

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

RICHARD MARTIN
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 19A-UI-05007-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

THE HON COMPANY
Employer

OC: 09/02/18
Claimant: Appellant (1)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the June 11, 2019, reference 02, decision that held he was disqualified for benefits and the employer's account would not be charged for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion that the claimant was discharged on May 17, 2019 for excessive unexcused absenteeism. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on July 17, 2019. The claimant did comply with the hearing notice instructions to register a telephone number for the hearing and did not participate. Kenneth Kjer of Employers Edge represented the employer and presented testimony through Madeline Elliott. Exhibits 1 and 2 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: Claimant Richard Martin was employed by The Hon Company as a full-time Material Support 2 from October 2018 until May 22, 2019, when the employer discharged him for attendance. The final absence that triggered the discharge occurred on May 21, 2019, when Mr. Martin was absent due to transportation issues. Mr. Martin notified the employer that he would be absent because his car was being worked on. Mr. Martin had also been absent due to transportation issues on April 15 and May 20, 2019. Mr. Martin had been late for personal reasons on April 1, April 9, April 10 and April 11, 2019. On April 8, 2019, Mr. Martin was absent due to illness and properly notified the employer. On April 10, 2019, the employer issued a written warning to Mr. Martin for attendance.

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 misconduct in connection with the employment based on excessive unexcused absences. The absences on April 15, May 20 and May 21 were due to transportation issues, a matter of personal responsibility, and were unexcused absences under the applicable law. The instances of tardiness on April 1, April 9, April 10 and April 11, 2019 were also unexcused absences under the applicable law. The unexcused absences were excessive. The last three unexcused absences followed the written warning for attendance. Mr. Martin is disqualified for benefits until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to 10 times his weekly benefit amount. Mr. Martin must meet all other eligibility requirements. The employer's account shall not be charged for benefits.

DECISION:

The June 11, 2019, reference 02, decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment based on excessive unexcused absences. The discharge date was May 22, 2019. The claimant is disqualified for unemployment benefits until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to 10 times his weekly benefit amount. The claimant must meet all other eligibility requirements. The employer's account shall not be charged for benefits.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/rvs