

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

BOBBY SMITH  
122 GRACE ST  
COUNCIL BLUFFS IA 51501

MIDLANDS LIVING CENTER LLP  
DOUGLAS GORACKE ET AL  
2452 N BROADWAY  
COUNCIL BLUFFS IA 51501

Appeal Number: 05A-UI-05632-ET  
OC: 05-01-05 R: 01  
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, 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

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(Administrative Law Judge)

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(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the May 19, 2005, reference 01, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on June 15, 2005. The claimant participated in the hearing. Mark Anderson, Administrator and Guyla Haneline, Director of Nursing, participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer.

## FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a full-time CNA for Midlands Living Center from October 14, 2002, to May 3, 2005. He was discharged after a female coworker accused him of sexually harassing her April 27, 2005, and April 30, 2005. The claimant denies the allegations.

## REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

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 proving disqualifying job misconduct. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment

of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000). The claimant was discharged for sexual harassment, and although he denies the harassment, the administrative law judge finds the claimant's actions were, at best, inappropriate and unprofessional. The employer, however, relied solely on hearsay evidence in attempting to establish the claimant's sexual harassment. While hearsay evidence is allowed in administrative hearings, it is not given the same weight as first-hand testimony that is subject to questioning and cross-examination. Consequently, the administrative law judge must conclude that the hearsay evidence provided by the employer is not more persuasive than the claimant's in-person denial of such conduct. The employer did not provide a good-cause reason as to why the first-hand witness did not participate in the hearing. 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). Therefore, while not condoning the claimant's behavior, the administrative law judge must conclude that the employer has not met its burden of proving disqualifying job misconduct as defined by Iowa law and benefits must be allowed.

#### DECISION:

The May 19, 2005, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

je/kjw