

IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Section
1000 East Grand—Des Moines, Iowa 50319
DECISION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
68-0157 (7-97) – 3091078 - EI

CAROLE BOO-HARRINGTON
2105 - 55TH ST
DES MOINES IA 50310-1556

IOWA JEWISH SENIOR LIFE CENTER
900 POLK BLVD
DES MOINES IA 50312

Appeal Number: 06A-UI-04353-BT
OC: 03/26/06 R: 02
Claimant: Respondent (2)

This Decision Shall Become Final, unless within fifteen (15) days from the date below, you or any interested party appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by submitting either a signed letter or a signed written Notice of Appeal, directly to the **Employment Appeal Board, 4th Floor—Lucas Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.**

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

STATE CLEARLY

1. The name, address and social security number of the claimant.
2. A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
3. That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
4. The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in this appeal or you may obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds. It is important that you file your claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

(Administrative Law Judge)

(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96 5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct
Section 96.3-7 - Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Iowa Jewish Senior Life Center (employer) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated April 14, 2006, reference 01, which held that Carole Boo-Harrington (claimant) was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on May 8, 2006. The claimant participated in the hearing with her husband, Michael Harrington. The employer participated through Stephen Blend, Executive Director and Sarah Farnsworth, Assistant to the Executive Director.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was employed as a full-time receptionist from February 24, 2003 through March 30, 2006, when she was discharged for inappropriate conduct. On March 24, 2006, the executive director had written a memorandum to the accounting manager regarding another employee and had placed this personal memorandum face down on the accounting manager's desk, since she was gone that day.

Hourly employees have an employee lounge or break room in which to eat lunch. If they do not want to use the break room, they can eat outside or in their cars. On March 24, 2006, the claimant sat in the accounting office at the accounting manager's desk to eat lunch with an accounting employee, whose desk was also located in that office. The claimant could have pulled up a chair next to the accounting employee's desk or sat at another desk but instead chose the accounting manager's desk. The claimant proceeded to read the personal memorandum addressed to the accounting manager and discussed its contents with the accounting employee and three other employees. This letter did not concern the claimant and she had no work purpose to read it or to disseminate the information contained within it. She was subsequently discharged due to a breach of confidentiality.

The claimant filed a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective March 26, 2006, and has received benefits after the separation from employment.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct. 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.

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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The claimant was discharged for inappropriate conduct and violating the employer's confidentiality policy. She contends she did nothing wrong since the personal memorandum she read was face up on the desk. First of all, the claimant was not authorized to eat lunch in the accounting office. Even if she was in the office with another employee, she had no authorization to sit at the accounting manager's desk and had no reason to do so. She could have sat at another desk or even pulled a chair up to the accounting employee's desk. The claimant then wrongfully read a personal memorandum that was on the accounting manager's desk, was not addressed to her and did not involve her. Furthermore, she discussed the contents of that memorandum with her co-employees. Incredulously, the claimant believes anything on anyone's desk is fair game for anyone else to read. The claimant's conduct was a willful and material breach of the duties and obligations to the employer and a substantial disregard of the standards of behavior the employer had the right to expect of the claimant. Work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law has been established in this case and benefits are denied.

Iowa Code section 96.3-7 provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which the claimant was not entitled. Those benefits must be recovered in accordance with the provisions of Iowa law.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated April 14, 2006, reference 01, is reversed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because she was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld 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 claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$966.00.

sdb/kkf