

IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Section
1000 East Grand—Des Moines, Iowa 50319
DECISION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
68-0157 (7-97) – 3091078 - EI

RACHEL D STURMS
314 EMMETT ST
BURLINGTON IA 52601

VISTA BAKERY INC
3000 MT PLEASANT
PO BOX 888
BURLINGTON IA 52601-0880

Appeal Number: 05A-UI-03578-S2T
OC: 04/04/04 R: 04
Claimant: Appellant (2)

This Decision Shall Become Final, unless within fifteen (15) days from the date below, you or any interested party appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by submitting either a signed letter or a signed written Notice of Appeal, directly to the **Employment Appeal Board, 4th Floor—Lucas Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319**.

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

STATE CLEARLY

1. The name, address and social security number of the claimant.
2. A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
3. That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
4. The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in this appeal or you may obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds. It is important that you file your claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

(Administrative Law Judge)

(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Rachel Sturms (claimant) appealed a representative's March 30, 2005 decision (reference 07) that concluded she was not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because she was discharged from work with Vista Bakery (employer) for conduct not in the best interest of the employer. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on April 26, 2005. The claimant participated personally and through Dean Petersen, former co-worker. The employer participated by Nancy Tripp, Human Resources Director.

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 hired on April 22, 2004, as a full-time packer. The claimant received warnings for absenteeism but none for job performance.

On February 22, 2005, the claimant bumped an empty three-pound tub while working knocking it over. She righted the tub. Then in jest she slapped the bin and asked a co-worker "can you hear me know." The co-worker laughed. Frequently employees slap the bin causing it no damage.

The employer suspended the claimant on February 22, 2005, after two employees who did not like the claimant filed a report with the employer. The two stated the claimant knocked over a tub and items in the tub fell to the floor. They also stated the claimant slapped the bin and raised her middle finger to her co-workers in an obscene gesture. The employer terminated the claimant on February 24, 2005.

The testimony of the employer and claimant was conflicting. The administrative law judge finds the claimant's testimony and the testimony of the claimant's eyewitness to be more credible because the employer had no first-hand witnesses.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct. For the following reasons the administrative law judge concludes she was not.

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.

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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

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). If a party has the power to produce more explicit and direct evidence than it chooses to do, it may be fairly inferred that other evidence would lay open deficiencies in that party's case. Crosser v. Iowa Department of Public Safety, 240 N.W.2d 682 (Iowa 1976). The employer had the power to produce eyewitness testimony but did not. The administrative law judge concludes that the hearsay evidence provided by the employer is not more persuasive than the claimant's denial of such conduct. The employer has not carried its burden of proof to establish that the claimant committed any act of misconduct in connection with employment for which she was discharged. Misconduct has not been established. The claimant is allowed unemployment insurance benefits.

DECISION:

The representative's March 30, 2005 decision (reference 07) is reversed. The claimant was discharged. Misconduct has not been established. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

bas/sc