

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

ERIC D LESTER
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 11A-UI-07060-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

CRST VAN EXPEDITED INC
Employer

OC: 04/03/11
Claimant: Respondent (2-R)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the May 17, 2011, reference 01, decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on June 27, 2011. Sandy Matt, human resources specialist, represented the employer and presented additional testimony through Robert Morris, fleet manager. Claimant Eric Lester did not respond to the hearing notice instructions to provide a telephone number for the hearing and did not participate. Exhibits One, Two, and Three 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: Eric Lester was employed by CRST Van Expedited as a full-time over-the-road truck driver from September 2010 until January 31, 2011, when Robert Morris, fleet manager, discharged him from the employment. Mr. Morris was Mr. Lester's immediate supervisor. The incident that prompted the discharge occurred on January 30, 2011 and came to the employer's attention on that day. Mr. Lester had been assigned to operate a tractor-trailer with a co-driver. On the evening of January 30, Mr. Lester took off alone with the truck while his co-driver was inside a store buying groceries. Mr. Lester picked up some family members and took them for a ride in the employer's truck. Mr. Lester backed into a power line at a gas station and took out the power to the station. Mr. Lester and his unauthorized passengers then fled the scene. The gas station employees contacted the police, who located the co-driver's contact information inside the truck and contacted the co-driver. The co-driver alerted the employer. The employer spoke to Mr. Lester on January 31 and he admitted to the conduct.

The employer had a written policy that prohibited unauthorized passengers. The employer had a written policy that obligated Mr. Lester to immediately notify the employer's vehicle was involved in an accident. The employer had a written policy that prohibited unauthorized use of the employer's equipment. All of these policies were contained in the handbook Mr. Lester signed for on September 13, 2010.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Iowa Code section 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.

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). When it is in a party's power to produce more direct and satisfactory evidence than is actually produced, it may fairly be inferred that the more direct evidence will expose deficiencies in that party's case. See Crosser v. Iowa Dept. of Public Safety, 240 N.W.2d 682 (Iowa 1976).

The evidence in the record establishes misconduct in connection with the employment. The evidence establishes that on January 30, 2011, Mr. Lester knowingly and intentionally violated multiple work rules. Mr. Lester violated the employer's rule against unauthorized use of the employer's equipment. The employer had not authorized Mr. Lester's joyride in the employer's vehicle. Mr. Lester violated the employer's rule against unauthorized passengers. Mr. Lester violated the employer's rule that required him to immediately report any accident to the employer. In addition to these three violations, Mr. Lester indicated a willful and wanton disregard for the employer's interests by leaving his co-driver stranded and by absconding from the scene of the accident.

Based on the evidence in the record and application of the appropriate law, the administrative law judge concludes that the claimant was discharged for misconduct. Accordingly, the claimant is disqualified for benefits until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account shall not be charged for benefits paid to the claimant.

Iowa Code section 96.3(7) provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. The overpayment recovery law was updated in 2008. See Iowa Code section 96.3(7)(b). Under the revised law, a claimant will not be required to repay an overpayment of benefits if all of the following factors are met. First, the prior award of benefits must have been made in connection with a decision regarding the claimant's separation from a particular employment. Second, the claimant must not have engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation to obtain the benefits or in connection with the Agency's initial decision to award benefits. Third, the employer must not have participated at the initial fact-finding proceeding that resulted in the initial decision to award benefits. If Workforce Development determines there has been an overpayment of benefits, the employer will not be charged for the benefits, regardless of whether the claimant is required to repay the benefits.

Because the claimant has been deemed ineligible for benefits, any benefits the claimant has received would constitute an overpayment. Accordingly, the administrative law judge will remand the matter to the Claims Division for determination of whether there has been an overpayment, the amount of the overpayment, and whether the claimant will have to repay the benefits.

DECISION:

The Agency representative's May 17, 2011, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged for misconduct. The claimant is disqualified for unemployment benefits until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit allowance, provided he meets all other eligibility requirements. The employer's account will not be charged.

This matter is remanded to the Claims Division for determination of whether there has been an overpayment, the amount of the overpayment, and whether the claimant will have to repay the benefits.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/kjw