

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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**KARISSA L SAWYER**  
Claimant

**BLACKHAWK SERVICES CORP**  
Employer

**APPEAL NO. 21A-UI-16679-JTT**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 11/22/20**  
**Claimant: Respondent (1)**

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Iowa Code Section 96.5(2)(a) – Discharge

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

The employer filed a timely appeal from the July 26, 2021, reference 04, decision that allowed benefits to the claimant provided the claimant met all other eligibility requirements and that held the employer's account could be charged for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion that the claimant was discharged on May 20, 2021 for no disqualifying reason. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on September 21, 2021. The claimant did not provide a telephone number for the hearing and did not participate. Amber Meadows of Insuperity PEP Services represented the employer and presented testimony through Rita West. The administrative law judge took official notice of the Agency's record of benefits disbursed to the claimant, which reflected that no benefits have been disbursed to the claimant in connection with the November 22, 2020 benefit year. Exhibits 1 through 7 were received into evidence.

**ISSUE:**

Whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment that disqualifies the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed by Blackhawk Services Corporation as a full-time food manufacturing production worker from August 2020 until May 19, 2021, when the employer discharged the claimant for exceeding the allowed number of attendance points. The claimant's work hours were 2:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The claimant was also required to work on Saturdays as needed.

The final absence that triggered the discharge occurred on May 14, 2021, when the claimant was absent due to illness and properly notified the employer of the absence by calling the workplace prior to the start of the shift and speaking with a manager or supervisor. The next most recent absence occurred on April 22, 2021, when the claimant left work early after speaking with a manager or supervisor. The employer witness does not know the reason for the April 22, 2021 absence. The discharge followed written warnings for attendance. The employer assigns attendance points to all absences except those for bereavement, those

scheduled in advance and covered by paid time off, and those for intermittent leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The employer implemented its attendance points policy in January 2021 and reviewed it with the claimant as part of annual training in February 2021.

### **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).

The employer has the burden of proof in this matter. See Iowa Code section 96.6(2). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment benefits. Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits. See *Lee v. Employment Appeal Board*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. See *Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board*, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of the current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act(s). The termination of employment must be based on a current act. See 871 IAC 24.32(8). In determining whether the conduct that prompted the discharge constituted a "current act," the administrative law judge

considers the date on which the conduct came to the attention of the employer and the date on which the employer notified the claimant that the conduct subjected the claimant to possible discharge. See also *Greene v. EAB*, 426 N.W.2d 659, 662 (Iowa App. 1988).

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. See 871 IAC 24.32(4).

In order for a claimant's absences to constitute misconduct that would disqualify the claimant from receiving unemployment insurance benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant's *unexcused* absences were excessive. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(7). The determination of whether absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. However, the evidence must first establish that the most recent absence that prompted the decision to discharge the employee was unexcused. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(8). Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation and oversleeping are considered unexcused. On the other hand, absences related to illness are considered excused, provided the employee has complied with the employer's policy regarding notifying the employer of the absence. Tardiness is a form of absence. See *Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). Employers may not graft on additional requirements to what is an excused absence under the law. See *Gaborit v. Employment Appeal Board*, 743 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). For example, an employee's failure to provide a doctor's note in connection with an absence that was due to illness properly reported to the employer will not alter the fact that such an illness would be an excused absence under the law. *Gaborit*, 743 N.W.2d at 557.

The evidence in the record establishes a discharge for no disqualifying reason. The evidence fails to establish a current act of misconduct. The May 14, 2021 final absence that triggered the discharge was due to illness, was properly reported to the employer, was an excused absence under the applicable law, and cannot serve as a basis for disqualifying the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits. The next most recent absence occurred about four weeks prior to the discharge and was not a current act for unemployment insurance purposes. In addition, the evidence fails to establish the April 22, 2021 absence was an unexcused absence under the applicable law. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.

**DECISION:**

The July 26, 2021, reference 04, decision, decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.



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James E. Timberland  
Administrative Law Judge

September 23, 2021  
Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/scn