

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

ALYSA K HEINRICHS
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 14A-UI-05826-NT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

ROSENBOOM MACHINE & TOOL INC
Employer

OC: 05/11/14
Claimant: Respondent (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Rosenboom Machine & Tool, Inc. filed a timely appeal from a representative's decision dated June 3, 2014, reference 02, which held claimant eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice was provided, a telephone hearing was held on June 30, 2014. Although duly notified, the claimant did not respond to the notice of hearing and did not participate. The employer participated by Mr. Craig VanDrunen, Human Resource Generalist.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct and whether the claimant has been overpaid job insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having considered all the evidence in the record, finds: Alysa Heinrichs was employed by Rosenboom Machine & Tool, Inc. from July 29, 2013 until May 8, 2014 when she was discharged for excessive absenteeism after exceeding the number hours of paid time off and unpaid time off allowed under company policy. Ms. Heinrichs was aware of the company's policies and had acknowledged receipt of them.

Prior to discharging the claimant the employer warned Ms. Heinrichs her absences and leaving early were becoming excessive. Warnings were issued to the claimant on January 2, 2014. On March 14, 2014 the claimant received a written warning and pay reduction for continual overuse of paid time off and on April 14, 2014 the claimant received a second and final written warning and pay reduction for additional use of unpaid time off after the claimant had exhausted all paid time off available to her.

During the course of her employment, Ms. Heinrichs had been absent, left work early or was tardy on 27 occasions. Six of those occasions were for the illness of herself or family members. The claimant was most recently absent from work on April 24, 25 and April 28, 2014 when the claimant elected to remain home from work to provide childcare to her son who had been suspended from school.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow the administrative law judge concludes that the claimant was discharged from employment under disqualifying conditions.

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).

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.

Since the claimant was discharged, 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 insurance benefits. Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee may not necessarily be serious enough to warrant a 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. App. 1992).

Excessive absences are considered misconduct unless excused. Absences due to properly reported illness or injury do not constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). Absences related to childcare are generally held to be unexcused. Harlan v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 192 (Iowa 1984).

The Supreme Court of the state of Iowa in the case of Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984) held that excessive unexcused absenteeism is a form of job misconduct. The Court held that the absences must be both excessive and unexcused and that the concept includes tardiness and leaving early etcetera. The Court in the case of Harlan v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 192 (Iowa 1984) held that absences due to matters of "personal responsibility", e.g. transportation problems, oversleeping or childcare are considered unexcused.

In the case at hand the evidence in the record establishes that Ms. Heinrichs had been excessively absent and had been properly warned by her employer that her employment was in jeopardy. The claimant's final absences were not due to illness or injury but were due to lack of childcare. These absences were unexcused and after the final warning that had been served upon her by her employer. The administrative law judge for these reasons concludes that the employer has sustained its burden of proof in establishing that the claimant's discharge took place under disqualifying conditions. Unemployment insurance benefits are withheld.

Because the claimant has been deemed ineligible for benefits any benefits the claimant has received could constitute an overpayment. The administrative record reflects that the claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$2,744.00 since filing a claim with an effective date of May 11, 2014 for the weeks ending May 17, 2014 through June 28, 2014. The administrative record also establishes that the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview or make a first-hand witness available for rebuttal.

Iowa Code section 96.3(7)a-b, 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.

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 § 96.8, subsection 5.

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 § 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 § 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 states pursuant to § 602.10101.

871 IAC 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 she was not entitled. The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. 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 the Agency the benefits she received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated June 3, 2014, reference 02, is reversed. The claimant is disqualified. Unemployment insurance benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount and is otherwise eligible. The claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$2,744.00 and is liable to repay that amount.

Terence P. Nice
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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