

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

KRISTEN M CLARK
Claimant

CASEY'S MARKETING COMPANY
Employer

APPEAL 18A-UI-03250-SC-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 02/04/18
Claimant: Appellant (1)**

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Kristen M. Clark (claimant) filed an appeal from the March 2, 2018, reference 02, unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon the determination Casey's Marketing Company (employer) discharged her for excessive unexcused absenteeism after being warned. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on April 5, 2018. The claimant participated. The employer participated through Assistant Manager Julie Gilbert. The Claimant's Exhibit A was admitted without objection.

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: The claimant was employed full-time as a Cashier beginning on December 10, 2015, and was separated from employment on February 5, 2018, when she was discharged. The claimant worked the 12:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. shift.

The claimant struggled to get to work on time due to her sleep medications. She was told verbally by Assistant Manager Julie Gilbert that she needed to report to work on time. On October 4, 2017, the claimant was absent from work and did not notify the employer of her absence. Gilbert issued her a written warning stating she needed to have perfect attendance, barring illness or emergencies, for the next 60 days. The claimant successfully completed the 60-day period without being late.

On January 13, 2018, the claimant was an hour late to work. The claimant overslept and missed the start of her shift on February 6, 2018. The Store Manager Lora Brown lives in the same apartment complex as the claimant and went to her apartment to wake her up as she had done in the past. The claimant told Brown she just woke up and would be going to work. Brown received another phone call later stating that the claimant had not arrived to work. Brown then went to cover the shift. The claimant did not contact the employer until 12:30 p.m. the following

day after learning that Brown had asked another employee to cover her shift. The claimant was discharged for excessive, unexcused absenteeism.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Benefits are denied.

Iowa law disqualifies individuals who are discharged from employment for misconduct from receiving unemployment insurance benefits. Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a. They remain disqualified until such time as they requalify for benefits by working and earning insured wages ten times their weekly benefit amount. *Id.* Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(1)a provides:

“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).

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 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 the 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). The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7); see *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190, n. 1 (Iowa 1984) holding “rule [2]4.32(7)...accurately states the law.”

The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are twofold. First, the absences must be excessive. *Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins* at 192. Second, the absences must be unexcused. *Cosper* at 10. The requirement of “unexcused” can be satisfied in two ways. An

absence can be unexcused either because it was not for “reasonable grounds,” *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not “properly reported,” holding excused absences are those “with appropriate notice.” *Cosper* at 10. The term “absenteeism” also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as “tardiness.” An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins, supra*.

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.*

The findings of fact show how the disputed factual issues were resolved. After assessing the credibility of the witnesses who testified during the hearing, the reliability of the evidence submitted, considering the applicable factors listed above, and using her own common sense and experience, the administrative law judge attributes more weight to the employer’s version of events.

An employer’s point system or no-fault absenteeism policy is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for benefits; however, an employer is entitled to expect its employees to report to work as scheduled or to be notified as to when and why the employee is unable to report to work. The claimant’s argument that her prior absences should be excused because they were due to her sleep medications is not persuasive. The claimant was able to arrive for work on-time for a 60-day window, indicating it was possible for her to report to work in a timely fashion.

The employer has established that the claimant was warned that further unexcused absences could result in termination of employment and the final absence was not excused as she overslept and did not report to her shift. The final absence, in combination with the claimant’s history of unexcused absenteeism, is considered excessive. Benefits are withheld.

DECISION:

The March 2, 2018, reference 02, unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to excessive, unexcused absenteeism. Benefits are withheld until such time as she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible.

Stephanie R. Callahan
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

src/scn