

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

MATTHEW KUESTER
Claimant

SEABOARD FOODS SERVICES INC
Employer

APPEAL 19A-UI-07473-DB-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 08/25/19
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant/appellant filed an appeal from the September 12, 2019 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that disallowed benefits based upon claimant's discharge from employment. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on October 14, 2019. The claimant, Matthew Kuester, participated personally and was represented by Attorney Todd Geer. The employer, Seaboard Foods Services Inc., did not participate.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full-time as a maintenance technician from May 31, 2019 until August 28, 2019. Claimant was responsible for making repairs to the animal barns, office buildings, and grounds.

On August 21, 2019, claimant noticed a hole in the wall in an office building. Claimant took a video of the hole in the wall on his work phone with the intention to show it to his supervisor. Claimant had technical issues with his work phone and turned it into his employer. The employer then found the video of the hole in the wall on his work phone prior to claimant bringing up the issue with his supervisor. Only three working days passed between claimant taking the video and the employer finding it on his phone. There was no imminent danger to co-workers or animals because of the hole in the wall. Claimant was told he was discharged for poor communication and having the video on his phone.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

As a preliminary matter, the administrative law judge finds that the Claimant did not quit. Claimant was discharged from employment.

Iowa Code § 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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 Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

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.

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). 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). When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Id.* Negligence does not constitute misconduct unless recurrent in nature; a single act is not disqualifying unless indicative of a deliberate disregard of the employer's interests. *Henry v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 391 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986).

Claimant's actions of taking the video and failing to show the video to his supervisor in three working days does not rise to the level of willful misconduct. The employer has failed to meet its burden of proof in establishing a current act of disqualifying job-related misconduct. As such, benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

DECISION:

The September 12, 2019 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

Dawn Boucher
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

db/rvs