

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

SHARON L MOFFAT
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WAL-MART STORES INC
c/o FRICK UC EXPRESS
PO BOX 283
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 05O-UI-02796-SWT
OC: 12/12/04 R: 03
Claimant: Respondent (1)

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:

The employer appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated January 6, 2005, reference 01, that concluded the claimant's discharge was not for work-connected misconduct. A telephone hearing was held on April 4, 2005. The claimant participated in the hearing. Jeff Solomon participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer with a witness, Barb Quigley. Exhibits One through Four were admitted into evidence at the hearing.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant worked as an hourly sales associate for the employer from December 18, 2001, to December 15, 2004. The claimant was informed and understood that under the employer's work rules, employees working full time were entitled to two paid 15-minute breaks and one

unpaid half-hour lunch break. She was informed and understood that she was subject to discipline for taking an excessive break, which was considered theft of time.

On December 8, 2004, the claimant took two paid breaks of about 15 minutes during her shift. The claimant's supervisor incorrectly believed that she had taken two paid breaks of longer than 15 minutes on that day. He did not approach the claimant that day to confront her about his concerns about her excessive breaks. The claimant was absent from work due to illness on December 9, 10, 13, and 14, 2004. When she reported to work on December 15, 2004, the employer discharged the claimant for taking excessive breaks on December 8, 2004. The claimant had never been counseled or warned for similar conduct prior to December 8, 2004.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue in this case is whether the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law.

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 to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. 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 findings of fact show how I resolved the disputed factual issues in this case by carefully assessing of the credibility of the witnesses and reliability of the evidence and by applying the proper standard and burden of proof. The claimant testified credibly that she had not taken excessive breaks on December 8, 2004. No witness with personal knowledge of what happened on December 8, 2004, testified on behalf of the employer. The claimant's direct testimony outweighs the employer's hearsay evidence in this case. No work-connected misconduct has been proven in this case.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated January 6, 2005, reference 01, is affirmed. The claimant is qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits, if she is otherwise eligible.

saw/pjs