

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

JEREMY E KLINE
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 13A-UI-04294-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

BAUER BUILT MANUFACTURING INC
Employer

OC: 04/01/12
Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Jeremy Kline filed a timely appeal from the April 2, 2013, reference 05, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on May 16, 2013. Mr. Kline participated. The employer did not respond to the hearing notice instructions to provide a telephone number for the hearing and did not participate. Exhibits A through E were received into evidence.

ISSUE:

Whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment that disqualifies the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Jeremy Kline was employed by Bauer Built Manufacturing, Inc., as a full-time welder from May 2012 until March 19, 2013, when Brian Smith, Plant Supervisor, discharged him for attendance. Mr. Kline's work hours were 6:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and Saturdays as needed. If Mr. Kline needed to be absent or late, the employer expected Mr. Kline to telephone the workplace and speak to Mr. Smith or leave a voicemail message for Mr. Smith. The employer preferred notice prior to the start of the shift or as soon as possible. Mr. Kline was aware of these policies.

The final absence that triggered the discharge happened on March 19, 2013, when Mr. Kline was an hour late because he had overslept. Mr. Kline attributes this incident of oversleeping to a prescription anti-depressant that was making it difficult for him to get to sleep at night. Mr. Kline had been late to work the previous day because his car would not start. Mr. Kline later determined that the problem was with his solenoid valve. Mr. Kline had not previously been having problems with his vehicle. Mr. Kline promptly notified the employer, prior to the start of his shift, that he had a ride on the way and would be delayed getting to work. Mr. Kline had prior absences that were due to illness and that had been properly reported to the employer.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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.

The employer has the burden of proof in this matter. See Iowa Code section 96.6(2). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment benefits. Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits. See Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. See Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of the current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act(s). The termination of employment must be based on a current act. See 871 IAC 24.32(8). In determining whether the conduct that prompted the discharge constituted a "current act," the administrative law judge considers the date on which the conduct came to the attention of the employer and the date on which the employer notified the claimant that the conduct subjected the claimant to possible discharge. See also Greene v. EAB, 426 N.W.2d 659, 662 (Iowa App. 1988).

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. See 871 IAC 24.32(4). When it is in a party's power to produce more direct and satisfactory evidence than is actually produced, it may fairly

be inferred that the more direct evidence will expose deficiencies in that party's case. See Crosser v. Iowa Dept. of Public Safety, 240 N.W.2d 682 (Iowa 1976).

In order for a claimant's absences to constitute misconduct that would disqualify the claimant from receiving unemployment insurance benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant's *unexcused* absences were excessive. See 871 IAC 24.32(7). The determination of whether absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. However, the evidence must first establish that the most recent absence that prompted the decision to discharge the employee was unexcused. See 871 IAC 24.32(8). Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation and oversleeping are considered unexcused. On the other hand, absences related to illness are considered excused, provided the employee has complied with the employer's policy regarding notifying the employer of the absence. Tardiness is a form of absence. See Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). Employers may not graft on additional requirements to what is an excused absence under the law. See Gaborit v. Employment Appeal Board, 743 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). For example, an employee's failure to provide a doctor's note in connection with an absence that was due to illness properly reported to the employer will not alter the fact that such an illness would be an excused absence under the law. Gaborit, 743 N.W.2d at 557.

The employer failed to participate in the hearing and thereby failed to present any evidence to support the allegation that Mr. Kline was discharged for misconduct. The evidence does establish unexcused absences on March 18 and 19. However, the evidence does also establish mitigating factors in connection with each absence. For the first, the evidence establishes an unanticipated mechanical failure of a vehicle. For the second, while the administrative law judge does not find that the medication made Mr. Kline oversleep and late for work, it may have been a contributing factor. The employer has not presented evidence to establish any additional unexcused absences. The evidence indicates that Mr. Kline had an ongoing medical issue. The administrative law judge concludes that Mr. Kline's unexcused absences were not excessive under the circumstances and did not constitute misconduct in connection with the employment.

Based on the evidence in the record and application of the appropriate law, the administrative law judge concludes that Mr. Kline was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Accordingly, Mr. Kline is eligible for benefits, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits paid to Mr. Kline.

DECISION:

The Agency representative's April 2, 2013, reference 05, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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