

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

MIKE R SKAGGS

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 20A-UI-10483-B2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

PILOT TRAVEL CENTERS LLC

Employer

OC: 05/31/20

Claimant: Respondent (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

Iowa Code § 96.3-7 – Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits

Federal Law PL 116-136 Sec. 2104 – Eligibility for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation

871 IA Admin. Code 24(10) – Employer Participation in Fact Finding

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Employer filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated August 20, 2020, reference 03, which held claimant eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on October 15, 2020. Employer participated by Cynthia Smith. Claimant failed to respond to the hearing notice and did not participate. Notice was taken of the administrative record.

ISSUES:

Whether claimant was discharged for misconduct?

Whether claimant was overpaid benefits?

Whether claimant is eligible for FPUC benefits?

If claimant was overpaid benefits, should claimant repay benefits or should employer be charged due to employer's participation or lack thereof in fact finding?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for employer on an unknown date in February 2020. Employer discharged claimant on some date in February 2020.

Claimant's date of hire was unknown by employer. Employer stated that she would have conducted the post-hire interview with the claimant and at the time the introduction was conducted claimant would have been given an employee handbook detailing, amongst other things, employer's attendance policies.

Employer stated claimant was often late for work and missed around five days of work in the few months working for employer. Employer had no documentation of dates of any warnings that might have been given to claimant for violation of attendance policies.

Employer did not know the last date that led to discharge, but believed claimant had missed the previous day of work and hadn't contacted employer to alert of his absence in a timely manner. Employer believed the date of discharge was the day after the last incident, but did not know the particular date.

Claimant has received state unemployment benefits in this matter in the amount of \$1,428.00.

Claimant has received Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation benefits in this matter in the amount of \$4,800.00.

It is unknown if employer did substantially participate in fact finding in this matter.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

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 disqualification shall continue 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).

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. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982), Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

The employer bears the burden of proving that a claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). *Myers*, 462 N.W.2d at 737. The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. Because our unemployment compensation law is designed to protect workers from financial hardships when they become unemployed through no fault of their own, we construe the provisions "liberally to carry out its humane and beneficial purpose." *Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 570 N.W.2d 85, 96 (Iowa 1997). "[C]ode provisions which operate to work a forfeiture of benefits are strongly construed in favor of the claimant." *Diggs v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 478 N.W.2d 432, 434 (Iowa Ct. App. 1991).

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation. The Iowa Supreme Court has opined that one unexcused absence is not misconduct even when it followed nine other excused absences and was in violation of a direct order. *Sallis v. EAB*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). *Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984), held that the absences must be both excessive and unexcused. The Iowa Supreme Court has held that excessive is more than one. Three incidents of tardiness or absenteeism after a warning has been held misconduct. *Clark v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 317 N.W.2d 517 (Iowa Ct. App. 1982). While three is a reasonable interpretation of excessive based on current case law and Webster's Dictionary, the interpretation is best derived from the facts presented.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning absenteeism.

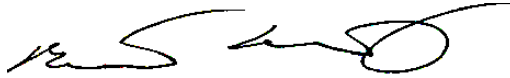
The last incident, which brought about the discharge, fails to constitute misconduct because employer could not provide specific testimony surrounding any dates of any alleged incidents. The administrative law judge holds that claimant was not discharged for an act of misconduct and, as such, is not disqualified for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

The overpayment issue is moot.

The issue of employer participation is moot.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated August 20, 2020, reference 03, is affirmed. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements.



Blair A. Bennett
Administrative Law Judge

October 16, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

bab/scn