

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

JON W ELLIS
Claimant

PRESTAGE FOODS OF IOWA LLC
Employer

APPEAL 19A-UI-07246-DB-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 08/18/19
Claimant: Appellant (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant/appellant filed an appeal from the September 5, 2019 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon him voluntarily quitting work without good cause attributable to the employer. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on October 4, 2019. The claimant, Jon W. Ellis, participated personally. The employer, Prestage Foods of Iowa LLC, participated through Sarah Adams.

ISSUES:

Did claimant voluntarily quit the employment with good cause attributable to employer?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full-time as a refrigerator and boiler technician. He began working for this employer on November 19, 2018 and his employment ended on August 19, 2019. His job duties included monitoring and maintaining the facility plant. His immediate supervisor was Gene Frehse.

Claimant had been on medical leave between July 24, 2019 and August 13, 2019. He called and notified the employer of each absence pursuant to the employer's leave policy. When he returned, the employer continued an investigation that had been put on hold during the claimant's medical leave. This investigation stemmed from an incident on July 21, 2019 when he had left the job site. The employer told him that he was suspended and walked him out of the building on August 13, 2019. On Friday, August 16, 2019, Ms. Adams telephoned the claimant and asked him to come into work on Monday, August 19, 2019 for a disciplinary meeting. Claimant refused to come to the meeting when Ms. Adams refused to disclose the disciplinary decision over the telephone to him. Claimant was going to receive a final written warning for the incident on July 21, 2019. There was continuing work available to the claimant.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes as follows:

Iowa Code §96.5(1) provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

1. Voluntary quitting. If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department.

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).

First, it must be determined whether claimant quit or was discharged from employment. A voluntary quitting means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer and requires an intention to terminate the employment. *Wills v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 447 N.W. 2d 137, 138 (Iowa 1989). A voluntary leaving of employment requires an intention to terminate the employment relationship accompanied by an overt act of carrying out that intention. *Local Lodge #1426 v. Wilson Trailer*,

289 N.W.2d 608, 612 (Iowa 1980); *Peck v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 492 N.W.2d 438 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

The decision in this case rests, at least in part, upon the credibility of the parties. The issue must be resolved by an examination of witness credibility and burden of proof. It is the duty of the administrative law judge as the trier of fact in this case, to determine the credibility of witnesses, weigh the evidence and decide the facts in issue. *Arndt v. City of LeClaire*, 728 N.W.2d 389, 394-395 (Iowa 2007). The administrative law judge may believe all, part or none of any witness's testimony. *State v. Holtz*, 548 N.W.2d 162, 163 (Iowa App. 1996). In assessing the credibility of witnesses, the administrative law judge should consider the evidence using his or her own observations, common sense and experience. *Id.* In determining the facts, and deciding what testimony to believe, the fact finder may consider the following factors: whether the testimony is reasonable and consistent with other believable evidence; whether a witness has made inconsistent statements; the witness's appearance, conduct, age, intelligence, memory and knowledge of the facts; and the witness's interest in the trial, their motive, candor, bias and prejudice. *Id.* After assessing the credibility of the witnesses who testified during the hearing, considering the applicable factors listed above, and using her own common sense and experience, the administrative law judge finds that Ms. Adams' version of events is more credible than the claimant's version.

Claimant had an intention to quit and carried out that intention by refusing to meet with the employer for his disciplinary meeting and never returning for any further shifts. Even if claimant believed he was discharged, claimant's actions still constitute a voluntary quit. Where an individual mistakenly believes that he is discharged and discontinues coming to work (but was never told he was discharged), the separation is a voluntary quit without good cause attributable to the employer. *LaGrange v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, (Unpublished Iowa Appeals 1984). Claimant has the burden of proving that the voluntary leaving was for good cause attributable to the employer. Iowa Code § 96.6(2). "Good cause" for leaving employment must be that which is reasonable to the average person, not the overly sensitive individual or the claimant in particular. *Uniweld Products v. Indus. Relations Comm'n*, 277 So.2d 827 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1973). In this case, claimant unreasonably believed that a discharge occurred, especially when the employer called him to have an in-person meeting, and he voluntarily quit because he was going to be reprimanded.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.25(28) provides:

Voluntary quit without good cause. In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer from whom the employee has separated. The employer has the burden of proving that the claimant is disqualified for benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.5. However, the claimant has the initial burden to produce evidence that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving Iowa Code section 96.5, subsection (1), paragraphs "a" through "i," and subsection 10. The following reasons for a voluntary quit shall be presumed to be without good cause attributable to the employer:

(28) The claimant left after being reprimanded.

The claimant's voluntary quitting was not for a good-cause reason attributable to the employer according to Iowa law. Benefits must be denied.

DECISION:

The September 5, 2019 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. Claimant voluntarily quit employment without good cause attributable to the employer. Unemployment insurance benefits are denied until claimant has worked in and earned wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount after his separation date, and provided he is otherwise eligible.

Dawn Boucher
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

db/rvs