

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

CHELSEA A PETRIE
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-05750-LT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**UNITED STATES
CELLULAR CORPORATION**
Employer

**Original Claim: 03/08/09
Claimant: Respondent (1)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the March 31, 2009, reference 01, decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a telephone conference hearing was held on May 8, 2009. Claimant participated. Employer participated through Michael Munckton and Paula Rosenbaum. Employer's Exhibit 1 was received.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having heard the testimony and having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant most recently worked full-time as a customer service representative (CSR) and was separated on March 13, 2009 for alleged violations of the code of conduct. The first week of March 2009, Munckton observed claimant sending what he believed to be personal e-mails and looking at a catalog while helping a customer on a call. She sent e-mails to coworkers and did not read a catalog while assisting customers. She had been never been warned her job was in jeopardy for any reason, but Munckton had counseled her verbally on an unknown date about not scheduling vacation days while on a call with a customer. On one occasion after the end of her shift, she transferred a customer to the tech department and muted the call to listen and hear how the issue was resolved so she could possibly use that information to avoid multiple transfers, which the employer does not like. While listening, she completed an overtime slip and closed out her drawer. She was on maternity leave when the e-mail was sent about code of ethics violations (Employer's Exhibit 1) and had over 400 e-mails waiting for her after returning to work without paid time to read them. She had accumulated "not ready" time, so she had no need to attempt call avoidance techniques.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

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.

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.

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). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. IDJS*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988). Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be "substantial." When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). Poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of evidence of intent. *Miller v. Employment Appeal Board*, 423 N.W.2d 211 (Iowa App. 1988).

In an at-will employment environment, an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job-related misconduct as the reason for the separation, employer incurs

potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. Employer has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately or with recurrent negligence in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. An employee is entitled to fair warning that the employer will no longer tolerate certain performance and conduct. Without fair warning, an employee has no reasonable way of knowing that there are changes that need be made in order to preserve the employment. If an employer expects an employee to conform to certain expectations or face discharge, appropriate (preferably written), detailed, and reasonable notice should be given. Benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The March 31, 2009, reference 01, decision is affirmed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

Dévon M. Lewis
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/kjw