

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

PEGGY S COOK
Claimant

CATHOLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES – IOWA
Employer

APPEAL 16A-UI-09138-DB-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 07/17/16
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant/appellant filed an appeal from the August 15, 2016 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon her discharge from employment for violation of a known company rule. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on September 9, 2016. The claimant, Peggy S. Cook, participated personally. The employer, Catholic Health Initiatives - Iowa, participated through Senior Human Resources Business Partner Lori Coniconde. Employer's Exhibits 1 and 2 were admitted.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?
Did claimant voluntarily quit the employment with good cause attributable to employer?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed part-time as an emergency room technician. She was employed from July 26, 2010 until her employment ended on July 15, 2016. Prior to holding the job title of emergency room technician claimant was employed as a unit secretary. Claimant's job duties included completing paperwork, cleaning patient rooms, as well as assisting nurses and doctors with paperwork. Claimant was not certified to draw blood or perform other invasive procedures. Teresa Ward was claimant's immediate supervisor. Geri Babs was Ms. Ward's supervisor.

On July 15, 2016 claimant was informed by Ms. Babs that she was being discharged from employment for failing to complete mandatory educational requirements. See Exhibit 1. Those mandatory educational requirements consisted of on-line classes that were to be completed on the computer. The educational requirements were due on June 30, 2016 but claimant did not complete them until July 4, 2016.

The employer has a progressive disciplinary policy. See Exhibit 2. The steps in the progressive discipline include verbal warning, written warning, suspension, and then termination. See

Exhibit 2. The supervisor generally proceeds to the next step of the process unless twelve (12) months have passed since the last warning was issued. See Exhibit 2.

Claimant received previous written discipline on June 11, 2015 for absenteeism. See Exhibit 1. Claimant received a suspension on September 10, 2015 for policy violations. The final incident of claimant's failure to complete her educational course occurred on June 30, 2016.

However, claimant was never notified that her educational requirements were due on June 30, 2016. Claimant did not receive any email notifications of this due date or other type of notification of the June 30, 2016 due date.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

As a preliminary matter, I find that the Claimant did not quit. Claimant was discharged from employment.

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).

871 IAC 24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and the 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.

871 IAC 24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

Further, 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).

It is the duty of the administrative law judge as the trier of fact in this case, to determine the credibility of witnesses, weigh the evidence and decide the facts in issue. *Arndt v. City of LeClaire*, 728 N.W.2d 389, 394-395 (Iowa 2007). The administrative law judge may believe all, part or none of any witness's testimony. *State v. Holtz*, 548 N.W.2d 162, 163 (Iowa App. 1996). In assessing the credibility of witnesses, the administrative law judge should consider the evidence using his or her own observations, common sense and experience. *Id.* In determining the facts, and deciding what testimony to believe, the fact finder may consider the following factors: whether the testimony is reasonable and consistent with other believable evidence; whether a witness has made inconsistent statements; the witness's appearance, conduct, age, intelligence, memory and knowledge of the facts; and the witness's interest in the trial, their motive, candor, bias and prejudice. *Id.* After assessing the credibility of the witnesses who testified during the hearing, considering the applicable factors listed above, and using her own common sense and experience, the administrative law judge finds claimant's testimony more credible than Ms. Coniconde's testimony.

There was no evidence presented that claimant was aware of the June 30, 2016 due date and that her failure to complete the educational requirements by that date was intentional or was caused by her carelessness which indicated a wrongful intent. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). There is no evidence that the claimant's actions had any wrongful intent.

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). Further, poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of evidence of intent. *Miller v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 423 N.W.2d 211 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988). A claimant's poor work performance does not disqualify her from receiving benefits. Failure in job performance due to inability or incapacity is not considered misconduct because the actions were not volitional. *Huntoon*, 275 N.W.2d at 448 (Iowa 1979). Where an individual is discharged due to a failure in job performance, proof of that individual's ability to do the job is required to justify disqualification, rather than accepting the employer's subjective view. To do so is to impermissibly shift the burden of proof to the claimant. *Kelly v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 386 N.W.2d 552 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986).

An employee is entitled to fair warning that the employer will no longer tolerate certain performance and conduct prior to discharge. Without fair warning, an employee has no reasonable way of knowing that there are changes that need be made in order to preserve the employment. If an employer expects an employee to conform to certain expectations or face discharge, appropriate (preferably written), detailed, and reasonable notice should be given. Claimant had no notice that she needed to complete educational requirements by June 30, 2016 and that her failure to do so would result in discharge.

The employer failed to meet its burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. As such, benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The August 15, 2016 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided she is otherwise eligible. The benefits claimed and withheld shall be paid, provided she is otherwise eligible.

Dawn Boucher
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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