

Speaker 1:

Welcome to PayTalk, the podcast for payroll professionals. With your host, Nina Talley. In the podcast, we explore the human side of payroll by speaking with global industry leaders who provide their unique insights to help listeners better understand the issues important to them and their careers.

Nina Talley:

Hey everyone, thanks for joining us for PayTalk, the podcast that brings you payroll's human side. I'm your host, Nina Talley, and today we're joined by Brandi Britton, the global executive director of contract finance and accounting at Robert Half for an engaging conversation that delves into the pulse of the job market. Brandi is here to share her insights on the latest revelations from Robert Half's just released 2024 Salary Guide.

And believe me when I say these findings are nothing short of fascinating. As the job landscape continues to evolve, salary and pay transparency have taken center stage in all of our lives, and Brandi is here to help us decode the key trends. Get ready to uncover the secrets that could transform your career or hiring strategy. But before we begin, Brandi, I would love if you could introduce yourself and give our listeners a bit of background on your career and your expertise.

Brandi Britton:

Absolutely. So Brandi Britton, global executive director for contract accounting and finance for Robert Half. I have submitted several articles to PAYTECH Magazine. I have attended Payroll Congress for the last two years. And I would say most interestingly, that in 2023, Robert Half has helped place over 2,500 payroll professionals just this year.

Nina Talley:

Thank you so much for that information, Brandi. And I'm so excited to speak with you because I really can't think of a better person to interpret these data and interpret these insights and tell us how we can really begin to apply it to careers in a meaningful way. I want to just get started at the top. How has pay transparency in and of itself and the laws that have to do with it impacted employers and job seekers?

Brandi Britton:

So pay transparency has been a very positive thing for employers as well as job seekers. And I'll share with you why. In fact, we noticed many, many years ago before there were laws in place, that by putting salary information in a job description, we saw much higher quality candidates applying to our roles. And in many cases, we increase the number of candidates that we're applying to our roles. Well fast-forward to where we're at right now, and employers are seeing that exact same benefit.

And for employees, maybe some employees are a little bit passive on whether or not they want to consider another role, but when they see that salary range, if it fits, it's an enticing role, they're more likely to apply for that position when maybe they would've just skipped over that in the past.

Nina Talley:

That's a really great point of it gives you just a little bit of extra push, just why not try? What's the worst? You don't get an email back, you don't hear back. I think that that's a really impactful way that these laws have really shifted our day-to-day lives and our careers in a way that maybe we necessarily haven't considered.

Brandi Britton:

For employers who are not doing it right now, it's definitely something for them to consider doing because at some point probably all of the states will have these laws, but before the law gets to their state, why not do it now so that you can attract high quality individuals to your position?

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that, and it's also an extra selling point of we're doing this in a time where not necessarily everybody was. We're thought leaders in this space. Don't you want to be involved in a company who's looking after its employees in such a way?

Brandi Britton:

Exactly. And ahead of the curve of do it before the law.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. Don't do it once you're legally forced to. So what guidance can you offer to individuals who are looking to enhance maybe negotiation skills for better pay and benefits, and what factors should employers be mindful of during these discussions as well?

Brandi Britton:

Yes. Well, we see employees make mistakes negotiating their salary, their benefits, all of the time. And so what we recommend is what we refer to at Robert Half as the WRAP. Research what does this role pay? Look at resources such as our Salary Guide, look at other resources out there so that you've done your homework on what the role should pay or is likely to pay in the future. Then you want to reflect on what are the things that are most important to you?

And although salary remains really important to individuals, other things are important as well, benefits, perks, things like that. But you've got to reflect on your own on what are your priorities then you want to act. So request that meeting with your manager to discuss your compensation package. If you let them know in advance that this is what you want to talk about because you want them to feel prepared for that meeting as well.

And then prepare. So salaries are something that can be difficult conversations to have. Not everyone's comfortable having that conversation. So if you have somebody, a friend, a family member that you can practice and prepare for that meeting with in advance, then you should definitely do that because you're going to go into that meeting with a lot more confidence and just feel better prepared and likely have a much better outcome.

