

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

TAMARA S EDWARDS

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 14A-UI-04210-MT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

COVENANT CARE MIDWEST INC

Employer

OC: 03/02/14

Claimant: Respondent (5)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Employer filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated April 14, 2014, reference 01, which held claimant eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on May 16, 2014. Claimant participated personally and was represented by Bert Watson, Attorney at Law. Employer participated by Troy Gibbs, Interim Executive Director. Exhibits A, B and One 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: Claimant last worked for employer on November 22, 2013. Claimant went off work and under a doctor's care. Claimant went on FMLA under employer's policy that allows up to 12 weeks leave.

Employer discharged claimant on February 28, 2014 because claimant over extended her FMLA. Employer discharges after 12 weeks of FMLA. Employer sent claimant a letter asking her to return by February 28 or suffer termination of employment. Claimant was not able to comply with the return to work request as she was still off work and under doctor's care.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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.

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).

Iowa Admin. Code r.871-24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and the employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. Allegations of misconduct or dishonesty without additional evidence shall not be sufficient to result in disqualification. If the employer is unwilling to furnish available evidence to corroborate the allegation, misconduct cannot be established. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

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. The Iowa Supreme Court has opined that one unexcused absence is not misconduct even when it followed nine other excused absences and was in violation of a direct order. Sallis v. EAB, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984), held that the absences must be both excessive and unexcused. The Iowa Supreme Court has held that excessive is more than one. Three incidents of tardiness or absenteeism after a warning has been held misconduct. Clark v. Iowa

Department of Job Service, 317 N.W.2d 517 (Iowa Ct. App. 1982). While three is a reasonable interpretation of excessive based on current case law and Webster's Dictionary, the interpretation is best derived from the facts presented.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was separated from employment effective November 22, 2013. Claimant was off on sick leave and as such was still employed. There is no separation date for unemployment purposes. The issue is moot.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated April 14, 2014, reference 01, is modified without effect. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements because the issue is moot as there was no separation of employment. The correct separation was adjudicated in another appeal, reference 02.

Marlon Mormann
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

mdm/css