

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

TARA L DRAKE
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GOOD SAMARITAN SOCIETY INC
c/o FRICK UC EXPRESS
P O BOX 283
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 04A-UI-03939-S2T
OC: 03/07/04 R: 02
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:

Good Samaritan Society (employer) appealed a representative's March 25, 2004 decision (reference 01) that concluded Tara Drake (claimant) was discharged for excessive absences but the absences were for illness. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on May 11, 2004. The claimant participated personally. The employer participated by Layne Gross, Administrator, and Jane Buttrey, Housekeeper and Laundry Supervisor. Gwen Musick, Director of Nursing, observed the hearing.

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 October 10, 2003, as a part-time housekeeping assistant.

The claimant received a copy of the employer's handbook and signed for its receipt on October 10, 2003. The handbook indicated that employees should report an absence two hours before the start of a shift. On December 22, 2003, the claimant signed for receipt of the employer's new handbook. The two-hour requirement was not in the new handbook. The new handbook indicated that an employee must notify the employer sometime before the start of the shift. In addition the claimant received a Medical Verification Policy and signed for receipt on January 1, 2004. This policy indicates that an employee who is sick four times in six months must receive an improvement plan. The policy goes on to say that an employee's sickness requires a doctor's excuse within 24 hours of the notification to the employer or verification by the employer's staff.

The claimant received a verbal warning on November 4, 2003, for being tardy five times and absent due to illness five times in 16 days. On December 15, 2003, the claimant received a written warning for four tardies and four absences due to illness. The employer issued the claimant a written warning on January 5, 2004, for 13 tardies and nine absences due to illness. The employer did not issue the claimant an improvement plan.

The claimant properly reported that she was ill and would not be able to work on March 7, 2004. On March 7, 2004, the claimant was fired for excessive absenteeism before her 24-hour period to provide a doctor's excuse had expired and before she was given the chance to appear for the employer's verification.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct. For the following reasons the administrative law judge concludes she was not.

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).

871 IAC 24.32(8) provides:

(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.

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. Excessive absences are not misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness can never constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The employer must establish not only misconduct but that there was a final incident of misconduct which precipitated the discharge. The last incident of absence was a properly reported illness which occurred on March 7, 2004. The claimant's absence does not amount to job misconduct because it was properly reported. The employer has failed to provide any evidence of willful and deliberate misconduct which was the final incident leading to the discharge. The claimant was discharged but there was no misconduct.

DECISION:

The representative's March 25, 2004 decision (reference 01) is affirmed. The claimant was discharged. Misconduct has not been established. Benefits are allowed provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

bas/s