Nina Talley:

I love that, WRAP. I love a good acronym. I think it always helps things stick a little bit and your advice on practicing the conversation with a loved one or a friend or somebody who you respect. I think sometimes we can sort of be like, "Oh, that's silly, we don't need to do it. I can have the conversation in my head."

But there is something about going through the motions of it and it sort of helps inoculate you against the experience. Going in and having these salary conversations can be nerve wracking and by just giving yourself almost a little bit of immersion therapy can take some of the anxiety out of what you're experiencing.

Brandi Britton:

And it's interesting, just verbally talking it out helps you better articulate that in that meeting and that's a critical meeting that you're going to have and it really just helps prepare you for that conversation. And if the person that you're practicing with is willing, they can throw out some challenging questions so that you're ready for that as well. But it all depends on the person that you're practicing with.

And then Nina, for advice for employers right now, there is still a shortage of skilled labor and employers certainly have realized that for a couple of years now. So our guidance to those individuals or employers is number one, move quickly when you find the right person because that person more than likely has a whole bunch of different opportunities out there. And then secondly, being creative with the offer.

We recognize right now in this inflationary period that not only is that impacting employees, workers on a day-to-day basis, I mean every time we go to the grocery store, I didn't think eggs could get any more expensive than they are. So it's impacting workers, but then it's impacting businesses alike. So employers have a real opportunity to be creative with their offers and maybe you can't offer as much compensation as the employee wants, but what are the things that you can?

And the thing that we see is a motivating factor for individuals is hybrid. A hybrid remote schedule. Individuals are willing to take less money many times for the role if they have a hybrid or remote schedule. And then lastly, being transparent, putting that salary range in the job description, it'll put you ahead of the curve as we referenced earlier with attracting really good people to your role.

Nina Talley:

Life is full of big important questions like how much money should you be making? Or how much money should you be offering to secure and retain top talent? Even for savvy payroll professionals and hiring managers, these questions can be hard to answer. Until now, the 2024 Salary Guide from Robert Half is the source for up-to-date salary information across all industries, including finance.

Find out which payroll jobs pay the most, when to ask for a raise, how to negotiate for the salary you want, how much your top talent is looking to make? All of this and more in a comprehensive resource for payroll professionals like you. Visit [roberthalf.com](https://roberthalf.com) to explore the new Salary Guide to make sure you're right on the money. And if you're not yet a PayrollOrg member but would like to become one, as the exclusive talent solutions partner, Robert Half is pleased to cover your membership enrollment fee.

Just use promo code R-H-I-P-A-Y-O-1 when you sign up. That's R-H-I-P-A-Y-O-1. Robert Half also provides discounts on services to PayrollOrg members. So if you are looking to hire whether for a contract or permanent role, check out PayrollOrg's career advancement page for info on the discount program and how to take advantage of it.

I think that a lot of what we're talking about is really sort of a reflection of a employee-employer landscape that is completely different than it was five years ago. These are things that is an entirely new world for hiring managers to really have to consider. And I think that for the first time, workers have realized that they would really rather not spend two hours of their day and X amount of money on gas just to get to the office. That does affect their bottom line.

And then if their children get sick, you have to spend that money getting back home and getting your child and all of these things. It's really important, I think that as a hiring manager, you look at your employer or your potential employer holistically. It is about money. Everybody wants more money these days. The cost of eggs is surprisingly high, but also giving your workers the respect and autonomy to do their jobs in a way that doesn't negatively impact their lives is a huge draw to today's skilled worker market.

We're dealing with a completely different set of issues and problems and also information and understanding of how things can continue to function. And I think that's such a great point and advice for hiring managers is get creative. Think about the landscape as it sits today, not five years ago.

Brandi Britton:

Absolutely. I was recently meeting with a president of a credit union who had 150 employees pre-pandemic, onsite at their corporate office. And the pandemic forced them to go remote, and now they're utilizing that as a competitive advantage to attract more talent. And what I thought was particularly fascinating about what he said. One of his employees came to him and said, "I really want to buy a home and they're in a city that's pretty expensive."

