

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

SHAWNA M THOMPSON
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 11A-UI-07680-LT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WELLS FARGO BANK NA
Employer

OC: 06/13/10
Claimant: Respondent (1)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed an appeal from the June 1, 2011 (reference 06) decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call on July 28, 2011. Claimant participated. Employer participated through Loan Administration Manager Joshua Reed and was represented by Kelley Landolth of Barnett Associates Inc. The employer's proposed exhibits, not all of which were legible, were not included in the record because the claimant did not receive them, although the Appeals Bureau mailed them to her address of record on June 21, 2011.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed part-time as a loan servicing specialist and was separated from employment on May 10, 2011. On that date, during a random call review, the employer believed that she had allegedly disconnected homeowners without speaking to the customers during more than 400 calls in a three-month period. The claimant had been telling her supervisor, Janna Pederson, for a month and a half via e-mails that she was having phone problems, but they were not addressed or repaired. Claimant also reported the equipment issues to managers Tammy Cook and Ines, and the help desk. They said they would let Reed know, but the next communication about the issue was the termination meeting, immediately after Pederson returned from a two-week vacation. Claimant had not been warned her job was in jeopardy for any reason and had been told she was doing a good job.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

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. *Cosper 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, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job-related misconduct as the reason for the separation, employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. The employer has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately to avoid customer calls or did so with recurrent negligence given the equipment issues she had reported. Nor was she in violation of a prior warning. 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. 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 June 1, 2011 (reference 06) decision is affirmed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

Dévon M. Lewis
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/kjw