

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

MISTI D WITKOWSKI
Claimant

DOLGENCORP LLC
Employer

APPEAL 15A-UI-06659-JP-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 05/17/15
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-Finding Interview

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed an appeal from the June 1, 2015, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on July 7, 2015. Claimant did not participate. Employer participated through store manager, Aubysa Edwards.

ISSUES:

Did claimant voluntarily leave the employment with good cause attributable to employer or did employer discharge claimant for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of benefits?

Has the claimant been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits, and if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency be waived?

Can charges to the employer's account be waived?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full time as an assistant manager from April 14, 2012, and was separated from employment on May 13, 2015, when she quit.

Claimant was scheduled to work on May 12, 2015 from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Claimant left for her lunch break at 12:15 p.m. Claimant never returned from work after her lunch break ended. Ms. Edwards attempted to contact claimant several times on May 12, 2015 with no success. Ms. Edwards again attempted several times to contact claimant several times on May 13, 2015 with no success. The employer has a policy regarding job abandonment that calls for termination if the employee walks off the job without notice. Claimant needed to contact Ms. Edwards if she was going to be absent from work. Claimant did not contact Ms. Edwards

about not coming back on May 12, 2015 after her lunch break. Claimant did not contact work until she showed up to work on May 14, 2015, after she was already deemed to have abandoned her job. Claimant was fifteen minutes late on May 14, 2015. Claimant was told she could not work and to contact Ms. Edwards. Claimant did not contact Ms. Edwards on May 14, 2015. On May 15, 2015, claimant made contact with Ms. Edwards. Claimant told Ms. Edwards she had been in the hospital but did not provide any documentation to Ms. Edwards.

The administrative record reflects that claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$1581.00, since filing a claim with an effective date of May 17, 2015, for the seven weeks ending July 4, 2015. The administrative record also establishes that the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview or make a first-hand witness available for rebuttal.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was not discharged but voluntarily quit the employment without good cause attributable to employer. Benefits are denied.

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 Code § 96.5-1 provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

1. Voluntary quitting. If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department.

A voluntary leaving of employment requires an intention to terminate the employment relationship accompanied by an overt act of carrying out that intention. *Local Lodge #1426 v. Wilson Trailer*, 289 N.W.2d 608, 612 (Iowa 1980). Generally, when an individual mistakenly believes they are discharged from employment, but was not told so by the employer, and they discontinue reporting for work, the separation is considered a quit without good cause attributable to the employer. *LaGrange v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, (No. 4-209/83-1081, Iowa Ct. App. filed June 26, 1984). The claimant has the burden of proving that the voluntary leaving was for good cause attributable to the employer. Iowa Code § 96.6(2) (amended 1998).

The employer has a policy regarding not returning to your shift after you break. Claimant left work for her lunch break on May 12, 2015 and never returned to finish her shift or work her shift the next day. Claimant failed to contact the employer until May 14, 2015, despite their repeated attempts the prior two days to contact her. Claimant's chosen action to leave early and not communicate with the employer until May 14, 2015, is evidence of an intention to quit and an action carrying out that intent. Claimant's leaving the employment without notice or reason, and

the failure to return to work renders the separation job abandonment without good cause attributable to the employer. Benefits are denied.

Iowa Code § 96.3-7, as amended in 2008, provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

b. (1) If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5. However, provided the benefits were not received as the result of fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual, benefits shall not be recovered from an individual if the employer did not participate in the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to section 96.6, subsection 2, and an overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment. The employer shall not be charged with the benefits.

(2) An accounting firm, agent, unemployment insurance accounting firm, or other entity that represents an employer in unemployment claim matters and demonstrates a continuous pattern of failing to participate in the initial determinations to award benefits, as determined and defined by rule by the department, shall be denied permission by the department to represent any employers in unemployment insurance matters. This subparagraph does not apply to attorneys or counselors admitted to practice in the courts of this state pursuant to section 602.10101.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the

claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which she was not entitled. The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based on a reversal on appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. The employer will not be charged for benefits if it is determined that they did participate in the fact-finding interview. Iowa Code § 96.3(7), Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10. In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. Since the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview the claimant is obligated to repay to the agency the benefits she received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

DECISION:

The June 1, 2015, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant voluntarily left the employment without good cause attributable to the employer. Benefits are withheld until such time as she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible. The claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$1581.00 and is obligated to repay the agency those benefits. The employer did participate in the fact-finding interview and its account shall not be charged.

Jeremy Peterson
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jp/mak