And he said, "Well, we're a credit union, we'll help you get that loan." And she said, "I can't afford the loan for what it would cost to live here and I'd like to move." And they facilitated that. She's been promoted three times since, and her overall livelihood is in a great place and her loyalty to the organization now is going to last a very, very long time. And so I think employers who recognize what it can do for morale and retention put themselves at a competitive advantage to other employers, frankly.

Nina Talley:

That's a great point of employee loyalty and how do you foster it. I think that the previous generations of workers often were long-term loyal to a company because of pensions and there was something that kept you there long-term. And that's a wonderful point of if you work with one of your employees to help them get a home somewhere else and just support them in that, that creates so much loyalty for your employer.

That's something that I really think that is a little bit more of an abstract concept. That is not necessarily something you can apply a dollar amount to of how much is that worth? What is the value of that? And I think that that can be a little bit amorphous to understand for businesses and that this type of survey where you're getting this information on salary but also benefits and what is keeping employees loyal and happy is so important for today's market because everything is different.

Brandi Britton:

Yes, it's just so competitive. And to your point earlier, there's so much information out there that gives employees more power in their discussions with managers.

Nina Talley:

We're talking about payroll professionals generally here on PayTalk, and so they're going to be a certain amount more elevated than your average employee. But even your average employee has access to information about payroll, salary, benefits industry-wide, and being aware of that and then also using that information for yourself to keep yourself informed is so powerful and just the right strategy for moving forward.

So could you highlight some of the most significant insights from the 2024 Salary Guide? I know that there's a lot, but I would love to know what you specifically think are the most impactful and significant insights from this survey.

Brandi Britton:

Yes. Well, as we mentioned, salaries remain extremely important and top of mind with the news around the labor shortage, with inflation pressures. We recently did a survey and 63% of employees plan to ask

for a raise before the end of the year if they haven't already. So very significant number. So salaries are number one on everybody's mind. Number two is the flexibility component. So what do people mean by flexibility? Workers today want to say in when, where, and how they work.

And flexibility, [inaudible 00:17:27] just to double down on this really can be the great equalizer between employers. So an employer who has the budget to offer big salaries, well maybe they don't have to offer hybrid flexible schedules. But the company who is watching their costs, controlling expenses, that could be the great equalizer between them and the company that has a larger payroll budget. And then third is inflation.

It's tricky because yes, employees are experiencing it and wanting raises and salary increases, but it is a two-way street in that employers are just as impacted. And we've really started to see companies over the last, say six months or so, be more thoughtful because of the pressure on their businesses and what inflation is doing to their organization.

Nina Talley:

That is the balancing point in where we currently are with inflation and the cost of living is that all of my bills have gone up. I'm sure all of your bills have gone up, including as we've talked about, the cost of eggs. But that does mean that everyone's bills have gone up including the employer's bills, which means if they are maintaining an office that has likely gone up.

If there's any additional cost for your wifi or any different cell phone plans that you're providing for your workers, your water bill, your energy bill. All of these things, it's all going up across the board. And I think that that can be a difficult thing for businesses to manage and keep in mind as well. It's two sides of the same coin is that businesses are feeling it, workers are feeling it. And how do you maintain a sort of balance between those? It's so difficult. It's so difficult and I do not envy hiring managers right now.

Brandi Britton:

I definitely don't either. But it does come back to employees who do want a salary increase and are planning to ask for a raise. For them to remember that their employer too is experiencing the same similar pressure, similar I should say, and that the whole WRAP acronym, the reflection on what is most important to you is really key here because let's say a business just can't give you the increase that you are looking for.

Then what could they offer you that would make you want to stay, that would entice you? And that moment of reflection is really key for individuals to walk out of any sort of conversation with their manager in a happy place. And sometimes it's not always a hybrid schedule or flexible schedule. Sometimes it's other things such as access to more education or providing them with retreats or more activities with their coworkers.

So again, that whole component of what's important to you is really something that we see employees not always do, but when they do, they're happy that they did that exercise of what they want first.

Nina Talley:

With that in mind of really thinking about what you want and what would make an actual impact on your family's bottom line. I think something that a lot of employers are doing these days is providing a home office fund. So that maybe they help pay for a part of your wifi, maybe they provide you with snack budget every month, just something like that.

