

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

KIMBERLY A JOHNSON
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 10A-UI-02545-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

TARGET CORPORATION
Employer

**Original Claim: 01/10/10
Claimant: Appellant (1)**

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Kimberly Johnson filed a timely appeal from the February 8, 2010, reference 01, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on April 1, 2010. Ms. Johnson participated. Blair Winkler, Executive Team Leader for Human Resources, represented the employer. Exhibits One through Seven and A were 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: Kimberly Johnson was employed by Target Corporation as a full-time logistics team member from 2004 until January 11, 2010, when the employer discharged her for attendance. The employer's attendance policy required that Ms. Johnson telephone the employer if she was going to be late and telephone the employer at least two hours prior to the scheduled start of her shift if she needed to be absent. Ms. Johnson was aware of the policy. Ms. Johnson suffers from depression and had been under the care of a psychiatrist for several years. Ms. Johnson takes multiple psychotropic medications to address her depression and related issues.

The final incident that prompted the discharge occurred on January 10, 2010, when Ms. Johnson was late for work for personal reasons.

In making the decision to discharge Ms. Johnson, the employer considered prior absences and tardiness. The next most recent absence was on January 5, 2010, when Ms. Johnson was absent due to inclement weather that prevented her from traveling to the workplace. A travel advisor was in place on that day. In 2009, Ms. Johnson was tardy for personal reasons on March 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 24, and 29; April 1, and 3; May 19 and 27; June 8, 9, 17, and 25; July 2, 9, 16, and 30; August 27; and December 8, 9, and 22. Ms. Johnson had additional full-day absences, but these were all for illness properly reported.

The employer issued Ms. Johnson reprimands for attendance on June 24, 2009 and November 8, 2009, at which time the employer warned Ms. Johnson that she faced termination of her employment if the attendance issues continued.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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 individual shall be disqualified for benefits 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.

871 IAC 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.

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). When it is in a party's power to produce more direct and satisfactory evidence than is actually produced, it may fairly be inferred

that the more direct evidence will expose deficiencies in that party's case. See Crosser v. Iowa Dept. of Public Safety, 240 N.W.2d 682 (Iowa 1976).

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 871 IAC 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 871 IAC 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).

The evidence in the record establishes unexcused tardiness on March 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 24, and 29; April 1, and 3; May 19 and 27; June 8, 9, 17, and 25; July 2, 9, 16, and 30; August 27; and December 8, 9, and 22, 2009, and a final unexcused tardiness on January 10, 2010. Ms. Johnson demonstrated the ability to get to work on time by not being tardy from August 28 and December 7, 2009 and by otherwise demonstrating an ability to get to work on time. Ms. Johnson's full day absences were due to illness properly reported and did not constitute misconduct in connection with the employment. The evidence fails to establish that Ms. Johnson's mental illness caused her habitual tardiness or was a significant factor in it. The employer had twice warned Ms. Johnson about her attendance before the employer discharged Ms. Johnson from the employment. The administrative law judge notes that Ms. Johnson was tardy four times between December 8 and January 10, after the employer warned her that she faced likely termination of her employment. Ms. Johnson's unexcused tardiness was excessive and constituted misconduct in connection with the employment.

Based on the evidence in the record and application of the appropriate law, the administrative law judge concludes that Ms. Johnson was discharged for misconduct. Accordingly, Ms. Johnson is disqualified for benefits until she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account shall not be charged for benefits paid to Ms. Johnson.

DECISION:

The Agency representative's February 8, 2010, reference 01, decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged for misconduct. The claimant is disqualified for unemployment benefits until she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit allowance, provided she meets all other eligibility requirements. The employer's account will not be charged.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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