

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

JEREMY P WEIGEL
Claimant

ADVANCE SERVICES INC
Employer

APPEAL 16A-UI-05949-JP-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 11/29/15
Claimant: Respondent (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-Finding Interview

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed an appeal from the May 24, 2016 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on June 13, 2016. Claimant did not participate. Employer participated through risk manager Steve Volle. Employer's Exhibit One was admitted into the record with no objection. Official notice was taken of the administrative record of claimant's benefit payment records.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

Has the claimant been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits and, if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the Agency be waived?

Can charges to the employer's account be waived?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed temporary, full time as an assembler last assigned at Pella Windows from April 13, 2015 and was separated from the assignment and the employer on May 3, 2016. The employer received an e-mail from the human resources at Pella Corporation that claimant had went over on his allowed attendance. Employer's Exhibit One. The employer has a written attendance policy. Employer's Exhibit One. Employees are warned after they obtain a four or five absences or tardies. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant was aware of the attendance policy. Employer's Exhibit One. Employees must notify the employer and Pella Corporation prior to the start of their shift. Employer's Exhibit One.

Claimant was last warned on April 25, 2016, that he faced termination from employment upon another incident of unexcused absenteeism. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant was also issued a written warning for his attendance infractions on December 15, 2015. Employer's

Exhibit One. Claimant had multiple absences for personal business and tardies during his employment. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant also had absences for sick/injury during his employment. Employer's Exhibit One.

On April 29, 2016, claimant left work before his shift had ended. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant told the assignment (Pella Corporation) that he had to leave because one of his kids was in the emergency room. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant did not provide the assignment a doctor's note for his absence. Claimant also did not provide the employer a doctor's note for his absence. Claimant was separated from his assignment and discharged from the employer on May 3, 2016. Mr. Volle testified that during the fact-finding interview, claimant stated it was his girlfriend in the hospital on April 29, 2016.

The administrative record reflects that claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$1,370.00, since filing a claim with an effective date of November 29, 2015, for the five weeks ending June 11, 2016. The administrative record also establishes that the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct.

Iowa Code § 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). Absences due to illness or injury must be properly reported in order to be excused. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused. *Gaborit v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007).

An employer's point system or no-fault absenteeism policy is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for benefits; however, an employer is entitled to expect its employees to report to work as scheduled or to be notified as to when and why the employee is unable to report to work. Claimant was warned on April 25, 2016, that any further absences could result in

discharge. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant then left work early on April 29, 2016. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant told the assignment that one of his children was in the hospital; however, Mr. Volle testified that at the fact-finding hearing claimant stated it was his girlfriend that was in the hospital. Employer's Exhibit One. Claimant did not provide the employer with a doctor's note for the April 29, 2016 absence. Claimant also did not provide the assignment with a doctor's note for the April 29, 2016 absence.

It is the duty of the administrative law judge as the trier of fact in this case, to determine the credibility of witnesses, weigh the evidence and decide the facts in issue. *Arndt v. City of LeClaire*, 728 N.W.2d 389, 394-395 (Iowa 2007). The administrative law judge may believe all, part or none of any witness's testimony. *State v. Holtz*, 548 N.W.2d 162, 163 (Iowa Ct. App. 1996). In assessing the credibility of witnesses, the administrative law judge should consider the evidence using his or her own observations, common sense and experience. *State v. Holtz*, Id. In determining the facts, and deciding what testimony to believe, the fact finder may consider the following factors: whether the testimony is reasonable and consistent with other believable evidence; whether a witness has made inconsistent statements; the witness's appearance, conduct, age, intelligence, memory and knowledge of the facts; and the witness's interest in the trial, their motive, candor, bias and prejudice. *State v. Holtz*, Id.

Absences due to illness or injury must be properly reported in order to be excused. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). Normally, claimant's conversation with the assignment on April 29, 2016 would have constituted a properly reported reason to be absent from work; however, at fact-finding claimant stated a different reason for why he was absent from work. Although medical documentation was not required, claimant did not follow up with the assignment or the employer with a doctor's note for the absence, which would have corroborated the reason for his absence. The employer presented evidence that claimant gave two conflicting reasons at two different times as to the reason for his April 29, 2016 absence. Claimant's two conflicting versions, as to why he was absent on April 29, 2016, cast doubt as to whether his absence was due to illness or injury. Furthermore, claimant failed to rebut the employer's evidence that there were two conflicting reasons for his absence. The employer has thus established that claimant was warned that further unexcused absences could result in termination of employment and the final absence was not excused. The final absence, in combination with the claimant's history of unexcused absenteeism, is considered excessive. Benefits are withheld.

Iowa Code § 96.3-7, as amended in 2008, provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

b. (1) If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5. However, provided the benefits were not received as the result of fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual, benefits shall not be recovered from an individual if the employer did not participate in the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to section 96.6, subsection 2, and an

overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment. The employer shall not be charged with the benefits.

(2) An accounting firm, agent, unemployment insurance accounting firm, or other entity that represents an employer in unemployment claim matters and demonstrates a continuous pattern of failing to participate in the initial determinations to award benefits, as determined and defined by rule by the department, shall be denied permission by the department to represent any employers in unemployment insurance matters. This subparagraph does not apply to attorneys or counselors admitted to practice in the courts of this state pursuant to section 602.10101.

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.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which he was not entitled. The unemployment insurance law 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. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based on a reversal on appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. The employer will not be charged for benefits if it is determined that they did participate in the fact-finding interview. Iowa Code § 96.3(7), Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10. In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. Since the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview the claimant is obligated to repay to the Agency the benefits he received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

DECISION:

The May 24, 2016 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment due to excessive, unexcused absenteeism. Unemployment insurance benefits shall be withheld in regards to this employer until such time as claimant is deemed eligible.

Claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$1,370.00 and is obligated to repay the Agency those benefits. The employer did participate in the fact-finding interview and its account shall not be charged.

Jeremy Peterson
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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