That if your workers are at home or they are hybrid, remember that there is a cost that if you are no longer maintaining a large office that you can sort of give back a little bit to your employees in ways that maybe doesn't mean large pay raises across the board.

Brandi Britton:

That's right. That's right. And then with payroll departments and human resources departments working so closely together, we're right in the midst of open enrollment right now. But looking at that overall benefit package too, we've seen a lot of employers incorporate childcare support into their benefits package. And that in many cases we've seen individuals receive multiple job offers, same salary or maybe one with a little bit higher salary and they choose the one that provides the childcare support, benefits, and it's just being creative with those things as well.

Nina Talley:

That is a huge, huge benefit. As a young mother myself, daycare is one of our absolute biggest costs other than our mortgage payment, it's childcare. And having an employer who is aware of that massive cost and how it affects you, that would be an amazing thing for any new parent. To just know that your employer's aware and they're considering it. Oh my goodness, what a weight off of your shoulders.

It means that your employer is looking at you as a whole person, not just as an employee. And those are those things where we've been talking about of what is the value of that loyalty? What is the value of that feeling that it engenders in your employees or your potential employees that goes beyond the actual cost of providing those services?

Brandi Britton:

That's right, that's right. The other thing, Nina, that we see. A lot of companies provide great, great benefits, however, especially more entry level workers, individuals who are just now coming into the workforce or have been in the workforce maybe two to five years, oftentimes they're very unaware of the benefits that the company provides. They understand philosophically, "Okay, I've got my healthcare," but they don't know all of the details. And I think companies really have invested a lot over the last five years of enhancing their benefits to be more competitive.

But what's missing that we see is the education to the employees and what is available to them and what does that mean. And so I think employers can really help themselves stand out and save themselves money on that whole salary discussion, frankly, if they just educated on a regular basis their employees as the benefits that are available to them. Because many times' people just don't know about them and how they can benefit from those.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that. I mean, a lot of what we've talked about here at PayTalk is even just getting people to look at their pay stub. Even just that, just getting people to look at the pay stub and confirm that everything is correct. That's an uphill battle. Let alone have them actually understand the benefits provided to them and how they can access them.

Brandi Britton:

I have to say I'm guilty of that myself.

Nina Talley:

Aren't we all? Who wants to spend 15 minutes looking at their pay stub, figuring out if everything's right or five minutes? I will say five, it's probably closer to that, but you just want your money. Even payroll professionals, we just want our money.

Brandi Britton:

I was much better when it came in the mail, I'll put it that way. And it's been a long time since it came in the mail.

Nina Talley:

Weren't we all? So something that I know that employers are concerned about when it comes to remote workers or hybrid workforces are addressing the issue of heavy workloads. So what strategies do you recommend for managers who are dealing with this challenge, both with in-office workers and remote workers and hybrid workers? What information from the survey could provide a little bit of help in those situations?

Brandi Britton:

I think there's different types of heavy workloads. There's your cyclical, seasonal type heavy workloads which employees anticipate and they're prepared for. Where heavy workloads become a stress or burden is when they are not anticipated and the employees don't have time to react or be prepared for that. So for leaders and managers, understanding those issues proactively having discussions or just having discussions with their team that they understand that the workload has increased and then what is the plan?

Is there a plan to address it? So that would be step number one. I would be remiss if I didn't bring up that a lot of employers, particularly now, are bringing in contract talent to help offset whether it's seasonal or cyclical heavy workloads or in a time where there may be unanticipated resignations or changes on a department that can help ease the burden for employees and then also help the manager stay connected to their team and what they're going through.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that, and I've worked as a contractor before, so it is one of those things where you're coming in and you can be a little bit of the B team. You're coming in and you're helping when things are really bad. And I do believe that it is at times contractors can be sort of looked down upon as not an actual member of the team. I believe there's a way to integrate them in.

And then as we've been talking about maybe even making them a longer term member of the team, looking into what would keep them. Because as soon as they start learning that knowledge, as soon as they start stepping in, they're creating value within your company. They're having this sort of insight into what's going on, hands on the ground that say you were to take that exact same contractor who's been there, we'll say, a month, swap them out with another one. The previous contractor has a little bit more knowledge than the new one does.

