

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

MARYSOL JIMENEZ PIZANO
Claimant

APPEAL 21A-UI-05649-AD-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

KRAFT HEINZ FOODS COMPANY LLC
Employer

OC: 12/20/20
Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Marysol Jimenez Pizano (claimant/appellant) filed a timely appeal from the Iowa Workforce Development decision dated March 17, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant voluntarily quit on February 19, 2020 without good cause attributable to employer.

A telephone hearing was held on April 27, 2021. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. The claimant participated personally. Kraft Heinz Foods Company (LLC) (employer/respondent) did not register a number for the hearing and did not participate.

Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

ISSUE(S):

- I. Was the separation from employment a layoff, discharge for misconduct, or voluntary quit without good cause?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds:

Claimant began working for employer in March 2002. The last day claimant worked on the job was in mid-February 2020. At that time claimant worked for employer full-time as a meat placer. In this position she put processed meat into packages. Claimant's immediate supervisor was Michelle Lizkye.

Claimant was diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome in October 2019 and with pneumonia in January 2020. Claimant's medical providers put her on light duty and removed her from work on several occasions during this time. Claimant was only able to work with one hand and was restricted from working in cold environments. However, employer continued to place her on lines where cold air was blowing on her. This made it very difficult for claimant to recover, and she continued to have to call out sick frequently. Claimant properly reported these absences and provided relevant medical information to employer as it became available.

Claimant received letters from employer in March 2020 informing her that her key card had been deactivated and her position with employer had been filled. Claimant did not resign nor did she wish for the employment relationship to end, in part because she had been there for 18 years.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons set forth below, the decision dated March 17, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant voluntarily quit on February 19, 2020 without good cause attributable to employer is REVERSED.

In this case, the claimant did not have the option of remaining employed nor did she express intent to terminate the employment relationship. Where there is no expressed intention or act to sever the relationship, the case must be analyzed as a discharge from employment. *Peck v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 492 N.W.2d 438 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

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 provides in relevant part:

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 bears the burden of proving that a claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). *Myers v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 462 N.W.2d 734, 737 (Iowa Ct. App. 1990). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be "substantial." *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of*

Job Serv., 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a “wrongful intent” to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman, Id.* In contrast, 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. *Newman, Id.*

When reviewing an alleged act of misconduct, the finder of fact may consider past acts of misconduct to determine the magnitude of the current act. *Kelly v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 386 N.W.2d 552, 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986). However, conduct asserted to be disqualifying misconduct must be both specific and current. *West v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 489 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa 1992); *Greene v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 426 N.W.2d 659 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Because our unemployment compensation law is designed to protect workers from financial hardships when they become unemployed through no fault of their own, we construe the provisions “liberally to carry out its humane and beneficial purpose.” *Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 570 N.W.2d 85, 96 (Iowa 1997). “[C]ode provisions which operate to work a forfeiture of benefits are strongly construed in favor of the claimant.” *Diggs v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 478 N.W.2d 432, 434 (Iowa Ct. App. 1991).

Employer has not carried its burden of proving claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of a current act of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). There is no indication that claimant’s discharge was due to any act of misconduct. Benefits are therefore allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

DECISION:

The decision dated March 17, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant voluntarily quit on February 19, 2020 without good cause attributable to employer is REVERSED. The separation from employment was not disqualifying. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is not otherwise disqualified or ineligible. Employer’s account is subject to charge.



Andrew B. Duffelmeyer
Administrative Law Judge

April 30, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

abd/ol