

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 talking about communication. Knowing how to persuasively communicate your needs and your team's needs is an incredibly powerful tool for a payroll professional, but it can be often overlooked in favor of say, technical skills, which is why I'm excited that today we're joined by Patricia Fripp, CSP, CPAE, president of Fripp & Associates, and an executive speech coach at PayrollOrg, who has been helping payroll professionals hone their communication skills for over 25 years. Some of you may know Patricia from Payroll Congress. I know that she'll be back there this year, Nashville, where you all can actually sign up to take some of her workshops now. But Patricia, could you please tell our listeners a bit about your experience with the payroll industry and why you joined us today?

Patricia Fripp:

I joined you because you asked, and my experience with the payroll industry came in 1988 when the executive director Dan Maddux hired me to speak at a luncheon. Fortunately for me, it must have gone quite well because here I am decades later, and I consider it a non-taxable fringe benefit to always have great audiences at congress. And over the years, I've developed many real friendships.

Nina Talley:

That's so wonderful to hear. And I know that I met you for the first time at congress and it was such a pleasure. And you are always such an amazing person to learn from, but also just to chat with. So thank you so much for joining us today.

Patricia Fripp:

My pleasure.

Nina Talley:

So in your experience working with payroll professionals, what advice would you give to somebody who's just beginning to focus on improving their communication skills?

Patricia Fripp:

At every stage of your career, if ever you feel the words, "I'm not a good speaker," or, "I'm nervous at speaking," stop there. You are perhaps an untrained speaker. Because just as you learned to be able to do your very technical important job as a payroll professional, I promise you learning to be a competent communicator is easy in comparison. It's just a matter of learning how to do it.

So one, don't tell yourself, "I'm nervous, I'm not good." It might be there being nervous, but you are going to focus that energy into being good. So let's begin at the very beginning. Think about what you are going to say before you say it.

For example, if you have an appointment to talk to your manager, think what is the purpose of the meeting and what you want to get across. And it might be know how to begin a conversation. And that can be with the purpose of our meeting is to, or, "Thank you for the opportunity to review our latest results," or whatever it is you're going to talk about.

And then think in shorter sentences. Very often if we speak in longer sentences, we don't know how to stop and the mouth keeps working. So be very clear. Speak in short sentences such as, "Thanks for the opportunity to update you on. Last time we spoke, this was the situation." So just think one idea or sentence because the written word is for the eye. And you might be a very good writer. However, longer sentences are fine because you can go back and reread. When you speak, you are speaking more for the rhythm and to be remembered in a way that you could be repeated to speak in shorter sentences.

And look at removing all qualifiers, the kind of and sort of. Now I hear executives, CEOs in Silicon Valley. I slap them around as well. You're not going to kind of sort of do anything. You're going to do it or not do it. It's black and white.

And another technique would be, rather than say, "I think this," when you're asked a question, you might say, "On behalf of our team, we believe this. Or based on the research, based on my experience," then you give your opinion. It's better than I think. Put why you think that way by, "Our team agrees that this." So that's good to get started.

Now this advice is good at any time in your career if you haven't focused on communication skills. But I guarantee that nobody knows how you feel. They only see how you act.

So breathe deeply, spend some time just preparing. And if you are asked a question that you need to think about the answer, get comfortable with silence.

While you are thinking for three seconds, that is not a long time for the person listening. They realize, "This person wants to give me the right information," so you get points for it. That's some good starter points at every time in your career.

Nina Talley:

And I love what you said about the harmony of how you're speaking, that-

Patricia Fripp:

Sort of. We don't say sort of.

Nina Talley:

Did I say sort of?

Patricia Fripp:

Yes. This is important. We do not improve what we're not aware of.

Nina Talley:

I love that. I had no idea.

Patricia Fripp:

You may totally disagree with my opinion, however you have to know I believe what I'm saying by the way I say it.

Nina Talley:

I love that. Thank you.

Patricia Fripp:

Okay. What I will say in my congress presentation on selling yourself and your ideas is we have to dress, look, act, and speak for the job you want, not the one you have. And that's the same with of course all your communications.

Nina Talley:

Yes, completely. And I think getting those sort of, those sort of, and I mean it's that sort of? Is that still the same thing?

