

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

JEREMY J STANBERG
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-06654-E2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

VANTEC INC
Employer

**Original Claim: 04/05/09
Claimant: Appellant (1)**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed an appeal from a representative's decision dated April 24, 2009, reference 01, which held the claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a telephone conference hearing was scheduled for and held on May 26, 2009. The employer participated by Brittany Sickels, Human Resources Manager. The claimant failed to respond to the hearing notice and did not participate. Exhibit One was admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and having considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: The claimant was discharged on December 15, 2008 by employer because he violated the employer's policy prohibiting sexual harassment. The claimant was accused by a co-employee of calling the co-employee a faggot, saying he was going to kick his ass, and making a number of offensive sexual comments. (Exhibit 1, p. 11). The employer has a written policy prohibiting such conduct. The claimant received a copy of the policy.

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.

871 IAC 24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations, and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation.

A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer discharges him for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a. The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000).

For unemployment insurance purposes, misconduct amounts to a deliberate act and a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of a worker's contract of employment. Misconduct is a deliberate violation or disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has a right to expect from employees or is an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. Inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, unsatisfactory performance due to inability or incapacity, inadvertence or ordinary negligence in isolated incidents, or good-faith errors in judgment or discretion are not deemed to constitute work-connected misconduct. 871 IAC 24.32(1)(a).

The undisputed testimony in this case was that the claimant violated the employer's policy of sexual harassment. Further, threats of physical violence are grounds for finding job-related misconduct. The claimant violated the employer's sexual harassment policy. The claimant made threats of physical violence. The claimant is disqualified for job-related misconduct for both the violation of policy and threats of violence. While the claimant had not received warnings about the specific conduct in the past, his conduct was clearly in disregard to standards of behavior that is acceptable to the employer, was in clear violation of policy, and violated the law concerning assault.

DECISION:

The representative's decision dated April 24, 2009, reference 01, is affirmed. Unemployment insurance benefits shall be withheld until the claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible.

James Elliott
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jfe/kjw