

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

BRENDA K BATES

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-00973-S2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

QWEST CORPORATION

Employer

**OC: 11/16/08 R: 02
Claimant: Respondent (2)R**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

Section 96.3-7 – Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Qwest Corporation (employer) appealed a representative's January 16, 2009 decision (reference 01) that concluded Brenda Bates (claimant) was discharged and there was no evidence of willful or deliberate misconduct. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was scheduled for February 9, 2009. The claimant participated personally. The employer was represented by Mary Out, Hearings Representative, and participated by Michael Miklus, Manager 1. Maxine Piper observed the hearing. The employer offered and Exhibit One was received into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was hired on February 11, 2008 as a full-time sales and service consultant. The employer issued the claimant written warnings for attendance/tardiness issues on April 22, May 28, June 5, June 19, July 14 and August 28, 2008. The employer notified the claimant that further infractions could result in termination from employment.

On November 10, 2008, the claimant met with the employer and said she needed time off because a close friend had less than 24 hours to live. The claimant said she understood the seriousness of her leaving. She stated that whatever the consequences, she would be leaving and not returning until further notice. The claimant properly reported daily. The friend died on November 12, 2008. The claimant was "depressed" by the matter but did not seek medical attention or report any medical issues to the employer.

The funeral was on November 17, 2008. The claimant returned to work on November 18, 2008. The employer terminated the claimant on November 20, 2008.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for misconduct.

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(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.

The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984).

An employer is entitled to expect its employees to report to work as scheduled. The employer has established that the claimant was warned that further unexcused absences could result in termination of employment and the final absence was not excused. While it is understandable that the claimant would want to take some time off at this stressful time, one cannot ignore the claimant's previous acts of absenteeism and tardiness. The final absence, in combination with the claimant's history of unexcused absenteeism, is considered excessive. Benefits are withheld.

Iowa Code section 96.3-7, 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.

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 section 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 section 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 state pursuant to section 602.10101.

The claimant has received benefits since filing the claim herein. Pursuant to this decision, those benefits may now constitute an overpayment. The issue of the overpayment is remanded for determination.

DECISION:

The representative's January 16, 2009 decision (reference 01) is reversed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because the claimant was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the claimant's weekly benefit amount, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The issue of the overpayment is remanded for determination.

Beth A. Scheetz
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

bas/pjs