

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

KATIE A NOVAK
Claimant

APPEAL 20A-UI-11678-DG-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WESTERN HOME SERVICES INC
Employer

OC: 04/05/20
Claimant: Appellant (1)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated July 21, 2020, (reference 02) that held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on October 26, 2020. Claimant participated personally. Employer participated by Jordan Elsamiller, Human Resources Specialist, and was represented by Jennifer Groenwold, Hearing Representative. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record as it relates to benefits claimant has received to date.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for employer on March 21, 2020. Employer discharged claimant on June 3, 2020, because claimant engaged in improper conduct while assisting a resident.

Claimant began working for employer as a full-time resident assistant on October 1, 2018. On March 20, 2020 claimant was assisting a resident in the restroom. As claimant and a co-worker were lifting the resident they began to lose their grip, and they could not move her any further. Claimant forcibly took the resident's hand and placed it on a handrail in an attempt to lighten the weight she and her co-worker were lifting. The resident received an injury to her shoulder during the incident.

Employer conducted an investigation into the incident that occurred on March 20, 2020. Claimant was aware of employer's ongoing investigation. Employer also reviewed claimant's personnel file which included a prior warning for violating its improper conduct rule on January 29, 2020 for improper interactions she had with a resident. Claimant was told that her employment was in jeopardy of being terminated during that warning process.

At the conclusion of its investigation employer decided to terminate claimant's employment on June 3, 2020 for injuring a resident in violation of employer's improper conduct policy. Claimant was notified that her employment was terminated effective immediately on that date.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Benefits are denied.

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.

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.

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.

The Iowa Court of Appeals found substantial evidence of misconduct in testimony that the claimant worked slower than he was capable of working and would temporarily and briefly improve following oral reprimands. *Sellers v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 531 N.W.2d 645 (Iowa Ct. App.

1995). Generally, continued refusal to follow reasonable instructions constitutes misconduct. *Gilliam v. Atlantic Bottling Co.*, 453 N.W.2d 230 (Iowa Ct. App. 1990). Failure to sign a written reprimand acknowledging receipt constitutes job misconduct as a matter of law. *Green v Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 299 N.W.2d 651 (Iowa 1980). Misconduct must be "substantial" to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). Willful misconduct can be established where an employee manifests an intent to disobey a future reasonable instruction of his employer. *Myers v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 373 N.W.2d 507 (Iowa Ct. App. 1985). 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). 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).

Claimant grabbed a resident's arm, and forcibly placed her hand on a handrail which injured the resident. Employer did provide sufficient evidence of deliberate conduct in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. Claimant's conduct does evince such willful or wanton disregard of 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. Benefits are denied.

Note to Claimant: If this decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits and you disagree with this decision, you may file an appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by following the instructions on the first page of this decision. Individuals who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits, but who are currently unemployed for reasons related to COVID-19 may qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). **You will need to apply for PUA to determine your eligibility under the program.** Additional information on how to apply for PUA can be found at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/pua-information>. If this decision becomes final, or if you are not eligible for PUA, you may have an overpayment of benefits.

DECISION:

The July 21, 2020, (reference 02) decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Unemployment insurance benefits shall be withheld until claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times claimant's weekly benefit amount, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.



Duane L. Golden
Administrative Law Judge

October 29, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/sam