

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

DARRIN L RICE
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 15A-UI-12461-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WINEGARD COMPANY
Employer

OC: 10/25/15
Claimant: Appellant (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Darrin Rice filed a timely appeal from the November 5, 2015, reference 01, decision that disqualified him for benefits and that relieved the employer of liability for benefits, based on an Agency conclusion that Mr. Rice had been discharged on October 23, 2015 for misconduct in connection with the employment. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on November 30, 2015. Mr. Rice participated. Kerry Hale represented the employer.

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: Darrin Rice was employed by Winegard Company as a full-time production worker from January 2015 until October 26, 2015, when Denise Baker, Human Resources Director, discharged him from the employment. The employer alleges that the incident that triggered the discharge occurred on October 22, 2015. The employer alleges that on that date, Mr. Rice uttered inappropriate remarks concerning a coworker, Jamie McDonald, who was injured during the October 22 shift. Another production worker, Joel Hussell, alleged to a supervisor that Mr. Rice said, "That's karma," "If I would have saw it, I would have taken a selfie," and "That's what that bitch gets." Mr. Rice denies making the statements attributed to him. On October 20, 2015, the employer had disciplined Mr. Rice for allegedly failing to stock Ms. McDonald's work area and for allegedly vowing to make sure that a recently promoted coworker "does not last long." Mr. Rice denied that set of allegations as well and refused to sign the written discipline that was presented to him. Mr. Rice had applied for the same job to which the coworker was appointed.

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.

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 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).

An employer has the right to expect decency and civility from its employees and an employee's use of profanity or offensive language in a confrontational, disrespectful, or name-calling context may be recognized as misconduct disqualifying the employee from receipt of unemployment insurance benefits. Henecke v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 533 N.W.2d 573 (Iowa App. 1995). Use of foul language can alone be a sufficient ground for a misconduct disqualification for unemployment benefits. Warrell v. Iowa Dept. of Job Service, 356 N.W.2d 587 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). An isolated incident of vulgarity can constitute misconduct and warrant disqualification from unemployment benefits, if it serves to undermine a superior's authority. Deever v. Hawkeye Window Cleaning, Inc. 447 N.W.2d 418 (Iowa Ct. App. 1989).

The employer failed to present sufficient evidence, and sufficiently direct and satisfactory evidence, to meet its burden of proof regarding any of the allegations of misconduct. The employer did not present testimony from a single person with firsthand knowledge of the alleged misconduct that factored in the discharge. The employer had the ability to present testimony from witnesses with personal knowledge of the matters. The employer failed to present sufficient evidence to rebut Mr. Rice's testimony that he did not utter any of the remarks attributed to him and did not fail to stock Ms. McDonald's work area.

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

DECISION:

The November 5, 2015, reference 01, 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

jet/css