

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

CHRISTOPHER J HURD
Claimant

CROELL INC
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-04871-S2-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 12/15/19
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quit

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed an appeal from the January 28, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon a finding he was discharged for violation of a known company rule. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on April 14, 2021. This hearing was consolidated with Appeal 21A-UI-04872-S2-T. Claimant Christopher J. Hurd participated. Employer Croell, Inc. did not register for the hearing and did not participate. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

As claimant was the only witness, the administrative law judge makes the following findings of fact based solely upon claimant's evidence: Claimant was employed full time as a wash plant foreman from May 2010, until November 25, 2020, when he was discharged.

On November 25, 2020, claimant's supervisor Jeremy Croell directed him to shut down the plant as they did each year around Thanksgiving for the season. Croell told claimant that he would likely not call claimant back the following spring, but did not explain why. After Thanksgiving, claimant's wife contacted employer to order the meat bundle employer gave employees each year for a Christmas bonus and was told that claimant was not eligible to receive one because his employment had been terminated. Claimant did not receive any notification from employer that he was discharged.

Claimant did not receive any verbal or written warnings during his employment.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

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).

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

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and 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.

Further, the employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa

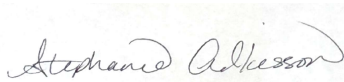
Ct. App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

In an at-will employment environment an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job related misconduct as the reason for the separation, it incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. A determination as to whether an employee's act is misconduct does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer's policy or rule. A violation is not necessarily disqualifying misconduct even if the employer was fully within its rights to impose discipline up to or including discharge for the incident under its policy.

Inasmuch as employer had not previously warned claimant about any issue leading to the separation, it has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately or with recurrent negligence in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. No evidence was presented that claimant was careless or engaged in a pattern of negligence. There is no evidence of intentional and substantial disregard of employer's interests. Employer has not met its burden of proving disqualifying job-related misconduct. Benefits are allowed provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

DECISION:

The January 28, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided he is otherwise eligible. Any benefits claimed and withheld on this basis shall be paid.



Stephanie Adkisson
Administrative Law Judge
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April 20, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

sa/kmj