record may be reopened if the absent party makes a request to reopen the hearing in writing under subrule 26.8(3) and shows good cause for reopening the hearing.

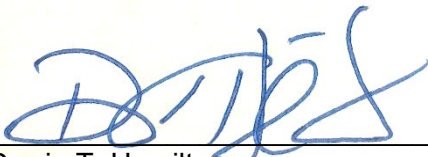
Due process requires notice and an opportunity to be heard, both of which were provided to the parties. The appellant is responsible for going forward with the case in a prompt and thoughtful manner. The appellant must be present at the start of the hearing to avoid a default judgement. Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(7). The hearing notice instructs the parties to read the hearing notice; call the toll-free number at the time of the hearing and wait for the judge; the judge will not call you; and failure to participate may result in the dismissal of your appeal.

The Iowa Supreme Court has held a default should not be set aside due to the appellant's negligence, carelessness, or inattention. See *Houlihan v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 545 N.W.2d 863 (Iowa 1996). Similarly, a default should not be set aside because the appellant has ignored clear requirements in the rules. Rather, a party must show it intended to proceed with the appeal and took steps to do so, but failed to appear because of some misunderstanding, accident, mistake or excusable neglect. Employer/appellant was not present at the start of the hearing. As a *curtesy*, employer was granted additional time not required by statute or rule. The representative's decision remains in force and effect.

If the appellant disagrees with this decision, the appellant may appeal the decision directly to the Employment Appeal Board, whose address is listed at the top right caption.

DECISION:

The January 27, 2022 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision denying benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is **DISMISSED**. Benefits are withheld until such time as he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible.



Darrin T. Hamilton
Administrative Law Judge

May 9, 2022
Decision Dated and Mailed

dh/scn

Note to Employer/Respondent:

Employer provided an updated address during the hearing, by changing the suit number, changing to whom it is sent to the attention of and dropping part of the name. That corrected address is added on the cover page of this decision. Employer was directed to contact IWD customer service at 1-866-239-0843 as soon as possible to update their contact information so that their information can be updated within IWD's systems and not just on this one printed decision.