Patricia Fripp:

Well, let's go back to... Can you remember what you said at the beginning?

Nina Talley:

Yeah. So it's that sort of harmony in how we're speaking.

Patricia Fripp:

Well I would say a variety or include variety in what you're speaking. Now we can nitpick this to death.

Nina Talley:

I love this.

Patricia Fripp:

All I would encourage us all to do is record some of our conversations and presentations or team meetings and listen to it. Because even I listen to my conversations with people, and I'm often appalled. I say, "You're talking too much. You should have shut up sentences ago." It's at every area of our careers, we have to be vigilant. Because as soon as you wipe out one, what I would call a naughty word, another one slips in.

And now a naughty word is not a rude word that your mother trained you not to say. A naughty word would be something like thing. "The thing is." No, the point is, the question is, the idea is. It's never a thing. So that is one of my naughty no-no words. And as soon as you wipe that out, there's another one you have to work on.

Nina Talley:

There's always another. And I think that is... Well, I know that is something that we can all continue to work on is being better. That is the point. That's the continuous striving. There's always a better way to communicate. I mean, I have been doing this podcast for four years now. Clearly there are things, there are-

Patricia Fripp:

Areas to improve.

Nina Talley:

Areas of improvement always. I love that. So that does lead us into my next question, which are, what are the key communication skills that differentiate a good payroll professional from a great one in the eyes of let's say an employer?

Patricia Fripp:

The number one secret of delivering an important conversation, presentation, report, is to realize everybody is more interested in themselves and their point of view than ours.

If you are reporting on what your payroll department is doing to your manager or higher above, understand how you fit into the entire company. And this is how everybody gets payroll and their importance elevated.

So you can always say, "In January, our leadership encouraged the entire company to embrace this. Now what we've done to incorporate that in payroll and our colleagues in HR as well," and now put your report in the context. In other words, we know what we are doing, but we also know what your ultimate goal is.

Now when you are talking to your own team, or if you are speaking at your chapter, you might say, "Well based on my experience," or you might put that even more, "Based on my 15 years in payroll." As you strategize your career, these are the five areas I would encourage you to develop your skills in.

Now you see you are using your opinion. But rather than I think it's based on my 15 years in payroll, for you to do better in your career, this will help you. It's always being aware of who the audience is and why they would care. And we get into this mode of speaking is asking ourselves, and I tell all speakers and leaders the same. Ask yourself, "Why would they care? Why would they care?"

When I work with sales teams, I say, "That's nice, but why would they care?" So it might be, well, we've been in business for 40 years. Why would they care? You have the security of knowing that for 40 years, we have become experts in your industry.

Now take that simple persuasive phrase, and let's just say you've been in payroll for two years, and you have to report to your boss. And you'll say, "Based on the 36 years of experience in our payroll department, we recommend." So what you are doing is realize you are never alone. You are part of a team.

So let's just say you're a two person team. You've been there two years, but Mary's been there 17, based on our almost two decades of experience.

Nina Talley:

Yes, yes.

Patricia Fripp:

That's how you get taken seriously.

Nina Talley:

That is a really beautiful reminder that none of us are an island. We do all have these team members, and they make us stronger and better. And you can use their experience combined with your own to craft a better story. For you, for your team, and for your careers and your futures.

Patricia Fripp:

Well good. Now talking about that, this would be a great idea. Let's just say you're just talking to your boss or even higher people who don't understand quite how complex what you do is. You might say, "Our six member team are actively involved in our local chapter of payroll log. And in preparation for this presentation, we asked our most seasoned colleagues there how they handle it in their companies. So the best practices we are recommending is not only for our company. They are the best practices and companies our colleagues work in that are a lot larger than we are."

So that's expanding your team. I mean you can go on. The last congress, three of us from our department attended. And before we went there, we all selected which were the best sessions that we could take, so that we could get together and collaborate on more areas of interest to our company. So now, you're taking it nationally and internationally.

Nina Talley:

I really love this sort of expansion of including your network into your team. Because truly, if you respect your peers, and you lean on your peers, and you know that your peers are doing their best as well at their companies... It's such a wonderful tool to be able to bring to the table. I mean purely selfishly just for yourself. But again, what a powerful tool for the team and to make actual transformative differences in your department, in payroll, within your company, which then impacts so many different people's lives. Wow.

