

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

**LAWRENCE VILLEGAS**

Claimant

**APPEAL 20A-UI-01804-S1-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**CASEY'S MARKETING COMPANY**

Employer

**OC: 02/02/20**

**Claimant: Respondent (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

Iowa Code § 96.3-7 – Overpayment

871 IAC 24.10 – Employer Participation in the Fact-Finding Interview

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Casey's Marketing Company (employer) appealed a representative's February 19, 2020, decision (reference 01) that concluded Lawrence Villegas (claimant) was eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on March 16, 2020. The claimant participated personally. The employer participated by Tiffany Pennington, Store Manager.

The employer offered and Exhibit One was received into evidence. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative file.

**ISSUE:**

The issue is whether the claimant was separated from employment for any disqualifying reason.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was hired on November 20, 2016, as a full-time store team member. He signed for receipt of the employer's handbook when he was hired. The employer has a policy that prohibits harassment in the workplace based on sexual orientation.

On March 6, 2019, the employer issued the claimant a three-day suspension for "inappropriate language and visible anger". The written warning stated, "The next incident will result in Larry's immediate termination with this Casey's store".

On December 13, 2019, the claimant repeatedly tried to engage a co-worker in a discussion of how the co-worker was incorrectly performing his job duties. The claimant attempted to draw the co-worker into a back room where there were no cameras. The co-worker refused and said, "You're going to hit me". The claimant denied the co-worker's assertion. As the co-worker prepared to leave at the end of his shift, the claimant again tried to talk with him. The co-worker refused and the claimant said, "Don't be a fucking faggot".

The co-worker complained to the store manager about the name calling and the store manager interviewed the claimant. The claimant admitted his conduct. The store manager said she would check with management and get back with the claimant. On December 19, 2019, the store manager terminated the claimant for harassment of the co-worker.

The claimant filed for unemployment insurance benefits with an effective date of February 2, 2020, and received \$1,065.00 in benefits after the separation from employment. The employer provided the name and number of Samantha Lewis as the person who would participate in the fact-finding interview on February 17, 2020. The fact finder called but Ms. Lewis was not available. The fact finder left a voice message with the fact finder's name, number, and the employer's appeal rights. The employer's witness did not respond to the message. The employer provided some documents for the fact finding interview but did not provide a witness to rebut the claimant's information regarding the events leading to the separation.

### **REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

For the reasons that follow the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for misconduct.

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 establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The claimant clearly disregarded the standards of behavior which an employer has a right to expect of its employees. The claimant's actions were volitional. He intentionally behaved inappropriately and used disparaging language regarding sexual orientation in the workplace. When a claimant intentionally disregards the standards of behavior that the employer has a right to expect of its employees, the claimant's actions are misconduct. The claimant was discharged for misconduct.

The unemployment insurance law requires benefits be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later denied benefits even if the claimant acted in good faith and was not at fault. However, a claimant will not have to repay an overpayment when an initial decision to award benefits on an employment separation issue is reversed on appeal if two conditions are met: (1) the claimant did not receive the benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, and (2) the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding that awarded benefits. In addition, if a claimant is not required to repay an overpayment because the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding, the employer's account will be charged for the overpaid benefits. Iowa Code section 96.3(7)a, b.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to

participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

The employer did not meaningfully participate in the fact finding interview and is chargeable. The claimant's overpayment is waived.

#### **DECISION:**

The representative's February 19, 2020, decision (reference 01) is reversed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because the claimant was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the claimant's weekly benefit amount provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

The employer did not meaningfully participate in the fact finding interview and is chargeable. The claimant's overpayment is waived.

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Beth A. Scheetz  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

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