

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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

EBONIE K THOMAS
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 19A-UI-04492-S1-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

FOCUS SERVICES LLC
Employer

OC: 04/28/19
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct
Section 96.3-7 – Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Focus Services (employer) appealed a representative's May 22, 2019, decision (reference 01) that concluded Ebonie Thomas (claimant) was eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on June 27, 2019. The claimant did not provide a telephone number where she could be reached and, therefore, did not participate. The employer participated by Naomi Strange, Human Resources Assistant, and Ange Pratt, Human Resources Assistant. The employer offered and Exhibit 1 was received into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the claimant was separated from employment for any disqualifying reason.

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 November 5, 2018, as a full-time customer service and sales agent. The claimant signed for receipt of the employer's handbook on November 5, 2018. The handbook indicated that disrespectful language could be grounds for termination. The employer also had a swearing policy. It read, "Focus Services does not allow any swearing on the call floor. Swearing on the call floor exposes the company to a great deal of risk. In order to reduce this risk any employee who is caught swearing on the call floor will be disciplined up to termination." The employer counseled the claimant a few times for performance issues.

On Friday, March 22, 2019, the claimant was overheard having a telephone conversation with a customer on the call floor and swearing. A transcript of the conversation was produced and the claimant was found to have agreed with a customer when she said, "You guys voted for that bastard. You're out of work. That's your own fucking fault. There's so much bullshit out there in the air you don't even know what to believe anymore." The employer suspended the claimant from work and sent her home pending investigation.

The employer determined that because the claimant did not just use one swear word, to a coworker or in passing, while on the call floor but repeatedly swore on the telephone to a customer, she should be terminated. On Monday, March 25, 2019, the employer terminated the claimant for violation of the employer's policy.

The claimant filed for unemployment insurance benefits with an effective date of April 28, 2019. She received \$148.00 in benefits after the separation from employment. On May 14, 2019, the employer provided a corrected telephone number of Angie Pratt as the person who would participate in the fact-finding interview on May 17, 2019. The fact finder did not call the number the employer provided. The employer provided documents for the fact finding interview indicating the claimant quit work.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for misconduct.

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 establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The claimant clearly disregarded the standards of behavior which an employer has a right to expect of its employees. The claimant's actions were volitional. She used inappropriate language repeatedly on the telephone with a customer in violation of the employer's policy. When a claimant intentionally disregards the standards of behavior that the employer has a right to expect of its employees, the claimant's actions are misconduct. The claimant was discharged for misconduct.

The unemployment insurance law requires benefits be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later denied benefits even if the claimant acted in good faith and was not at fault. However, a claimant will not have to repay an overpayment when an initial decision to award benefits on an employment separation issue is reversed on appeal if two conditions are met: (1) the claimant did not receive the benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, and (2) the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding that awarded benefits. In addition, if a claimant is not required to repay an overpayment because the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding, the employer's account will be charged for the overpaid benefits. Iowa Code section 96.3(7)a, b.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits that she was not entitled to receive. The employer participated in the fact finding interview to the best of its ability and is not chargeable. The claimant is overpaid unemployment insurance benefits.

DECISION:

The representative's May 22, 2019, decision (reference 01) is reversed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because the claimant was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the claimant's weekly benefit amount provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits that she was not entitled to receive. The employer participated in the fact finding interview to the best of its ability and is not chargeable. The claimant is overpaid unemployment insurance benefits.

Beth A. Scheetz
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

bas/rvs