

**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONS AND APPEALS
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS DIVISION, UI APPEALS BUREAU**

DEBORAH L VAN ALMEN
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 22A-UI-17349-JT-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

HY-VEE INC
Employer

**OC: 08/21/22
Claimant: Respondent (1)**

Iowa Code Section 96.5(2)(a) & (d) – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

On September 21, 2022, the employer filed a timely appeal from the September 13, 2022 (reference 02) decision that allowed benefits to the claimant, provided the claimant was otherwise eligible, and that held the employer's account could be charged for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion the claimant was discharged on July 23, 2022 for no disqualifying reason. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on October 18, 2022. Deborah Van Almen (claimant) did not comply with the hearing notice instructions to call the designated toll-free number at the time of the hearing and did not participate. Barbara Buss of Corporate Cost Control represented the employer and presented testimony through Dan Anderson and Carey Gibson. Exhibits 2 through 6 were received into evidence. The administrative law judge took official notice of the clerk of court record regarding Scott County case number FECR423979, which records are available to the public at www.iowacourts.state.ia.us.

ISSUE:

Whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment that disqualifies the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Deborah Van Almen (claimant) was employed by Hy-Vee, Inc. as a part-time convenience store clerk from March 2019 until July 20, 2022, when the employer indefinitely suspended her from the employment. The sole basis for the indefinite suspension was the claimant being charged with multiple felony drug charges after law enforcement officials conduct a search warrant on the claimant's residence. There was no connection between the alleged criminal conduct and the workplace or the employment. The claimant did not miss work in connection with the charges. The employer has a written policy that prohibits "Conduct outside of work having an impact on the work environment or the employee's fitness." The employer provided the policy to the claimant during the employment. At the time the employer indefinitely suspended the claimant, the claimant had been arrested and charged by law enforcement, but had not been formally charged by the county attorney. The criminal charges are still pending and have not led to a guilty plea or conviction.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)(a) provides:

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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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 Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979). The Iowa Legislature recently codified the definition of misconduct and included a list of conduct that constitutes disqualifying misconduct in connection the employment. See Iowa Code section 96.5(2)(d).

The employer has the burden of proof in this matter. See Iowa Code section 96.6(2). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment benefits. Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits. See *Lee v. Employment Appeal Board*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. See *Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board*, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of the current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act(s). The termination of employment must be based on a current act. See 871 IAC 24.32(8). In determining whether the conduct that prompted the discharge constituted a "current act," the administrative law judge

considers the date on which the conduct came to the attention of the employer and the date on which the employer notified the claimant that the conduct subjected the claimant to possible discharge. See also *Greene v. EAB*, 426 N.W.2d 659, 662 (Iowa App. 1988).

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. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(4).

Violation of a specific work rule, even off-duty, can constitute misconduct in connection with the employment. In *Kleidosty v. EAB*, 482 N.W.2d 416, 418 (Iowa 1992), the employer had a specific rule prohibiting immoral and illegal conduct. The worker was convicted of selling cocaine off the employer's premises. The Court found misconduct in connection with the employment. In its analysis, the Court stressed the importance of a specific policy, even one which was stated only in terms of illegal or immoral conduct.

Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(9) provides as follows:

Suspension or disciplinary layoff. Whenever a claim is filed and the reason for the claimant's unemployment is the result of a disciplinary layoff or suspension imposed by the employer, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct must be resolved. Alleged misconduct or dishonesty without corroboration is not sufficient to result in disqualification.

The evidence in the record establishes a July 20, 2022 discharge for no disqualifying reason. Though the employer has a written policy that would subject the claimant to workplace discipline for off-duty misconduct, the claimant's criminal charges are allegations of misconduct, not proof of misconduct. Whereas *Kleidosty* involved a criminal conviction, the present matter does not. The evidence does not establish misconduct in connection with the employment. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.

DECISION:

The September 13, 2022 (reference 02) decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.



James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

October 28, 2022
Decision Dated and Mailed

APPEAL RIGHTS. If you disagree with the decision, you or any interested party may:

1. Appeal to the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days of the date under the judge's signature by submitting a written appeal via mail, fax, or online to:

**Employment Appeal Board
4th Floor – Lucas Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Fax: (515)281-7191
Online: eab.iowa.gov**

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.

AN APPEAL TO THE BOARD SHALL 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.

An Employment Appeal Board decision is final agency action. If a party disagrees with the Employment Appeal Board decision, they may then file a petition for judicial review in district court.

2. If no one files an appeal of the judge's decision with the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days, the decision becomes final agency action, and you have the option to file a petition for judicial review in District Court within thirty (30) days after the decision becomes final. Additional information on how to file a petition can be found at Iowa Code §17A.19, which is online at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf>.

Note to Parties: YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in the appeal or 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.

Note to Claimant: It is important that you file your weekly claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

SERVICE INFORMATION:

A true and correct copy of this decision was mailed to each of the parties listed.

DERECHOS DE APELACIÓN. Si no está de acuerdo con la decisión, usted o cualquier parte interesada puede:

1. Apelar a la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo dentro de los quince (15) días de la fecha bajo la firma del juez presentando una apelación por escrito por correo, fax o en línea a:

**Employment Appeal Board
4th Floor – Lucas Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Fax: (515)281-7191
En línea: eab.iowa.gov**

El período de apelación se extenderá hasta el siguiente día hábil si el último día para apelar cae en fin de semana o día feriado legal.

UNA APELACIÓN A LA JUNTA DEBE ESTABLECER CLARAMENTE:

- 1) El nombre, dirección y número de seguro social del reclamante.
- 2) Una referencia a la decisión de la que se toma la apelación.
- 3) Que se interponga recurso de apelación contra tal decisión y se firme dicho recurso.
- 4) Los fundamentos en que se funda dicho recurso.

Una decisión de la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo es una acción final de la agencia. Si una de las partes no está de acuerdo con la decisión de la Junta de Apelación de Empleo, puede presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el tribunal de distrito.

2. Si nadie presenta una apelación de la decisión del juez ante la Junta de Apelaciones Laborales dentro de los quince (15) días, la decisión se convierte en acción final de la agencia y usted tiene la opción de presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el Tribunal de Distrito dentro de los treinta (30) días después de que la decisión adquiriera firmeza. Puede encontrar información adicional sobre cómo presentar una petición en el Código de Iowa §17A.19, que está en línea en <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf>.

Nota para las partes: USTED PUEDE REPRESENTARSE en la apelación u obtener un abogado u otra parte interesada para que lo haga, siempre que no haya gastos para Workforce Development. Si desea ser representado por un abogado, puede obtener los servicios de un abogado privado o uno cuyos servicios se paguen con fondos públicos.

Nota para el reclamante: es importante que presente su reclamo semanal según las instrucciones, mientras esta apelación está pendiente, para proteger su derecho continuo a los beneficios.

SERVICIO DE INFORMACIÓN:

Se envió por correo una copia fiel y correcta de esta decisión a cada una de las partes enumeradas.