

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

---

**NASHONDA ALTMAN**  
Claimant

**PRESTAGE FOODS OF IOWA LLC**  
Employer

**APPEAL 20A-UI-08200-HP-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 03/29/20  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

---

Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting  
Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Claimant Nashonda Altman filed an appeal from a July 22, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based on a disqualifying reason. Notices of hearing were mailed to the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for August 24, 2020. Altman appeared and testified. Pamela Webster appeared and testified on behalf of Prestage Foods of Iowa LLC ("Prestage"). Exhibit 1 was admitted into the record. I took administrative notice of the claimant's unemployment insurance benefits records maintained by Iowa Workforce Development.

**ISSUE:**

Was the separation a layoff, discharge for misconduct or voluntary quit without good cause?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Altman commenced full-time employment as a production team member with Prestage on July 1, 2019. Kenny Collins was Altman's immediate supervisor.

Altman had problems with attendance during her employment. Webster testified on March 17, 2020, March 18, 2020, and March 19, 2020, Altman was a no call, no show. At that time, Altman had received nine points on the ten-point attendance policy. Webster testified Altman would not have been terminated for violating the ten-point attendance policy.

On July 1, 2019, Altman signed an hourly employee attendance policy. (Exhibit 1) The policy provides that if an employee is a no call, no show for three consecutive days, the employee is deemed to have voluntarily quit.

Altman testified on March 17, 2020, she was late to work. She reported Collins told her to get dressed for work. Altman testified after she dressed for work Collins told her to go home and that someone from the office would contact her. Altman reported she left that day without clocking in.

Webster testified when an employee is late to work, the employee is still required to clock in and Altman's description of the events that occurred on March 17, 2020, was not in accord with policy. Collins was not called as a witness at hearing. Webster admitted she could not confirm or deny whether Collins sent Altman home on March 17, 2020.

Altman further testified she contacted Hortencia Saldivar in human resources on March 18, 2020 or March 19, 2020. Altman reported she asked what she was supposed to do and Saldivar told her she would speak to the "head boss" to see what he wanted to do and she would get in touch with her. Altman relayed she never heard back from Saldivar. Saldivar was no longer working for Prestage at the time of the hearing.

Altman had been late to work on September 24, 2019 and December 13, 2019. Altman admitted she was able to clock in when she was late to work on those two occasions.

### **REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

A discharge is a termination of employment initiated by the employer for such reasons as incompetence, violation of rules, dishonesty, laziness, absenteeism, insubordination, or failure to pass a probationary period. 871 IAC 24.1(113)(c). A quit is a separation initiated by the employee. *Id.* 24.1(113)(b). In general, a voluntary quit requires evidence of an intention to sever the employment relationship and an overt act carrying out that intention. *See Local Lodge #1426 v. Wilson Trailer*, 289 N.W.2d 698, 612 (Iowa 1980); *Peck v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 492 N.W.2d 438 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992). In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer. *See* 871 IAC 24.25.

Under Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a,

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits: . . .

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 disqualification shall continue 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 Iowa Administrative Code 24.31(1)a, defines the term "misconduct" 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 Iowa Legislature. *Huntoon v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 558 (Iowa 1979).

871 Iowa Administrative Code 24.32(4) also provides,

*Report required.* The claimant's statement and 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.

And 871 Iowa Administrative Code 24.32(8) provides:

*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.

Unemployment statutes should be interpreted liberally to achieve the legislative goal of minimizing the burden of involuntary unemployment. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6, 10 (Iowa 1982). The employer bears the burden of proving the employee engaged in disqualifying misconduct. *Id.* at 11. The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating the claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262, 264 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984)

Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits; such misconduct must be "substantial." *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806, 808 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984) The definition of misconduct in the administrative rule focuses on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. *Id.* When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Id.* at 808-09. Negligence does not constitute misconduct unless it is recurrent in nature; a single act is not disqualifying unless it is indicative of a deliberate disregard of the employer's interests. *Henry v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986) Additionally, poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of intent. *Miller v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 423 N.W.2d 211, 213 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988). The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661, 666-69 (Iowa 2000) What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants a denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679, 680 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988) Instances of poor judgment are not misconduct. *Richers v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 479 N.W.2d 308, 312 (Iowa 1991); *Kelly v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 386 N.W.2d 552, 555 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986)

871 Iowa Administrative Code 24.32(7), provides, "[e]xcessive 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 Supreme Court has held 871 Iowa Administrative Code 24.32(7) accurately states the law. *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190, n. 1 (Iowa 1984)

Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. *Cosper*, 321 N.W.2d at 10. Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not volitional, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to and including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. *Gaborit v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 743 N.W.2d 554, 558 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007)

The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins*, 350 N.W.2d at 192. The absences must also be unexcused. *Cosper*, 321 N.W.2d at 10. An absence can be unexcused if it did not constitute reasonable grounds or if it was not properly reported. *Id.*; *Higgins*, 350 N.W.2d at 191. Excused absences are those with "appropriate notice." *Cosper*, 321 N.W.2d at 10. Absences in good faith, for good cause, and with appropriate notice are not misconduct. *Id.* Such absences may be grounds for discharge, but not for disqualification of benefits because substantial disregard for the employer's interest has not be shown and this is essential for a finding of misconduct. *Id.*

Iowa Code section 96.5(1) provides an individual "shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits: . . . If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department." The Iowa Supreme Court has held a "'voluntary quit' means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer." *Wills v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 447 N.W.2d 137, 138 (Iowa 1989). A voluntary quit requires "an intention to terminate the employment relationship accompanied by an overt act carrying out the intent." *Peck v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 492 N.W.2d 438, 440 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992). "Good cause" for leaving employment must be that which is reasonable to the average person, not the overly sensitive individual or the claimant in particular. *Uniweld Products v. Indus. Relations Comm'n*, 277 So.2d 827 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1973). The claimant has the burden of proving that the voluntary leaving was for good cause attributable to the employer. Iowa Code § 96.6(2). The employer has the burden of proving that a claimant's departure from employment was voluntary. *Irving v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 883 N.W.2d 179 (Iowa 2016).

871 Iowa Administrative Code 24.25(4) provides:

**Voluntary quit without good cause.** In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer from whom the employee has separated. The employer has the burden of proving that the claimant is disqualified for benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.5. However, the claimant has the initial burden to produce evidence that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving Iowa Code section 96.5, subsection (1), paragraphs "a" through "i," and subsection 10. The following reasons for a voluntary quit shall be presumed to be without good cause attributable to the employer:


**24.25(4)** The claimant was absent for three days without giving notice to employer in violation of company rule.

Webster testified Altman voluntarily quit her employment for being a no call, no show for three consecutive days. Webster reported Prestage did not terminate Altman under the ten-point attendance policy. Altman testified she showed up to work late on March 17, 2020, and her supervisor, Collins, sent her home before she clocked in. I do not find Altman violated the three-day no call, no show policy. Altman reported to work on March 17, 2020, and Collins sent her

home. I find Prestage has failed to prove Altman was discharged for any current act of job-related misconduct that would disqualify her from receiving unemployment benefits. Benefits are allowed.

**DECISION:**

The July 22, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision denying unemployment insurance benefits is reversed. The employer has not established the claimant was discharged for misconduct for a disqualifying reason. The evidence does not support the claimant voluntarily quit her employment with the employer. Benefits are allowed provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.



---

Heather L. Palmer  
Administrative Law Judge  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau  
Iowa Workforce Development  
1000 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209  
Fax (515) 478-3528

August 26, 2020  
Decision Dated and Mailed

hlp/scn