

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

**DANIEL L RICKLEFS**  
Claimant

**WALMART ASSOCIATES**  
Employer

**APPEAL NO. 22A-UI-03243-JT-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 02/28/21  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

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

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

On January 15, 2022, Daniel Ricklefs (claimant) filed a timely appeal from the January 11, 2022, reference 03, 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 was discharged on December 27, 2021 for excessive unexcused absenteeism. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on March 2, 2022. Claimant participated. The employer did not comply with the hearing notice instructions to call the designated telephone number at the time of the hearing and did not participate. Exhibit A was received into evidence.

**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: Daniel Ricklefs (claimant) was employed by Walmart, Inc. as a full-time stocker from October 17, 2021 until December 27, 2021, when the employer discharged the claimant for attendance. The claimant's shift started at 4:00 a.m. and ended at 12:30 p.m. The claimant was usually scheduled to work five shifts per week. The final absence that factored in the discharge occurred within a few days before the Christmas holiday, when the claimant was absent due to illness and properly reported the absence by calling the designated absence reporting number prior to the start of the shift. The claimant advised the employer at the start of the employment that he suffered from ulcerative colitis that might cause him to miss work during flare-ups. The claimant provided the employer with a medical note that indicated that same. The claimant has provided the medical notice in connection with an earlier absence. The employer discounted the note and told the claimant he would be discharged if he was absent again. During the period of the employment, the claimant underwent a colonoscopy, which temporarily aggravated his underlying health issue.

## REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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 Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(4).

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 Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(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 Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(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). Employers may not graft on additional requirements to what is an excused absence under the law. See *Gaborit v. Employment Appeal Board*, 743 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). For example, an employee's failure to provide a doctor's note in connection with an absence that was due to illness properly reported to the employer will not alter the fact that such an illness would be an excused absence under the law. *Gaborit*, 743 N.W.2d at 557.

The evidence in the record establishes a December 27, 2021 discharge for no disqualifying reason. The employer did not participate in the appeal hearing and did not present any evidence to meet its burden of proving a discharge for misconduct in connection with the employment. The evidence indicate a discharge triggered by an absence that was due to illness, properly reported, and therefore an excused absence under the applicable law. The evidence does not establish any absence that would be an unexcused absence under the applicable law. The evidence does not establish any willful or wanton disregard of the employer's interests. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.

**DECISION:**

The January 11, 2022, reference 03, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged on December 27, 2021 for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.



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James E. Timberland  
Administrative Law Judge

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March 16, 2022  
Decision Dated and Mailed