

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

NANCY E NEWTON
Claimant

GOOD SAMARITAN SOCIETY INC
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-00460-B2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 04/12/20
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated November 12, 2020, reference 02, which held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on February 8, 2021. Claimant participated personally. Employer failed to respond to the hearing notice and did not participate.

ISSUE:

Whether claimant was discharged for 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 August 19, 2020. Employer discharged claimant on August 19, 2020 because claimant was allegedly found not wearing her personal protective equipment after receiving multiple warnings for not wearing such equipment.

Claimant worked as a full time housekeeper for employer and had done so for nearly 25 years. This spring, employer issued rules saying masks and a plastic shield must be worn at all times as work.

Claimant was found on two occasions not wearing her shield on June 27, 2020 and July 25, 2020. The July warning told claimant she could be terminated if she was found not to be wearing her PPE again.

The last, most recent incident that led to claimant's termination occurred on August 19, 2020 when claimant was allegedly seen by an unnamed individual without a mask or shield while in a room. Claimant stated that she was wearing a shield at all times. She stated that she was additionally wearing her mask, but had stretched her elastic to speak with a customer. Claimant denied what the unnamed person stated. Employer did not have any witnesses.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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).

A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work connected misconduct. Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982), Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

The employer bears the burden of proving that a claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). [Myers, 462 N.W.2d at 737](#). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. Because our unemployment compensation law is designed to protect workers from financial hardships when they become unemployed through no fault of their own, we construe the

provisions "liberally to carry out its humane and beneficial purpose." *Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 570 N.W.2d 85, 96 (Iowa 1997). "[C]ode provisions which operate to work a forfeiture of benefits are strongly construed in favor of the claimant." *Diggs v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 478 N.W.2d 432, 434 (Iowa Ct. App. 1991).

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation. In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning not wearing her PPE while at work. Claimant was warned concerning this policy.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge, fails to constitute misconduct because employer did not prove the alleged action occurred. The administrative law judge holds that claimant was not discharged for an act of misconduct and, as such, is not disqualified for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated November 12, 2020, reference 02, is reversed. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements.



Blair A. Bennett
Administrative Law Judge

February 19, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

bab/kmj