

- DECISION -

Claimant:
KENNETH A FRAGER

Decision No.: 3074-BR-12

Date: August 08, 2012

Appeal No.: 1206360

S.S. No.:

Employer:
UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY
UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY

L.O. No.: 63

Appellant: Claimant

Issue: Whether the claimant's separation from this employment was for a disqualifying reason within the meaning of the Md. Code Annotated Labor and Employment Article, Title 8, Sections 1002-1002.1 (Gross/Aggravated Misconduct connected with the work), 1003 (Misconduct connected with the work) or 1001 (Voluntary Quit for good cause).

- NOTICE OF RIGHT OF APPEAL TO COURT -

You may file an appeal from this decision in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City or one of the Circuit Courts in a county in Maryland. The court rules about how to file the appeal can be found in many public libraries, in the Maryland Rules of Procedure, Title 7, Chapter 200.

The period for filing an appeal expires: September 07, 2012

REVIEW OF THE RECORD

After a review of the record, the Board adopts the hearing examiner's findings of facts. However, the Board concludes that these facts warrant different conclusions of law and a reversal of the hearing examiner's decision.

The General Assembly declared that, in its considered judgment, the public good and the general welfare of the citizens of the State required the enactment of the Unemployment Insurance Law, under the police powers of the State, for the compulsory setting aside of unemployment reserves to be used for the benefit

of individuals unemployed through no fault of their own. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. Art., § 8-102(c)*. Unemployment compensation laws are to be read liberally in favor of eligibility, and disqualification provisions are to be strictly construed. *Sinai Hosp. of Baltimore v. Dept. of Empl. & Training*, 309 Md. 28 (1987).

The Board reviews the record *de novo* and may affirm, modify, or reverse the findings of fact or conclusions of law of the hearing examiner on the basis of evidence submitted to the hearing examiner, or evidence that the Board may direct to be taken, or may remand any case to a hearing examiner for purposes it may direct. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. Art., § 8-510(d)*; *COMAR 09.32.06.04*. The Board fully inquires into the facts of each particular case. *COMAR 09.32.06.03(E)(1)*.

A threshold issue in this case is whether the claimant voluntarily quit or whether the claimant was discharged. For the following reasons, the Board affirms the hearing examiner's decision that the claimant was discharged.

The burden of proof in this case is allocated according to whether the claimant voluntarily quit or whether the employer discharged the claimant. In a discharge case, the employer has the burden of demonstrating that the claimant's actions rise to the level of misconduct, gross misconduct or aggravated misconduct based upon a preponderance of the credible evidence in the record. *Hartman v. Polystyrene Products Co., Inc.*, 164-BH-83; *Ward v. Maryland Permalite, Inc.*, 30-BR-85; *Weimer v. Dept. of Transportation*, 869-BH-87; *Scruggs v. Division of Correction*, 347-BH-89; *Ivey v. Catterton Printing Co.*, 441-BH-89.

When a claimant voluntarily leaves work, he has the burden of proving that he left for good cause or valid circumstances based upon a preponderance of the credible evidence in the record. *Hargrove v. City of Baltimore*, 2033-BH-83; *Chisholm v. Johns Hopkins Hospital*, 66-BR-89. Purely personal reasons, no matter how compelling, cannot constitute good cause as a matter of law. *Bd. Of Educ. Of Montgomery County v. Paynter*, 303 Md. 22 (1985). An objective standard is used to determine if the average employee would have left work in that situation; in addition, a determination is made as to whether a particular employee left in good faith, and an element of good faith is whether the claimant has exhausted all reasonable alternatives before leaving work. *Board of Educ. v. Paynter*, 303 Md. 22 (1985); also see *Bohrer v. Sheetz, Inc.*, Law No. 13361, (Cir. Ct. for Washington Co., Apr. 24, 1984). The "necessitous or compelling" requirement relating to a cause for leaving work voluntarily does not apply to "good cause". *Board of Educ. v. Paynter*, 303 Md. 22 (1985). A resignation in lieu of discharge is a discharge under §§ 8-1002, 8-1002.1, and 8-1003. *Miller v. William T. Burnette and Company, Inc.*, 442-BR-82.

The intent to discharge or the intent to voluntarily quit can be manifested by words or actions. "Due to leaving work voluntarily" has a plain, definite and sensible meaning, free of ambiguity. It expresses a clear legislative intent that to disqualify a claimant from benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant, by his or her own choice, intentionally and of his or her own free will, terminated the employment. *Allen v. Core Target Youth Program*, 275 Md. 69 (1975). A claimant's intent or state of mind is a factual issue for the Board of Appeals to resolve. *Dept. of Econ. & Empl. Dev. v. Taylor*, 108 Md. 250(1996), *aff'd sub. nom.*, 344 Md. 687 (1997). An intent to quit one's job can be manifested by actions as well as words. *Lawson v. Security Fence Supply Company*, 1101-BH-82. A resignation submitted in response to charges which *might* lead to discharge is a voluntary quit. *Hickman v. Crown Central Petroleum Corp.*, 973-BR-88; *Brewington v. Dept. of Social Services*, 1500-BH-82; *Roffe v. South*

Carolina Wateroe River Correction Institute, 576-BR-88 (where a claimant quit because he feared a discharge was imminent, but he had not been informed that he was discharged is without good cause or valid circumstances); also see *Cofield v. Apex Grounds Management, Inc.*, 309-BR-91. When a claimant receives a medical leave of absence but is still believes she is unable to return upon the expiration of that leave and expresses that she will not return to work for an undefinable period, the claimant is held to have voluntarily quit. See *Sortino v. Western Auto Supply*, 896-BR-83.

