

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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

MARK M HAWKS

Claimant

APPEAL NO: 20A-UI-10940-JE-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

BOB BROWN GMC INC

Employer

OC: 04/12/20

Claimant: Appellant (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge/Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the August 28, 2020, reference 02, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on October 27, 2020. The claimant participated in the hearing with friend/former service advisor Kirk Troy Sanders; former service manager/director Tim Bogardus; and Attorney Valerie Cramer. The employer chose not to participate in the hearing.

ISSUE:

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

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a full-time service technician for Bob Brown GMC from January 1, 2016 to June 11, 2020. He was discharged after being accused of using a racial epithet.

On June 11, 2020, the employer met with the claimant and stated it had interviewed the staff and it was reported that he called former President Obama a "f***** n*****" in January 2020. The claimant agrees he was involved in a political discussion at work and said Obama was a "f***** crappy president" but denies using the N-word.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

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.

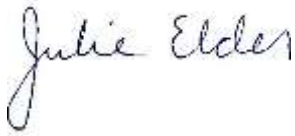
This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Huntoon v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

The employer has the burden of proving disqualifying misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). 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. 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 Board*, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000).

When misconduct is alleged as the reason for the discharge and subsequent disqualification of benefits, it is incumbent upon the employer to present evidence in support of its allegations. Allegations of misconduct without additional evidence shall not be sufficient to result in disqualification. 871 IAC 24.32(4). The employer did not participate in the hearing and failed to provide any evidence. The evidence provided by the claimant does not rise to the level of disqualifying job misconduct as that term is defined by Iowa law. The employer has not met its burden of proof. Therefore, benefits must be allowed.

DECISION:

The August 28, 2020, reference 02, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Elder".

Julie Elder
Administrative Law Judge

October 30, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

je/sam