

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

PATTY A AMENELL
Claimant

OPTIMAE LIFESERVICES INC
Employer

APPEAL NO. 20A-UI-05862-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 07/28/20
Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the June 4, 2020, reference 02, decision that disqualified the claimant for benefits and that relieved the employer's account of liability for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion that the claimant voluntarily quit on April 24, 2020 without good cause attributable to the employer. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on July 16, 2020. Claimant participated. The employer did not provide a number for the hearing and did not participate. Exhibits A and B were received into evidence. The administrative law judge took official notice of the benefits disbursed to the claimant (DBRO and KPYX).

ISSUES:

Whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment that disqualifies the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

Whether the claimant voluntarily quit the employment without good cause attributable to the employer.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed by Optimae Life Services, Inc. as a full-time Des Moines County Service Coordinator from September 2019 until April 30, 2020, when Wade O'Neal, Regional Human Resources Manager, discharged her from the employment. April 29, 2020, Ms. Amenell was arrested and charged with simple misdemeanor domestic abuse assault. Ms. Amenell had her initial appearance before a judge, at which time she entered a plea of not guilty to the charge. On April 30, 2020, Mr. O'Neal summoned Ms. Amenell to a meeting and discharged her from the employment, pending the outcome of the criminal charge. The particular charge was subsequently dismissed.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

A discharge is a termination of employment initiated by the employer for such reasons as incompetence, violation of rules, dishonesty, laziness, absenteeism, insubordination, or failure to pass a probationary period. Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.1(113)(c). A quit is a

separation initiated by the employee. Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.1(113)(b). In general, a voluntary quit requires evidence of an intention to sever the employment relationship and an overt act carrying out that intention. See *Local Lodge #1426 v. Wilson Trailer*, 289 N.W.2d 698, 612 (Iowa 1980) and *Peck v. EAB*, 492 N.W.2d 438 (Iowa App. 1992). In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.25.

The evidence indicates a discharge rather than a voluntary separation from the employment.

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 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).

The evidence in the record establishes a discharge for no disqualifying reason. The employer did not participate the hearing and presented no evidence to meet its burden of proving misconduct in connection with the employment. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.

DECISION:

The June 4, 2020, reference 02, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged on April 30, 2020 for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.



James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

July 24, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/mh