

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

PAMELA PICKEN
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 11A-UI-04331-BT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**APPLEBEES NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL
& BAR**
Employer

+

OC: 02/27/11
Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Pamela Picken (claimant) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated March 24, 2011, reference 01, which held that she was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits because she was discharged from Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar (employer) for work-related misconduct. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on April 27, 2011. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer participated through Mark VanBuren, Regional Manager. Employer's Exhibits One through Three was admitted into evidence. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-related misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was employed as a part-time server from March 20, 2007 through February 24, 2011 when she was discharged for violation of company policy. The employer's policy prohibits employees from giving away food or beverages without the manager's approval. The claimant prepared and delivered three small desserts for her regular customers without charging them. She planned on paying for the desserts at the end of her shift and put a note in her pocket to remind herself. The regional manager saw that the claimant had not charged the customers for the desserts and pulled the claimant off her shift early. The regional manager would not listen to the claimant's explanation but discharged her for violation of company policy. No previous disciplinary warnings were issued.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct. 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.

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.

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 establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Casper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 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. IDJS*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa 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. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa 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." When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). Poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of evidence of intent. *Miller v. Employment Appeal Board*, 423 N.W.2d 211 (Iowa App. 1988).

In an at-will employment environment an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy. However, if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job-related misconduct as the reason for the separation, the employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. An employee is entitled to fair warning that the employer will no longer tolerate

certain performance and conduct. 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.

In the case herein, the employer discharged the claimant for violation of company policy and what amounts to theft. The claimant explained that she did not intend to violate company policy or steal three desserts worth \$6.00. Misconduct must be substantial in nature to support a disqualification from unemployment benefits. *Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board*, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. App. 1982). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. *Id.* The claimant said she was going to pay for the desserts and the employer cannot prove she intended to steal the food. She had no disciplinary record and was a long-term employee. Inasmuch as the employer had not previously warned the claimant about the issue which led to the separation, it has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately or with recurrent negligence in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. If an employer expects an employee to conform to certain expectations or face discharge, appropriate (preferably written), detailed, and reasonable notice should be given. Benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated March 24, 2011, reference 01, is reversed. The claimant was discharged. Misconduct has not been established. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

Susan D. Ackerman
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

sda/css