

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

WENDY A RORK
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-11880-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

ACE AMERICAN INSURANCE COMPANY
Employer

OC: 03/01/09
Claimant: Respondent (1)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the August 6, 2009, reference 03, decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on September 2, 2009. Claimant Wendy Rork participated. The employer failed to respond to the hearing notice instructions to provide a telephone number for the hearing and did not participate.

ISSUE:

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

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Wendy Rork was employed with Combined Insurance Company of America for eight years as a full-time sales person until March 1, 2009, when the employer discharged her from the employment. Ms. Rork's immediate supervisor was Noel Hazard, Regional Manager. Toward the end of the employment, Combined Insurance Company of America was purchased by Ace American Insurance Company.

Throughout the employment, Ms. Rork sold accident, sickness and cancer insurance. At the end of the employment, the employer conditioned Ms. Rork's further employment on her ability to obtain a license to sell life insurance. At the very end of February 2009, Ms. Rork took a life insurance licensing test and did not pass. The employer had previously advised Ms. Rork that failure to pass the test would mean automatic termination from the employment. The test instructor told Ms. Rork that she could take the test again, but Ms. Rork lacked the necessary funds. Ms. Rork received a follow up letter from the employer that confirmed the employer had severed the employment relationship.

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).

The employer failed to participate in the hearing and, thereby, failed to present any evidence whatsoever of a voluntary quit or of a discharge for misconduct. The evidence in the record establishes that the employer discharged Ms. Rork because she could not perform to the employer's satisfaction by passing the life insurance test. This inability to perform to the employer's expectations would not constitute misconduct. See 871 IAC 24.32(1)(a).

Based on the evidence in the record and application of the appropriate law, the administrative law judge concludes that Ms. Rork was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Accordingly, Ms. Rork is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits paid to Ms. Rork.

DECISION:

The Agency representative's August 6, 2009, reference 03, 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/pjs