The intent to discharge can be manifested by actions as well as words. The issue is whether the reasonable person in the position of the claimant believed in good faith that he was discharged. See *Dei Svaldi v. Martin Taubenfeld, D.D.S., P.A.*, 1074-BR-88 (the claimant was discharged after a telephone conversation during which she stated her anger at the employer and the employer stated to her, "If that's the way you feel, then you might as well not come in anymore." The claimant's reply of "Fine" does not make it a quit). Compare, *Lawson v. Security Fence Supply Company*, 1101-BH-82. A quit in lieu of discharge is a discharge for unemployment insurance purposes. *Tressler v. Anchor Motor Freight*, 105-BR-83.

In the instant case, the claimant quit in lieu of discharge. Finding that the claimant was discharged for unemployment insurance purposes, the Board shall examine whether it was for a disqualifying reason.

In a discharge case, the employer has the burden of demonstrating that the claimant's actions rise to the level of misconduct, gross misconduct or aggravated misconduct based upon a preponderance of the credible evidence in the record. *Hartman v. Polystyrene Products Co., Inc.*, 164-BH-83; *Ward v. Maryland Permalite, Inc.*, 30-BR-85; *Weimer v. Dept. of Transportation*, 869-BH-87; *Scruggs v. Division of Correction*, 347-BH-89; *Ivey v. Catterton Printing Co.*, 441-BH-89.

As the Court of Appeals explained in *Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation v. Hider*, 349 Md. 71, 82, 706 A.2d 1073 (1998), "in enacting the unemployment compensation program, the legislature created a graduated, three-tiered system of disqualifications from benefits based on employee misconduct. The severity of the disqualification increases in proportion to the seriousness of the misconduct."

Dept. of Labor, Licensing & Regulation v. Boardley, 164 Md. 404, 408 fn.1 (2005).

Section 8-1002 of the Labor and Employment Article defines gross misconduct as conduct of an employee that is a deliberate and willful disregard of standards of behavior that an employing unit rightfully expects and that shows gross indifference to the interests of the employing unit or repeated violations of employment rules that prove a regular and wanton disregard of the employee's obligations.

The term "misconduct" as used in the statute means a transgression of some established rule or policy of the employer, the commission of a forbidden act, a dereliction from duty, or a course of wrongful conduct committed by an employee within the scope of his employment relationship, during hours of employment or on the employer's premises, within the meaning of Section 8-1003 of the Labor and Employment Article. (See, *Rogers v. Radio Shack*, 271 Md. 126, 314 A.2d 113).

Simple misconduct within the meaning of § 8-1003 does not require intentional misbehavior. *DLLR v. Hider*, 349 Md. 71 (1998). Misconduct must be connected with the work; the mere fact that misconduct adversely affects the employer's interests is not enough. *Fino v. Maryland Emp. Sec. Bd.*, 218 Md. 504 (1959). Although not sufficient in itself, a breach of duty to an employer is an essential element to make an act connected with the work. *Empl. Sec. Bd. v. LeCates*, 218 Md. 202 (1958). Misconduct, however, need not occur during the hours of employment or the employer's premises. *Id.*

Without sufficient evidence of a willful and wanton disregard of an employee's obligations or gross indifference to the employer's interests, there can be no finding of gross misconduct. *Lehman v. Baker Protective Services, Inc.*, 221-BR-89. Where a showing of gross misconduct is based on a single action, the employer must show the employee demonstrated gross indifference to the employer's interests. *DLLR v. Muddiman*, 120 Md. App. 725, 737 (1998).

In determining whether an employee has committed gross misconduct, "[t]he important element to be considered is the nature of the misconduct and how seriously it affects the claimant's employment or the employer's rights." *Dept. of Econ. & Empl. Dev. v. Jones*, 79 Md. App. 531, 536 (1989). "It is also proper to note that what is 'deliberate and willful misconduct' will vary with each particular case. Here we 'are not looking simply for substandard conduct...but for a willful or wanton state of mind accompanying the engaging in substandard conduct.'" *Employment Sec. Bd. v. LeCates*, 218 Md. 202, 207 (1958)(internal citation omitted); also see *Hernandez v. DLLR*, 122 Md. App. 19, 25 (1998).

The failure to follow workplace rules or procedures can constitute gross misconduct. See, e.g. *Kidwell v. Mid-Atlantic Hambro, Inc.*, 119-BH-86; *Ullman v. Anne Arundel County Public Schools*, 498-BR-93. Attendance violations may constitute gross misconduct. An employer has the right to insist that its employees report to work on time, adhere to a specified schedule and leave only when that schedule has been completed. An employee's decision to follow a come-and-go-as-I-please philosophy could clearly disrupt the orderly operation of the workplace. *Dept. of Econ. Dev. v. Propper*, 108 Md. App. 595 (1996).

