

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

COREY M FRENCH
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 10A-UI-09218-DT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

SWIFT & COMPANY / JBS
Employer

OC: 05/16/10

Claimant: Respondent (2/R)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Swift & Company / JBS (employer) appealed a representative's June 18, 2010 decision (reference 01) that concluded Corey M. French (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on August 13, 2010. The claimant participated in the hearing. Tonya Box appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from one other witness, Audel Ruiz. During the hearing, Employer's Exhibits One through Three were entered into evidence. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on April 23, 2002. He worked full time as an alley buyer on the second shift. His last day of work was May 19, 2010. The employer discharged him on that date. The stated reason for the discharge was inappropriate behavior creating a hostile work environment for a coworker in violation of the employer's "best work environment" policies.

Mr. Ruiz was the claimant's coworker. Over time the claimant had on occasion made a practice of making physical contact with Mr. Ruiz which Mr. Ruiz found offensive and had asked the claimant to cease. On May 18 there had been an earlier incident that day of physical contact which Mr. Ruiz had again responded to the claimant by asking him to stop. He then went into the lunchroom and was reading a newspaper. The claimant approached Mr. Ruiz and made a comment to him about getting back to work, and gave him a slap on the buttocks, similar to the type of contact to which Mr. Ruiz had previously objected. Mr. Ruiz was again offended by the contact, and complained about it to the employer on May 19.

On November 30, 2009 the employer had given the claimant a suspension and final warning for another violation of the "best work environment" policies. As a result of this additional violation on May 18, the employer discharged the claimant.

The claimant established a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective May 16, 2010. The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits after the separation.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. Cosper v. IDJS, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982); Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

In order to establish misconduct such as to disqualify a former employee from benefits an employer must establish the employee was responsible for a deliberate act or omission which was a material breach of the duties and obligations owed by the employee to the employer. 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 275 N.W.2d 445 (Iowa 1979); Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa App. 1986). The conduct must show a 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. 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; Huntoon, supra; Henry, supra. 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. 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; Huntoon, supra; Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984).

The claimant's continued making of inappropriate and objected to physical contact with a coworker in violation of the employer's policies after a prior final warning and suspension for violation of those policies shows a willful or wanton disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has the right to expect from an employee, as well as an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer discharged the claimant for reasons amounting to work-connected misconduct.

The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based on a reversal on appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. The employer will not be charged for benefits whether or not the overpayment is recovered. Iowa Code § 96.3-7. In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was ineligible for those benefits. The matter of determining the amount of the overpayment and whether the claimant is eligible for a waiver of overpayment under Iowa Code § 96.3-7-b is remanded the Claims Section.

DECISION:

The representative's June 18, 2010 decision (reference 01) is reversed. The employer discharged the claimant for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance benefits as of May 16, 2010. This disqualification continues until the claimant has been paid ten times his weekly benefit amount for insured work, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account will not be charged. The matter is remanded to the Claims Section for investigation and determination of the overpayment issue and whether the claimant is eligible for a waiver of any overpayment.

Lynette A. F. Donner
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

ld/css