

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

JAMES E KRAUSE

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 15A-UI-07149-TN-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

AGRI STAR MEAT & POULTRY LLC

Employer

OC: 05/17/15

Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5-2-a - Discharge
Section 96.3-7- Benefit Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Agri Star Meat & Poultry LLC filed a timely appeal from a representative's decision dated June, 4, 2015, reference 01, which held the claimant eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice was provided, a telephone hearing was held on July 22, 2015. Although duly notified, the claimant did not respond to the notice of hearing and did not participate. The employer participated by Ms. Laura Roney, Payroll-Human Resource Assistant and Mr. Terry Meyer Maintenance Supervisor. Employer's Exhibits A, B, C, D and E were received into evidence.

ISSUES:

The issues are whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct sufficient to warrant the denial of unemployment insurance benefits and whether the claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having considered all the evidence in the record the administrative law judge finds: James Krause was employed by Agri Star Meat & Poultry LLC from June 19, 2013 until March 24, 2015, when he was discharged for being excessively absent. Mr. Krause was employed as a full-time maintenance foreman and was paid by the hour. His immediate supervisors were Terry Meyer and Dennis Fillman.

Mr. Krause was discharged via registered letter on March 24, 2015, after the employer concluded the claimant had been excessively absent and had not provided medical documentation to support his extensive absenteeism. The employer also concluded that Mr. Krause had failed to properly provide notice to the company of his impending absences on numerous occasions.

At the time of discharge the claimant had accumulated 18 additional consecutive days of absence since last reporting for scheduled work on February 28, 2015. During those 18 days of absence the claimant did not respond to repeated requests that he supply medical

documentation to support his need to be absent and Mr. Krause failed to report his impending absences by calling in at least one hour before the beginning of the work shift on 13 of the 18 days. Based upon the claimant's repeated failure to supply medical documentation after it was requested, his failure to report for work and his failure to properly notify the company of impending absences, a decision was made to terminate Mr. Krause from his employment with the company. Later when Mr. Krause turned in his company equipment he stated that he had taken new employment.

The final infraction prior to the claimant's discharge took place on March 23, 2015, when the claimant called in late to report his impending absence stating that he was awaiting a doctor's statement.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The question before the administrative law judge is whether the evidence in the record establishes misconduct sufficient to warrant the denial of employment insurance benefits. It does.

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.

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).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

In discharge cases the employer has the burden of proof to establish disqualifying conduct on the part of a claimant. See Iowa Code section 96.6(2). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment insurance benefits. Misconduct that may be serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee may not necessarily be serious enough to warrant the denial of unemployment insurance 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. of Appeals 1992).

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(7). Absences related to issues of personal responsibilities such as transportation or over sleeping are considered unexcused. Absences related to illness are considered excused providing the employee has complied with the employer's policy regarding notifying the employer of the absence. Tardiness or leaving early is a form of absenteeism. See Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984)

The evidence in the record establishes that Mr. Krause had been excessively absent and had failed to provide medical documentation although the employer had repeatedly requested the claimant do so. The claimant did not follow the employer's attendance policy in connection with numerous absences during March 2015. The policy requires that the employee personally contact the employer at least one hour before the beginning of the employee's work shift. The claimant did not follow the policy and failed to call in to properly notify the employer of his impending absence in a timely manner on March 23, 2015.

Based upon Mr. Krause's failure to properly notify the employer of his absences, the administrative law judge concludes that the claimant's unexcused absences were excessive and constituted misconduct in connection with the employment.

Based upon the evidence in the record and the application, the appropriate law, the administrative law judge concludes that the claimant was discharged for misconduct. Accordingly, the claimant is disqualified for benefits until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, providing he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account should not be charged for benefits paid to Mr. Krause.

Because the claimant has been deemed ineligible for benefits any benefits claimed as received could constitute an overpayment. The administrative record reflects that the claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$2080.00 since filing a claim with an effective date of May 17, 2015 for the week ending dates of March 23, 2015 through June 20, 2015. The administrative record also establishes that the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview or make a firsthand witness available for rebuttal.

Iowa Code § 96.3-7, as amended in 2008, provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

b. (1) If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5. However, provided the benefits were not received as the result of fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual, benefits shall not be recovered from an individual if the employer did not participate in the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to section 96.6, subsection 2, and an overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment. The employer shall not be charged with the benefits.

(2) An accounting firm, agent, unemployment insurance accounting firm, or other entity that represents an employer in unemployment claim matters and demonstrates a continuous pattern of failing to participate in the initial determinations to award benefits, as determined and defined by rule by the department, shall be denied permission by the department to represent any employers in unemployment insurance matters. This subparagraph does not apply to attorneys or counselors admitted to practice in the courts of this state pursuant to section 602.10101.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the

employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying benefits were paid to which he was not entitled. The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and later is determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based on a reversal on an appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. The employer will not be charged for benefits if it is determined they did participate in the fact-finding interview. Iowa Code Section 96.3(7). In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. Since the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview the claimant is obligated to repay to the agency the benefits he received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

DECISION:

The representative's decision dated June 4, 2015, reference 01, is reversed. Claimant was discharged for misconduct. Unemployment insurance benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount and is otherwise eligible. Claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$2080.00 and is liable to repay that amount. The employer's account shall not be charged because the employer participated in the fact-finding interview.

Terence P. Nice
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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