So how do you keep that person and how do you turn those contractors into long-term employees? And I think that this really ties in with something that I wanted to make sure that we talked about, which was retaining talent. I think that the survey, probably one of the most interesting parts of it is how it can be used to help hiring managers retain talent because nobody wants to constantly hire, nobody wants to constantly interview. It's spinning your wheels.



You want to build a relationship with somebody who's going to be loyal to your company, who's going to help you solve problems. So how can they do that and what information in this survey can help them to do so?

Brandi Britton:

Absolutely. Well, I'll address it in two areas. One, I'll address it for your contractors, and then the other I'll address with full-time, new hires that you're bringing on, and some of them are applicable to both. And when you're bringing in a contractor, you're absolutely right, in that it's imperative to help them feel part of the team from the beginning.

A happy contractor is just like a happy employee and that the more connected they feel, the better they're going to do. And so couple of things that you could do is one, make sure the team knows that you are bringing in a contractor. [inaudible 00:30:23] But let them know, get a little background on them so you can share that with the team just as you would bringing in a new employee. Two, if you are on site or a hybrid, taking them around, introducing them, making sure that they know where everything is, from the break room to the bathroom.

It sounds very, very silly, but those are things that are important.

Nina Talley:

They matter.

Brandi Britton:

Treat the contractor just like you would the employee and so on. And then have a plan for the onboarding or the training or the orientation of that person. So one of the things that we see is, and I'm going to switch to employees right now. Whenever we see someone leave a full-time job within the first couple of months of taking this new full-time job, and imagine this, you're in a full-time role.

You leave that role, maybe you've been there 2, 3, 4, 5 years and you go to this new company, you've made a commitment and investment. When we see those individuals quit that role within the first couple of months, the primary reason is because they're walking into a mess. The job's been open for months, company hasn't organized the desk and the work, and they just walk in feeling like, "I don't know if I can be successful here."

And so really addressing vacancies, whether that is assigning the work to your current employees, bringing in a contractor. Those are things that employers really have to consider doing so that they set their new employee up for success and they set themselves up for success by retaining that person. Now contractors are more prepared for walking into an environment like that. It is up to though the manager to make sure that that contractor is aware if the role has been vacant and there's a lot of work that hasn't been done so that they can mentally prepare for what they're walking into.

But oftentimes that is very well received by a contractor by just being made aware of it on the front end. Then other tips from a retention standpoint for employees, and I'd say this applies to contractors as well, is some sort of buddy system. Who else besides the manager can they go to for questions with regularity and making sure that they have individuals that they can go to? From an employee standpoint, a full-time employee, mentorship programs are very helpful. A lot of individuals, they want career growth.

And so mentorships can really help promote that for the individual and then help retain them at the organization because they're going to go up the ladder. Then feedback on a regular reoccurring basis is critical. This applies to contractors and employers, and that's something that oftentimes managers



forget that people thrive off of and give them the good feedback and give them the areas of opportunity. And you'll have loyal employees and then of course, training and development for your individuals.

And then recognition can go a long way. One of the things I find so fascinating with payroll professionals is that's one of the most important roles within a company, and I think we can do a lot better thanking those individuals for what their good work is. Maybe you shouldn't talk to them when you find a mistake, say thank you that I never find a mistake.

Nina Talley:

It's either the mistakes or payroll professional. That's when you talk to your payroll professionals.

Brandi Britton:

Which is kind of sad. These people are very important to us.

Nina Talley:

Yes, yes. Well, that was such a really wonderful point, and I think that we talk a lot about salaries and everybody's very concerned about money and how to increase their own standing to increase their own stability in an increasingly unstable world. And that insight on retention of talent I think is something that can maybe be, not get the center stage of this survey. It's a little bit more about increasing your standing or increasing your next job or promotion or salary.

But taking this and being like, well, how do we retain talent? How do we create a culture where our people feel comfortable talking to not just their manager, but they're able to find a mentor and get advice elsewhere and other ways to retain them, mostly just by looking at the human being as a human and not just an employee. And I really thank you for taking the time to dive into that with us.

Brandi Britton:

It's been fun, Nina. Thank you.

