

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

MORRIS Y WILLIAMS
Claimant

AEROTEK INC
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-03483-AD-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 10/18/20
Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

On January 19, 2021, Morris Williams (claimant/appellant) filed a timely appeal from the Iowa Workforce Development decision dated January 12, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant was discharged from work on October 5, 2020 for excessive unexcused absenteeism.

A telephone hearing was held on March 26, 2021. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. The claimant participated personally. Aerotek Inc. (employer/respondent) did not register a number for the hearing and did not participate.

Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

ISSUE:

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 worked for employer as a temporary employee. He was assigned to work as a full-time administrative assistant. Claimant's first day of employment was October 2019. Claimant's schedule was Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. The last day claimant worked on the job was October 12 or 13, 2020. Claimant separated from employment around that time.

Claimant's separation was due to his one-year contract at the assignment ending, and the employer he was assigned to no longer needing claimant, due to a lack of work. The lack of work was due to the pandemic. Claimant has not been able to secure employment since then.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons set forth below, the decision dated January 12, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant was discharged from work on October 5, 2020 for excessive unexcused absenteeism is REVERSED.

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). Claimant’s separation was due to his one-year contract at the assignment ending and the employer he was assigned to no longer needing claimant due to a lack of work. The lack of work was due to the pandemic. Claimant was not discharged due to excessive unexcused absenteeism. Benefits are therefore allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

DECISION:

The decision dated January 12, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant was discharged from work on October 5, 2020 for excessive unexcused absenteeism is REVERSED. The separation from employment was not disqualifying. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is not otherwise disqualified or ineligible.



Andrew B. Duffelmeyer
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March 29, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

abd/ol