

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

ARIEL C PETERSON
Claimant

CARE INITIATIVES
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-06095-S2-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 12/06/20
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quit

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed an appeal from the February 23, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on May 3, 2021. Claimant Ariel C. Peterson participated personally. Employer Care Initiatives did not register for the hearing and did not participate.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

As claimant was the only witness, the administrative law judge makes the following findings of fact based solely upon claimant's evidence: Claimant was employed full time as a certified dietary manager from May 28, 2016, until December 9, 2020, when she was discharged.

In early November 2020, claimant's supervisor provided her with goals to work on. Claimant was to improve her time management and ensure kitchen food orders included all necessary items. Claimant's supervisor gave her additional work duties prior to this goal setting, and claimant was doing duties that nurses and certified nursing assistants usually did, in addition to her regular duties. This resulted in claimant often working 14 hour plus days.

On December 9, 2020, claimant was discharged. Her supervisor told her she was not doing enough to help out in the organization. Claimant received no disciplinary action during her employment. She believes her supervisor was upset with her because his boss learned that claimant was doing some of his duties.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

Iowa Code § 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.

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).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. 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. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

Further, the employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be "substantial." *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Id.* Negligence does not constitute misconduct unless recurrent in nature; a single act is not disqualifying unless indicative of a deliberate disregard of the employer's interests. *Henry v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 391 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986). Further, poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of evidence of intent. *Miller v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 423 N.W.2d 211 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988). The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000).

Iowa Admin. Code r.871-24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

When claimant was discharged there was no current act of misconduct. Claimant was told she was terminated because she was not doing enough to help out. There must be a current act of misconduct to disqualify the claimant from receiving benefits. In this case, there was none. Claimant had no previous verbal or written warnings about her conduct. Without a current act, the employer failed to meet its burden of proof of establishing disqualifying job misconduct. As such, benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The February 23, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided she is otherwise eligible. Any benefits claimed and withheld on this basis shall be paid.



Stephanie Adkisson
Administrative Law Judge
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May 12, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

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