Patricia Fripp:

And it is so much easier to get funding to send you to the state congress. Because what we have to do when we look at our career is that companies do not waste money, or we hope companies don't waste money. However, they do make investments. And if you might say, "Three of us belong to our local chapter, and we pay the dues ourselves."

Now if you tie in the benefits to what you were now talking about, and if someone said, "Well, that's very interesting. "You say, "Perhaps when we work on our budget next year, we could include our dues."

Nina Talley:

I love that.

Patricia Fripp:

The answer is no if you don't ask. Because very often when people come to me and I say, "Well, is your company paying for the speech coaching?" "Oh no, I can do it myself." I say, "Well look, at least go and ask, is there a budget for self-improvement? Because now I'm promoted to this position, I have to speak more, and I would like to work with a speech coach. I've identified this is the person." Because even if they say, "No, there is no money," you at least get credit for being willing to take your own time and your own money to pay for it.

Nina Talley:

Yes. And framing it as the ability to help represent the company better, that's always going to be such a powerful selling tool.

Patricia Fripp:

Yes. And I recommend in all my sessions at congress that if we go to congress and our company pays for us to go to congress, in fact, I always ask, "How many of you are required to give a report to your

manager about what happened to congress?" And some people put their hands up and I say, "Well, it doesn't matter if you're required or not, you have to give it." And this is the format that I say, and this is a simple format. You can put it in an email, but really you want a personal meeting.

"Thank you for investing in sending me to congress." Or, "Thank you for sending me to congress. It was a very good investment for our company." Make sure investment is in there. And then it's just three areas. "This is what I did before I went to congress. I found out from my team what information they needed me to bring back. We discussed what vendors that I could reconnect with in the trade show, and other vendors, they wanted us to check out and made a list of what sessions would be most helpful. And made sure I was there to be part of all the chapter networking events."

So this is what you did before. "While I was there, this is what I learned from the keynote speakers. This is what I learned from the industry breakout sessions. This is what I learned in the trade show, and this is what I learned by networking. Based on my experience, these are the recommendations I have."

One, you always ask for more people to go to congress. You recommend that perhaps there would be budget for all six members of our department to at least belong to the local chapter and go to the state conferences. And you say many of the meetings are in Zoom, so we won't even be away from the office or there won't be any travel expenses.

And then, I have already earned my CPP. And I'm encouraging all my team also get this CPP. And this is the help we would like from you to do that. And it might be as simply as, "This takes a lot of study, and I would like to allow two hours a week for those studying to be able to work with me who's had it to be helpful," or whatever you want to say.

Again, ask. The answer might be no, but at least your manager and your leaders know this is a team that takes their jobs seriously. And they might think, "I wish our other groups would be as serious as the payroll department is."

Nina Talley:

It really is all about making yourself known, making your efforts known, and making your voice heard and presentable. I love it. That was such a wonderful closing format for how to present the fact that an investment is an investment, and that an investment in you and your career is an investment well spent.

Patricia Fripp:

And as I recommended to my audiences at Congress, you don't have to spend a lot of time talking about how good the parties are. Focus on the content.

Nina Talley:

Are you ready to build on your communication skills? Then sign up for PayrollOrg's, annual payroll congress so you can learn more from today's guest, Patricia Fripp, who will be on hand in Nashville teaching several of PAYO's more than 100 workshops, as part of your ongoing payroll training. Payroll Congress is the biggest and best event in payroll, unlike no other conference you've been to. Attend May 7th through the 10th in Nashville, Tennessee, and you'll receive unprecedented opportunities to expand your knowledge and bolster your career, with educational insights from payroll industry experts in US and global payroll.

On top of that, it's the year's key opportunity to all come together in one place to expand your professional networking, by catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. Make sure you have the chance to keep your passion for payroll going, and register today at [payrollcongress.com](https://payrollcongress.com). Again, that's [payrollcongress.com](https://payrollcongress.com).

