

**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**

**NICHOLAS WHITE  
2105 CLARK ST APT 24  
CHARLES CITY IA 50616-4032**

**COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMS INC  
1700 CLARK ST  
PO BOX 457  
CHARLES CITY IA 50616**

**TOM MORRIS  
1695 BURTON AVE  
WATERLOO IA 50703**

**Appeal Number: 06A-UI-03199-ET  
OC: 02-19-06 R: 02  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

**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, 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

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(Administrative Law Judge)

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(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge/Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the March 8, 2006, reference 01, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on April 6, 2006. The claimant participated in the hearing with Union Representative Tom Morris. Sheryl Pringle, Director of Personnel, participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a part-time direct support staffer for Comprehensive Systems from June 6, 2005 to February 22, 2006. He was discharged after two female co-workers reported he was sexually harassing them by slapping their behinds and making inappropriate comments. The claimant agreed that he slapped co-workers on the butt but stated they also slapped him as well and he considered it routine horseplay. He stated that the women sometimes told him to stop but did so in a joking manner. The claimant testified he did not know he was violating the employer's policy and would have stopped if he knew or if he knew the women were upset.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

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).

The employer has the burden of proving disqualifying job misconduct. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). While the claimant's actions were clearly inappropriate, the women who made the complaints did not participate in the hearing and therefore the administrative law judge must give more credence to the claimant's first hand testimony. Although anyone should know that outside of athletics, slapping co-workers on the butt is not acceptable behavior, it appears the other employees engaged in the same behavior as the claimant. Consequently, the administrative law judge concludes the employer has not met its burden of proving disqualifying job misconduct as defined by Iowa law. Therefore, benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The March 8, 2006, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

je/tjc