

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

**LUIS D CONTRERAS DECIGA**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO. 20A-UI-11467-B2T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**TYSON FRESH MEATS INC**  
Employer

**OC: 07/26/20**  
**Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment  
Federal Law PL 116-136 Sec. 2104 – Eligibility for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated September 15, 2020, reference 01, which held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on November 10, 2020. Claimant participated personally and with attorney Mary Hamilton. Employer participated by Karina Mellado. Interpretive services were provided by CTS Language Link.

**ISSUES:**

Whether claimant was discharged for misconduct?

Whether claimant has been overpaid state unemployment benefits?

Whether claimant is eligible to receive Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for employer on July 15, 2020.

Employer discharged claimant on July 16, 2020 because claimant allegedly waved a knife above his head in a dangerous manner.

Claimant worked on an assembly line cutting meat. On July 7, the line was moving very fast, frustrating claimant. He expressed to a supervisor standing behind him that the line was moving too fast as many workers were off because of Covid. He pointed his trimming knife at the line.

A week later, claimant was taken off the shift and addressed concerning allegations that he'd dangerously waved his knife. Employer stated that claimant admitted to angrily waving the knife

in the air. Claimant denied ever saying he did this and stated he pointed the knife in the direction of the meat while he complained about the speed of the conveyor.

Employer stated claimant never had any safety related warnings prior to his termination for this action.

### **REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

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 disqualification shall continue 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).

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. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982), Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

The employer bears the burden of proving that a claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). *Myers*, 462 N.W.2d at 737. The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance

case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. Because our unemployment compensation law is designed to protect workers from financial hardships when they become unemployed through no fault of their own, we construe the provisions "liberally to carry out its humane and beneficial purpose." *Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 570 N.W.2d 85, 96 (Iowa 1997). "[C]ode provisions which operate to work a forfeiture of benefits are strongly construed in favor of the claimant." *Diggs v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 478 N.W.2d 432, 434 (Iowa Ct. App. 1991).

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 Ct. 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. *State v. Holtz*, 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. *State v. Holtz*, Id. In this matter, employer had the opportunity to bring forth witnesses who could testify to the incident, but chose to bring no direct witnesses.

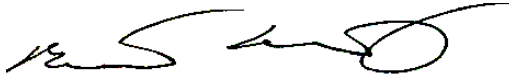
The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation. Here, claimant had no warnings prior to termination.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning improper handling of dangerous instruments. Claimant was not warned concerning this policy.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge, fails to constitute misconduct because employer did not show that claimant improperly waved his knife. The administrative law judge holds that claimant was not discharged for an act of misconduct and, as such, is not disqualified for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

**DECISION:**

The decision of the representative dated September 15, 2020, reference 01, is reversed. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements.



---

Blair A. Bennett  
Administrative Law Judge

November 17, 2020  
Decision Dated and Mailed

bab/scn