

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

LARRY D WILLIAMS
Claimant

US POSTAL SERVICE
Employer

APPEAL NO. 20A-UCFE-00001-B2

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 12/01/19
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated December 26, 2019, reference 01, which held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held in-person on January 22, 2020. Claimant participated personally. Employer chose not to participate in the hearing. Claimant's Exhibits A-D were admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether claimant was discharged for misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: As claimant was the only participant in the hearing, all findings of fact are derived from claimant's testimony. Claimant last worked for employer on August 31, 2019. Employer discharged claimant on November 18, 2019 because claimant was allegedly involved in a physical confrontation with a coworker where he allegedly made threats to the coworker.

Claimant worked as a forklift driver and mail processor for employer. One of his coworkers was the father to claimant's grandchildren. In 2014 the coworker aggressively approached claimant when he believed claimant was removing claimant's daughter and his children from claimant's house. Claimant immediately got away from the coworker and reported the incident.

On August 31, 2019 claimant was outside work on his phone when he was aggressively approached by this same man who was cussing at claimant while bumping into him. The coworker stated that claimant told claimant's daughter to get child support from the coworker. Claimant again walked away to avoid confrontation, but the coworker aggressively followed him inside. The coworker, who was much larger physically than claimant was very close and spitting in claimant's face as he was yelling at him. Multiple people had to pull the coworker away from claimant.

Although employer stated that claimant pushed the coworker, he denied he'd done so, and further denied that he'd made any threatening statements.

Employer conducted an investigation, and allowed the coworker to return to his position while terminating claimant.

Claimant had no previous write ups for aggressive behavior in twenty years of working for employer.

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).

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.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning violence and threats of violence at work. Claimant was not warned concerning this policy.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge, fails to constitute misconduct because employer did not prove claimant did the alleged conduct. 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 December 26, 2019, 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

Decision Dated and Mailed

bab/scn