In *Cortez v. American Cooperage and Steel Drum*, 765-BH-84, the claimant missed a great deal of time from work due to personal problems, and the employer acquiesced to these absences. The claimant was later discharged for excessive absenteeism. Since the employer acquiesced to the claimant's conduct, it cannot be considered simple or gross misconduct within the meaning of Sections 8-1002 or 8-1003.

Persistent and chronic absenteeism, where the absences are without notice or excuse and continue in the face of warning constitutes gross misconduct. *Watkins v. Empl. Security Admin.*, 266 Md. 223 (1972). The failure to report or call into work without notice may constitute gross misconduct. *Hardin v. Broadway Services, Inc.* 146-BR-89. Employees who miss a lot of time from work, even for excused reasons, have a heightened duty not to miss additional time for unexcused reasons and to conform with the employer's notice requirements. *Daley v. Vaccaro's Inc.*, 1432-BR-93.

A specific warning regarding termination is not required and a reasonable person should realize that such conduct leads to discharge. *Freyman v. Laurel Toyota*, 608-BR-87. A violation of an employer's attendance policy is not misconduct per se where that policy does not distinguish between absences which occurred because of legitimate medical reasons and absences for which there was no reasonable excuse.

Where an employee has been absent for a day of scheduled work, the burden of proof shifts to the employee to explain the reason for the absence. *Leonard v. St. Agnes Hospital*, 62-BR-86.

Where the employer is not present and the claimant credibly denies each of the employer's allegations made to the claims specialist a finding of misconduct is not supported. *Lipman v. Graphics Factory, Inc.*, 697-BR-90. A claimant does not have to prove why the employer fired him. *Ivey v. Catterton Printing Company*, 441-BH-89.

In the instant case, the claimant was employed by the employer for three years. The claimant lived approximately 50 miles, one way, from the employer. The claimant had to travel in heavily congested areas and he was often late to work—even if he allowed time for heavy traffic. Over the years, the employer became less tolerant of the claimant's late arrival to work. The claimant credibly testified that his immediate supervisor acquiesced to the late arrivals, but that supervisor was retiring and the claimant was told by the new supervisor that he would not tolerate the claimant arriving late to work. The new supervisor told the claimant that he could resign in lieu of being discharged for attendance issues. The claimant opted to resign.

As noted in *Cortez*, the claimant's supervisor acquiesced to the claimant's late arrivals. The employer, duly notified of the date, time and place of the hearing failed to appear to contradict the claimant's testimony. The Board finds that the claimant was discharged but not for misconduct.

The Board notes that the hearing examiner did not offer or admit the *Agency Fact Finding Report* into evidence. The Board did not consider this document when rendering its decision.

The Board finds based on a preponderance of the credible evidence that the employer has not met its burden of demonstrating that the claimant's actions rose to the level of gross misconduct within the meaning of § 8-1002. The employer has also not met its burden of showing that the claimant's discharge was for misconduct within the meaning of § 8-1003. The decision shall be reversed for the reasons stated herein.


DECISION

It is held that the claimant was discharged, but not for gross misconduct or misconduct connected with the work, within the meaning of Maryland Code Annotated, Labor and Employment Article, Title 8, Section 1002 or 1003. No disqualification is imposed based upon the claimant's separation from employment with UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY.

The Hearing Examiner's decision is reversed.



Clayton A. Mitchell, Sr., Associate Member



Donna Watts-Lamont, Chairperson

RD/mr

Copies mailed to:

KENNETH A. FRAGER

UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY

Susan Bass, Office of the Assistant Secretary

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS DECISION

KENNETH A FRAGER

SSN #

Claimant

vs.

UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY
UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY

Employer/Agency

Before the:

**Maryland Department of Labor,
Licensing and Regulation**

Division of Appeals

1100 North Eutaw Street

Room 511

Baltimore, MD 21201

(410) 767-2421

Appeal Number: 1206360

Appellant: Claimant

Local Office : 63 / CUMBERLAND
CLAIM CENTER

March 16, 2012

For the Claimant: PRESENT

For the Employer:

For the Agency:

ISSUE(S)

Whether the claimant's separation from this employment was for a disqualifying reason within the meaning of the MD. Code Annotated, Labor and Employment Article, Title 8, Sections 1001 (Voluntary Quit for good cause), 1002 - 1002.1 (Gross/Aggravated Misconduct connected with the work), or 1003 (Misconduct connected with the work).

FINDINGS OF FACT

The claimant, Kenneth Frager, began working for this employer in October, 2009. At the time of separation, the claimant was working as a Public Affairs Officer. The claimant last worked for the employer on or about January 6, 2012, before leaving under the following circumstances:

The claimant was constantly late for work. He was commuting from White Marsh to Bethesda. He was late approximately twice a week. The claimant was warned that his attendance could lead to his termination, but the problems continued. These late arrivals were generally caused by the claimant's commute.