

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

AMBER M RUBY
APT 306A
3920 HWY 151
MARION IA 52302-6535

NCS PEARSON INC
c/o TALX UCM SERVICES
PO BOX 283
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 05A-UI-05221-DT
OC: 04/03/05 R: 03
Claimant: Respondent (5)

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
Section 96.5-1 – Voluntary Leaving

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

NCS Pearson, Inc. (employer) appealed a representative's May 5, 2005 decision (reference 02) that concluded Amber M. Ruby (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on June 6, 2005. This appeal was consolidated for hearing with one related appeal, 05A-UI-05220-DT. The claimant participated in the hearing. Christine Wittmann appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from one other witness, Lynne Zinnel. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

Was there a disqualifying separation from employment either through a voluntary quit without good cause attributable to the employer or through a discharge for misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on or about November 1, 2003. She worked full time as a call center representative at the employer's Coralville, Iowa, call center. Her last day of work was April 18, 2005.

The claimant has a condition in which she regularly suffers from migraine headaches. Beginning February 1, 2005, the claimant began a period of short-term disability at least in part covered by FMLA (Family Medical Leave). After an initial approved period of leave, the leave was then extended through March 24, 2005. At approximately this time, the claimant began to contact the employer regarding the requirements for her to return to work. Her initial contacts were with a human resources representative. After she did not get further response from the representative, the claimant contacted her direct supervisor on April 5, 2005; she then learned that the human resources representative was no longer employed with the employer. The representative's last day of work had been April 3, 2005.

By April 8, 2005, the claimant had been informed through her supervisor who had gotten in touch with Ms. Wittmann, a senior human resources generalist, that she needed to have a full doctor's release in order to return to work. The claimant initially intended on getting a release on that date. An arrangement was made for the claimant to return to work on April 18, 2005 for retraining. On that date, the claimant did in fact return and began her retraining class. She brought with her a doctor's report. That doctor's report was not dated until April 15, 2005; it indicated that the claimant would have been able to return to work as of March 25, 2005. The employer concluded that the claimant had been absent without leave and had been a no-call, no-show for the interim between March 25 and April 18, 2005, and therefore determined that her employment was ended.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The first issue in this case is whether the claimant voluntarily quit.

Iowa Code section 96.5-1 provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

1. Voluntary quitting. If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department.

871 IAC 24.25 provides that, 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. A voluntary leaving of employment requires an intention to terminate the employment relationship accompanied by an overt act of carrying out that intention. Bartelt v. Employment Appeal Board, 494 N.W.2d 684 (Iowa 1993). The employer asserted that the claimant was not discharged but that she quit by job abandonment by a three-day no-call, no-show. The intent to quit can be inferred in certain circumstances. For example, a three-day no-call, no-show in violation of company rule can be considered to be a voluntary quit. However, the inference can be rebutted, and the administrative law judge

concludes that the employer has failed to satisfy its burden that the claimant voluntarily quit. Iowa Code §96.6-2. As the separation was not a voluntary quit, it must be treated as a discharge for purposes of unemployment insurance. 871 IAC 24.26(21).

The issue in this case is then whether the employer discharged the claimant for reasons establishing work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. The issue is not whether the employer was right or even had any other choice but to terminate the claimant's employment, 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 is misconduct that warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. Pierce v. IDJS, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988). A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code Section 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. Cosper v. IDJS, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

The focus of the definition of misconduct is on acts or omissions by a claimant that "rise to the level of being deliberate, intentional or culpable." Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa App. 1986). The acts must show:

1. Willful and wanton disregard of an employer's interest, such as found in:
 - a. Deliberate violation of standards of behavior that the employer has the right to expect of its employees, or
 - b. Deliberate disregard of standards of behavior the employer has the right to expect of its employees; or
2. Carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to:
 - a. Manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design; or
 - b. Show an intentional and substantial disregard of:
 1. The employer's interest, or
 2. The employee's duties and obligations to the employer.

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, (7) provide:

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).

(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 reason the employer effectively discharged the claimant was her undocumented absence between March 25 and April 18, 2005. It is clear that the claimant was making good faith efforts to determine what verification the employer needed to allow her to return to work, and it is clear that the employer knew or should have known the reason for the claimant's absence from work even after March 25, 2005. There is no showing that the claimant intentionally delayed providing the necessary paperwork or returning to work. The employer has not met its burden to show disqualifying misconduct. Cosper, supra. Based upon the evidence provided, the claimant's actions were not misconduct within the meaning of the statute, and the claimant is not disqualified from benefits.

DECISION:

The representative's May 5, 2005 decision (reference 02) is modified with no effect on the parties. The claimant did not voluntarily quit and the employer did discharge the claimant but not for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits, if she is otherwise eligible.

ld/tjc