

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

DEE D SUCKLING

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 11A-UI-12667-JT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

SKYLINE CENTER INC

Employer

OC: 08/21/11

Claimant: Respondent (1)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the September 15, 2011, reference 01, decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, an in-person hearing was held on October 25, 2011. Claimant Dee Suckling participated. Lisa Hammond represented the employer and presented additional testimony through Jennifer Green. Exhibits One through Four, A and B were received into evidence.

ISSUES:

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

Whether the claimant has been able to work and available work since she established her claim for unemployment insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Dee Suckling was employed by Skyline Center, Inc., as a full-time direct care manager from February 2010 until August 25, 2011, when Lisa Hammond, human resources director, discharged her from the employment for attendance. The final absence that triggered the discharge occurred on August 24, 2011, when Ms. Suckling was absent due to illness that prompted a trip to the emergency room. The employer's attendance policy required that Ms. Suckling notify the employer at least three hours prior to her shift if she needed to be absent. The policy also required that Ms. Suckling find her own replacement. Ms. Suckling provided appropriate notice in connection with the final absence. Ms. Suckling attempted unsuccessfully to find a replacement. The next most recent absence that factored into the discharge had occurred on August 3, 2011, when Ms. Suckling missed a meeting due to having overslept.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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.

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 871 IAC 24.32(4). When it is in a party's power to produce more direct and satisfactory evidence than is actually produced, it may fairly

be inferred that the more direct evidence will expose deficiencies in that party's case. See Crosser v. Iowa Dept. of Public Safety, 240 N.W.2d 682 (Iowa 1976).

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 871 IAC 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 871 IAC 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 that the final incident that triggered the discharge was an absence due to illness properly reported to the employer. The final absence was an excused absence under the applicable law and cannot be used as the basis for disqualifying Ms. Suckling for unemployment insurance benefits. The next most recent absence occurred three weeks earlier and did not constitute a "current act." The evidence fails to establish a current act of misconduct. Accordingly, the administrative law judge must conclude that Ms. Suckling was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Because there was no current act of misconduct, the administrative law judge need not consider the prior attendance matters. Ms. Suckling is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits paid to Ms. Suckling.

DECISION:

The Agency representative's September 15, 2011, reference 01, decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged 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/kjw