

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

BRANDI ROCK
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 18A-UI-06613-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

TYSON FRESH MEATS INC
Employer

OC: 05/20/18
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code Section 96.5(2)(a) – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Brandi Rock filed a timely appeal from the June 12, 2018, reference 01, decision that disqualified her for benefits and that relieved the employer of liability for benefits, based on the Benefits Bureau deputy's conclusion that Ms. Rock was discharged on May 25, 2018 for excessive unexcused absences. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on July 3, 2018. Ms. Rock participated. Mehdina Kurtovic represented the employer.

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: Brandi Rock was employed by Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc. as a full-time production laborer from 2016 until May 25, 2018, when the employer discharged her for attendance after concluding that Ms. Rock had exceeded the allowable number of attendance points. If Ms. Rock needed to be absent from work, the employer's policy required that she telephone the designated absence reporting number at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled start of her shift. Ms. Rock was familiar with the absence reporting policy. The final absence that triggered the discharge occurred on May 24, 2018, when Ms. Rock was absent due to illness and properly notified the employer. Ms. Rock had also been absent due to illness on May 21 and 22, 2018 and had properly notified the employer both days. Ms. Rock's next most recent absence was on May 7, 2018, when she was absent for personal reasons with prior approval from her supervisor. Ms. Rock's next most recent absence occurred on April 26, 2018, when she was absent due to illness and properly reported the absence to the employer.

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 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 Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(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).

In order for a claimant's absences to constitute misconduct that would disqualify the claimant from receiving unemployment insurance benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant's *unexcused* absences were excessive. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(7). The determination of whether absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. However, the evidence must first establish that the

most recent absence that prompted the decision to discharge the employee was unexcused. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(8). Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation and oversleeping are considered unexcused. On the other hand, absences related to illness are considered excused, provided the employee has complied with the employer's policy regarding notifying the employer of the absence. Tardiness is a form of absence. See *Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). Employers may not graft on additional requirements to what is an excused absence under the law. See *Gaborit v. Employment Appeal Board*, 743 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). For example, an employee's failure to provide a doctor's note in connection with an absence that was due to illness properly reported to the employer will not alter the fact that such an illness would be an excused absence under the law. *Gaborit*, 743 N.W.2d at 557.

The evidence in the record establishes a discharge for no disqualifying reason. The final absence on May 24, 2018 and the additional most recent absences going back to April 26, 2018 were each excused absences under the applicable law. All but one of those absences were due to illness and were properly reported to the employer. The remaining most recent absence on May 7, 2018, was for personal reasons, but was approved in advance by the supervisor. The absences that were excused absences under the applicable law cannot serve as a basis for a finding of misconduct in connection with the employment and cannot be considered against Ms. Rock for purposes of determining her unemployment insurance benefit eligibility. Because the evidence fails to establish a current act of misconduct, Ms. Rock is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.

DECISION:

The June 12, 2018, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged on May 25, 2018 for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/rvs