

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

JODY L PURDIE
Claimant

A TECH INC
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-05371-S2-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 12/13/20
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quit
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 February 8, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits based upon her voluntary quit. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on April 22, 2021. Claimant Jody L. Purdie participated and testified. Employer A Tech, Inc. participated through controller Crystal Augustine. Employer's Exhibits 1 and 2 were admitted. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record.

ISSUES:

Did claimant voluntarily quit the employment with good cause attributable to employer?
Has the claimant been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits, and if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency 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 a schedule coordinator from December 26, 2017, and was separated from employment on November 13, 2020, when she quit.

Claimant took a day off from work on November 10, 2020. She sent an email from her personal email account to supervisor Crystal Augustine the prior evening. The email went to Augustine's junk email so was unaware that claimant would be absent. When claimant did not show up for work on November 10, Augustine telephoned and sent text messages to claimant to make sure she was alright, because when claimant did miss work in the past she always sent a text message to Augustine. Claimant did not respond because she was not looking at her phone that day. Claimant's supervisor, John Freeman, and Augustine went into claimant's office to get into her email to respond to customers and salespersons needing assistance. Claimant's desk was cleared off because when the pandemic began she was wiping it down each day so did not leave out her personal belongings. Augustine and Freeman notice the empty desk and believed

she had left her employment. Freeman responded to staff emails and stated claimant had left her employment.

The evening of November 10, 2020, claimant responded to Augustine's messages and stated she would be back to work the following day. When claimant returned on November 11, 2020, she learned Augustine did not receive her email notifying her claimant would not be into work. Claimant was upset that Freeman told several staff members she had quit her employment. Claimant spent the day informing employees she had taken a vacation day and did not quit.

Claimant became frustrated with the way Augustine handled her absence and felt she was being distant towards her after the absence. Claimant was also frustrated with Augustine's insistence that she schedule a commercial manager who did not want her assistance. On November 13, 2020, claimant drafted a resignation email and scheduled it to be emailed at noon with her resignation effective immediately. Claimant left for lunch and did not return. The email did not go out, so when claimant did not arrive to work on November 16, 2020, Augustine and Freeman went into claimant's email to respond to customers and staff, and discovered the email draft.

Claimant's job was not in jeopardy and continuing work was available.

The administrative record reflects that claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$4,248.00, since filing a claim with an effective date of December 13, 2020, for the nine weeks ending April 10, 2021. Employer did not participate in a fact-finding interview. Employer did not receive notice of an interview and was not contacted by Iowa Workforce Development to participate in an interview.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant's separation from the employment was without good cause attributable to the employer.

Iowa Code section 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.26(4) provides:

Voluntary quit with good cause attributable to the employer and separations not considered to be voluntary quits. The following are reasons for a claimant leaving employment with good cause attributable to the employer:

- (4) The claimant left due to intolerable or detrimental working conditions.

As such, if claimant establishes that she left due to intolerable or detrimental working conditions, benefits would be allowed. Generally notice of an intent to quit is required by *Cobb v. Employment Appeal Board*, 506 N.W.2d 445, 447-78 (Iowa 1993), *Suluki v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 503 N.W.2d 402, 405 (Iowa 1993), and *Swanson v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 554 N.W.2d 294, 296 (Iowa Ct. App. 1996). These cases require an employee to give an employer notice of intent to quit, thus giving the employer an opportunity to cure working conditions. Accordingly,

in 1995, the Iowa Administrative Code was amended to include an intent-to-quit requirement. The requirement was only added, however, to rule 871-24.26(6)(b), the provision addressing work-related health problems. No intent-to-quit requirement was added to rule 871-24.26(4), the intolerable working conditions provision. Our supreme court concluded that, because the intent-to-quit requirement was added to 871-24.26(6)(b) but not 871-24.26(4), notice of intent to quit is not required for intolerable working conditions. *Hy-Vee, Inc. v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 710 N.W.2d 1 (Iowa 2005). “Good cause attributable to the employer” does not require fault, negligence, wrongdoing or bad faith by the employer. *Dehmel v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 433 N.W.2d 700, 702 (Iowa 1988)(“[G]ood cause attributable to the employer can exist even though the employer is free from all negligence or wrongdoing in connection therewith”); *Shontz v. Iowa Employment Sec. Commission*, 248 N.W.2d 88, 91 (Iowa 1976)(benefits payable even though employer “free from fault”); *Raffety v. Iowa Employment Security Commission*, 76 N.W.2d 787, 788 (Iowa 1956)(“The good cause attributable to the employer need not be based upon a fault or wrong of such employer.”). Good cause may be attributable to “the employment itself” rather than the employer personally and still satisfy the requirements of the Act. *Raffety*, 76 N.W.2d at 788 (Iowa 1956). Therefore, claimant was not required to give the employer any notice with regard to the intolerable or detrimental working conditions prior to her quitting. However, claimant must prove that her working conditions were intolerable or detrimental.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.25 provides:

Voluntary quit without good cause. In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer from whom the employee has separated. The employer has the burden of proving that the claimant is disqualified for benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.5. However, the claimant has the initial burden to produce evidence that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving Iowa Code section 96.5, subsection (1), paragraphs "a" through "i," and subsection 10. The following reasons for a voluntary quit shall be presumed to be without good cause attributable to the employer:

- (21) The claimant left because of dissatisfaction with the work environment.
- (22) The claimant left because of a personality conflict with the supervisor.

Here, claimant has failed to establish her leaving was for good cause. Claimant contends her working conditions were intolerable because her supervisors told staff she quit her employment and made her feel uncomfortable. While the administrative law judge understands claimant's frustration with the situation, the evidence does not support that her working conditions were intolerable. Rather, claimant became dissatisfied with her work environment and her supervisors. Employer's belief that claimant quit her job on November 10, 2020 was justified. She did not show up for work and her desk was cleared off. Additionally, because Augustine had not received claimant's email and claimant did not respond to any of its attempts to contact her, it was natural for employer to believe claimant left her employment. While claimant's leaving may have been based upon good personal reasons, it was not for a good-cause reason attributable to the employer according to Iowa law. Benefits are denied.

The next issue in this case is whether claimant was overpaid unemployment insurance benefits.

Iowa Code § 96.3(7) provides, in pertinent part:

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.

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 § 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 § 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 § 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 § 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 § 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 § 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

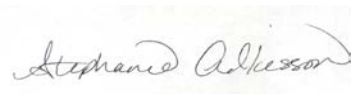
The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based 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.

Because claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which claimant was not entitled. The administrative law judge concludes that claimant has been overpaid regular unemployment insurance benefits in the gross amount of \$4,248.00 for the nine-week period between December 13, 2020 and April 10, 2021. There is no evidence that claimant received these benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation. Furthermore, employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview. Therefore, claimant is not obligated to repay the UI benefits that claimant received. While employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview, it was not because employer failed to timely or adequately respond to IWD's request for information relating to the payment of benefits; employer never received the request. Accordingly employer's account cannot be charged. Because neither party is to be charged, the UI overpayment is absorbed by the fund.

DECISION:

The February 8, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. The claimant voluntarily left her 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.

Claimant has been overpaid regular unemployment insurance benefits in the gross amount of \$4,248.00 for the nine-week period between December 13, 2020 and April 10, 2021 and is not obligated to repay those benefits to the agency. Employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview through no fault of its own; employer's account shall not be charged. The regular unemployment insurance benefit overpayment must be charged to the fund.



Stephanie Adkisson
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax (515)478-3528

April 27, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

sa/scn

Note to Claimant: This decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits. If 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 due to disqualifying separations, 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>.