

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

LUKE J RAWLINGS

Claimant

DEPT OF THE ARMY/CIVILIAN

Employer

APPEAL 19A-UI-07772-AW-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 09/01/19

Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant/appellant filed an appeal from the September 26, 2019 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on October 24, 2019, at 11:00 a.m. Claimant participated. Employer participated through Katie Taki, Hearing Representative. Amy Aleksiejczyk, Human Resources Specialist, and Linda Hall, Material Movement Supervisor, were witnesses for employer. Employer's Exhibits 1 – 8 were admitted.

ISSUE:

Whether claimant's separation was a discharge due to disqualifying job-related misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed as a full-time laborer from July 8, 2019 until his employment with the Department of the Army ended on September 4, 2019. (Claimant Testimony) Claimant's direct supervisor was Linda Hall, Material Movement Supervisor. (Claimant Testimony)

On August 28, 2019, claimant attended a morning staff meeting of approximately 30 employees. (Hall Testimony; Claimant Testimony) During the meeting, Hall told the employees that they were required to attend a training class that same day. (Hall Testimony) Hall called the employees by name and told them which of two training classes to attend. (Hall Testimony) Claimant did not attend the training. (Hall Testimony) Later that day, a coworker asked claimant why he was not at the training; claimant responded that he was not aware of it. (Claimant Testimony) Claimant immediately contacted Hall and asked about the training class. (Claimant Testimony) Claimant does not recall being told to attend training that day. (Claimant Testimony) Claimant did not intentionally skip the training class. (Claimant Testimony) The hiring process took eight months and involved fingerprinting and a background check. (Claimant Testimony) Claimant would not have done something to put his job in jeopardy. (Claimant Testimony)

On September 4, 2019, employer discharged claimant for various issues arising during claimant's employment; the final incident that led to claimant's discharge was his absence from

the training class on August 28, 2019. (Aleksiejczyk Testimony) Claimant had no prior warnings or disciplinary action for similar conduct. (Hall Testimony)

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

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 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:

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 of misconduct has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Reigelsberger v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 500 N.W.2d 64, 66 (Iowa 1993); *accord Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000). Further, the employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. 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. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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.

A determination as to whether an employee's act is misconduct does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer's policy or rule. A violation is not necessarily disqualifying misconduct even if the employer was fully within its rights to impose discipline up to or including discharge for the incident under its policy. 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 law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). A failure in job performance is not misconduct unless it is intentional. *Huntoon*, supra; *Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000).

It is the duty of the administrative law judge, as the trier of fact, 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 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. *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 evidence you believe; 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. *Id.*

The findings of fact show how I have resolved the disputed factual issues in this case. I assessed the credibility of the witnesses who testified during the hearing, considering the applicable factors listed above, and using my own common sense and experience. I find the claimant's testimony that he did not intentionally skip the training class on August 28, 2019 to be credible.

Employer discharged claimant for various issues, which occurred over the course of claimant's employment. The most recent incident preceding claimant's discharge was claimant's failure to attend a training course. There is no evidence that claimant willfully or wantonly disregarded the standards of behavior the employer had a right to expect of him. Claimant's failure to attend the class was a mere inadvertency or ordinary negligence. Employer has not established a current act of misconduct that led to claimant's discharge. Without a current or final act of misconduct, the history of other incidents need not be examined. Employer has not met its burden of proving disqualifying job-related misconduct. Claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

DECISION:

The September 26, 2019 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

Adrienne C. Williamson
Administrative Law Judge
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Decision Dated and Mailed

acw/scn