

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

JENNIFER THOMAE
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 14A-UI-08194-MT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

UNIV OF IA COMMUNITY CREDIT UNION
Employer

OC: 07/13/14
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.3-7 – Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits, Employer Chargeability for Non Participation at Fact Finding

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Employer filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated July 31, 2014, reference 01, which held claimant eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on August 28, 2014. Claimant participated personally. Employer participated by Larry Lynch, Attorney at Law, with witnesses Sue Freeman, Senior Vice President Human Resources; Pam Beckner, Human Resource Specialist; Ryan Baack, Branch Service Manager; and Curt Schamberger, Financial Service Representative. Exhibits One and A were admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issues in this matter are whether claimant was discharged for misconduct and recovery of overpayment of unemployment insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for the employer July 1, 2014. Employer discharged claimant on July 1, 2014 because claimant engaged in sexual relations with not one but two subordinates. Claimant dated an immediate report for a number of months. Claimant then had a one-night stand with her subordinate's subordinate. Employer's policy prohibits such relationships. Employer demands immediate notification so one can transfer to another location. Claimant failed to report the relationships. Claimant denied such relationships at fact finding. Employer failed to bring first-hand witnesses to the fact-finding hearing. Employer's policy calls for discipline up to discharge.

Employer did participate at the fact-finding interview. Employer did present sufficient evidence at fact finding that if un rebutted would have allowed employer to win.

There is no evidence that proves claimant received benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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(4), (8) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and the employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. Allegations of misconduct or dishonesty without additional evidence shall not be sufficient to result in disqualification. If the employer is unwilling to furnish available evidence to corroborate the allegation, misconduct cannot be established. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

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.

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation.

The administrative law judge holds that the evidence has established that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated the employer’s policy concerning inter office affairs. Claimant was informed concerning this policy.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge constitutes misconduct because claimant intentionally violated policy and gave false information to employer. The failure to properly inform employer of the affairs is an intentional violation of a duty owed employer. Violation of the policy alone may not have been enough to warrant discharge. The dishonesty element is sufficient to rise to the level of misconduct. Therefore, claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct and as such, is disqualified for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

The next issue concerns an overpayment of unemployment insurance benefits and charges to employer’s account.

Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment benefits. See Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10(4).

Employer participation would include testimony from a firsthand witness or the name and number of a firsthand witness who may be contacted for rebuttal. It could also include a detailed written statement or documents that provide specific, factual information regarding the separation. At a minimum, the employer’s information regarding a discharge must include the dates, particular circumstances and the act or omissions of the claimant. A voluntary separation should include the stated reason for the quit. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871- 24.10(1)

Statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and/or information submitted after the fact-finding interview are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10(1)

The unemployment insurance law requires benefits be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later denied benefits even if the claimant acted in good faith and was not at fault. However, a claimant will not have to repay an overpayment when an initial decision to award benefits on an employment separation issue is reversed on appeal if two conditions are met: (1) the claimant did not receive the benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, and (2) the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding that awarded benefits. In addition, if a claimant is not required to repay an overpayment because the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding, the employer’s account will be charged for the overpaid benefits. Iowa Code § 96.3-7-a, -b.

Employer’s account shall not be charged because employer did meaningfully participate at fact finding. Employer’s evidence would be sufficient to win if claimant had not participated. Employer did need a first-hand witness to overcome claimant’s testimony at fact-finding. Claimant is overpaid \$1,664.00 in unemployment benefits due to the reversal in allowance.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated July 31, 2014, reference 01, is reversed. Unemployment insurance benefits shall be withheld until claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times claimant's weekly benefit amount, provided claimant is otherwise eligible. Employer's account shall not be charged. Claimant is overpaid \$1,664.00 in unemployment benefits.

Marlon Mormann
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

mdm/can