Nina Talley:

So now is the time in our podcast for something that we like to call Payroll Nightmares. And these are always just some of my absolute favorite stories to share. I just think it's really comforting that we can all connect on this level. Everyone has been here and it doesn't matter who you are. So Brandi, do you have a nightmare and a lesson learned that you can share with our listeners?

Brandi Britton:

Yes, I can. And I am not going to share whether this happened at Robert Half or with one of our clients.

Nina Talley:

A mystery.

Brandi Britton:

It'll remain a mystery, but the nightmare is a manager was getting ready to bring somebody on board. And so they were sending an email with this person, they're name and this salary package that they

were going to be offered with a very large bonus involved in that salary package. And rather than sending that to payroll, they accidentally emailed the entire office with all of this information.

Nina Talley:

Oh, no.

Brandi Britton:

Yes. And mind you, there were several people with that same position in this company who... It's not like a different role. Yes. When you recall an email, sometimes it brings a little bit more attention to it, ways to take a look. So it was a little bit stressful, as you can imagine. What it forced managers to do is to have conversations with all of the impacted employees about their compensation, where they're at in the moment, how satisfied are they and what are their career goals.

And so although the various leadership within the company wasn't necessarily ready to have those conversations within a two-week period of time, they were forced to have it. And it really did create... It was a difficult moment, but it forced some really beneficial conversations that in many cases created some loyalty from the employees because the managers addressed it right away and addressed it one-to-one for them, not about that other person.

Nina Talley:

That's a great path forward because I think most of our listeners, that is one of their deepest fears. Sending that email and having it go out like that. And I think that this is really interesting nightmare because the nightmare could have been prevented by having those conversations ahead of time. And so looking at it like this, I think is A, reassuring, B, terrifying. It does happen.

And C, it's also a lesson in that if you are having these really important conversations with your employees ahead of time, you are preventing a certain type of nightmare from happening, but you're also doing that work ahead of time to retain that talent because essentially what happened was a crisis of maybe we're going to lose people because we're not doing the work to retain our talent.

Brandi Britton:

That's right.

Nina Talley:

Do you want to hear how our expert guests would've handled a payroll nightmare that you are familiar with? Send an email to [podcasts@payroll.org](mailto:podcasts@payroll.org) or leave us a comment on the PayrollOrg's Facebook page to get involved in the conversation. We don't like to leave things on a negative note here at PayTalk. So I have one more question for you. What is the best piece of career advice you have ever been given, or what is the piece of advice that you wish that somebody had given to you?

Brandi Britton:

Well, first, I would be remiss if I didn't utilize this opportunity to thank all of the payroll professionals out there because what you do matters. And having worked since I was 16 years old, having my paycheck correct for most of those years or most of those paychecks really is of value to all of us even if you don't get thanked on a regular basis. So I just wanted to put that out there.

From an advice standpoint, what I would say is keep learning, whether it's payroll or anything else, the hungrier you are for knowledge, the more valuable it makes you, and frankly, the more interesting you can keep your role by just continuing to learn.

Nina Talley:

That's such a great piece of advice, and I love it. It comes up a lot here at PayTalk, and I also think it's something that can be applied to all areas of your life. You have to keep learning, you have to keep moving. And in the payroll space, in particular, over the last five years, if you haven't been learning, you're behind. It's just a fact of the matter. So we always really encourage everyone to look into any and all ongoing education resources that you can find.

It's going to make all the difference for you. Brandi, thank you so much for joining us to talk about the Robert Half 2024 Salary Guide. This data is so important, and thank you so much for lending us your expertise and your time and helping us understand how this data can be applied to make an actionable difference in our listeners careers and lives.

Brandi Britton:

Thank you for having me. It's been wonderful chatting with you.

Nina Talley:

I also want to take a moment to thank all of our loyal listeners out there. Without you, PayTalk would not be possible. So please, if you like the podcast, if it's important to you, make sure that you rate, review and subscribe on your preferred podcast streaming service. That is truly the best way to support this podcast and ensure that we can continue to bring you the human stories that make payroll so personal. Until next time, folks, this has been your host, Nina Talley with PayTalk.

Speaker 1:

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