

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

**MATTHEW A BARKER**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-07741-JTT**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**ALANIZ LLC**  
Employer

**OC: 04/05/09**  
**Claimant: Appellant (2)**

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

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Matthew Barker filed a timely appeal from the May 11, 2009, reference 01, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on June 12, 2009. Mr. Barker participated. Kayla Riley, Human Resources Generalist, represented the employer.

**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: Matthew Barker was employed by Alaniz, L.L.C., as a full-time laser operator from July 28, 2008 through December 21, 2008, when the employer discharged him for attendance. The final absence that prompted the discharge occurred on December 20, 2008, when Mr. Barker notified his supervisor that he would be absent due to the weather. The weather was not severe and did not justify Mr. Barker's absence. On December 21, Mr. Barker contacted his supervisor prior to his shift to see whether his absence on December 20 would be deemed an excused absence. The supervisor told Mr. Barker the absence was not deemed excused and that Mr. Barker was discharged from the employment based on attendance. All of Mr. Barker's prior absences were for illness properly reported to the employer. The employer had issued warnings to Mr. Barker as he accrued attendance "occurrences," but these warnings were based on absences for illness properly reported to the employer.

**EASONING 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).

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 871 IAC 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 871 IAC 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).

The evidence in the record establishes a unexcused absence on December 20, 2008, when Mr. Barker was absent for personal reasons. The short amount of snow fall, even in light of the distance Mr. Barker needed to travel from his parent's home to the workplace, did not justify the absence. All of the other absences were for illness properly reported to the employer and are excused absences under the applicable law. A single unexcused absence is not misconduct. See Sallis v. Employment Appeal Board, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989).

Based on the evidence in the record and application of the appropriate law, the administrative law judge concludes that Mr. Barker was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Accordingly, Mr. Barker is eligible for benefits, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits paid to Mr. Barker.

**DECISION:**

The Agency representative's May 11, 2009, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.

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James E. Timberland  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

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