So something we touched on really briefly, but I want to come back to, is how would you suggest that payroll professionals tailor their communication style when dealing with diverse teams, remote teams, international teams? There's so many different cultures and communication styles out there. What are your recommendations?

Patricia Fripp:

Well, it is very funny because years ago when I went to the National Speakers Association, they used to talk about speaking internationally. Now as I work a lot with Silicon Valley, all my audiences are international. So the world we live in now is different. The most important part I would say is to acknowledge you know who is in your audience.

So for example, many of the presentations we give, we welcome people, and I always say, "And for all our friends in streaming land." Or you might say, "As you look around this table and see 28 of your colleagues, let us not forget that 287 of our colleagues are in India," blah, blah, blah. So you acknowledge we know you are there.

And then when you're talking about a subject, and for example, you might say, "In our audience sitting next to you are our colleagues in HR and technology." So you acknowledge we got different groups, and each talking point or whatever you're discussing, you say, "For us in payroll, this is important because. And our friends in HR, this is going to help them in this way. And for our superheroes in our technology team that made this possible, let's give them a hand."

When you are speaking internationally, which as I say is a huge amount of my clients in Silicon Valley, is be aware. And we all have accents to somebody else. And when we begin to speak, slow down slightly at the beginning, so that our audience gets used to our voice.

Nina Talley:

I love that advice. I have never heard that advice, and that is such a wonderful, wonderful piece of advice.

Patricia Fripp:

Well, remember you heard it from me first.

Nina Talley:

I will. It's marked in there now.

Patricia Fripp:

Yeah. And of course, a lot of my clients are from India. And they are wonderful, wonderful voices. And people often say, "I want to get rid of my accent." And I always say, "Well, having an accent is an advantage because it makes you an object of interest. We just have to make sure that you are understandable."

And we all have words that we have a problem saying. And they might be simple words. It's just like I write guarantee on a very regular basis, and I always have to spell check it. There are some words that are difficult to write. There are some words that are difficult to say.

So what you do is you don't say them. Your manager might say, "I want you to go and talk about this." Well, any words that are there that you can't say, I used to find years ago in my introduction, it used to

say, "She was a successful entrepreneur." If you have not read it in advance, entrepreneur is difficult to say if you don't say it all the time. I'd say she ran a very successful business, because people can say that.

Nina Talley:

Yes.

Patricia Fripp:

So you just look at what is the best, easiest way to say this? Now, brings me up to another point. I often look at people's scripts, and my job is to clean it up. And some words in script, I have to look up what did they even mean. I was helping [inaudible 00:27:07], I never even heard of this word. And my rule is if you use this word at the dinner table with your family or at a team meeting, keep it in your presentation.

Very often, people add fancy words into their scripts that they don't normally use, and the audience will know it. Find a better word that you use frequently. You won't impress people putting in words that go flawlessly from your lips.

Nina Talley:

So something that I'm really particularly interested in hearing from you is a story of transformation. And I think that improving... I know that. You're going to kill me, Patricia.

Patricia Fripp:

Oh no, I don't. No.

Nina Talley:

Oh, no.

Patricia Fripp:

No, never.

Nina Talley:

Never. I know that communication and improving your communication can be one of the most transformational things that you can do for your career. And I know this because I've seen it in action. But I would love to hear from you a story of where effective communication significantly impacted either a payroll professional's career or maybe even their organization.

Patricia Fripp:

Well, I could give you a short one and a long one. I'll give you the short one first. Ryan Yannetta CPP is one of the industry speakers at congress and my job is to help them with their presentations to make sure it's the right time and it's exactly what they want to say in a way that the audience would really hang on their every word.

And when I first spoke to him, he said, "The first time I was at congress, you pulled me to the stage in one of your sessions to speak." And I said, "Well, obviously it worked. Now you are the payroll industry expert, speaking to everyone at congress." And listening to his story, of course, he educated himself, but communication skills have been a very important part of that.



So you might say from going to congress and getting pulled on stage might have been a challenge, but obviously he found, "It wasn't as bad as I thought. And wow, it's really quite fun."

Now a longer one, and this was a friend who is no longer with us, but I was a great admirer of Patty Lake. And when Patty Lake first went to her chapter, she was so nervous. She couldn't talk to anyone. She would just keep her head down and check people in.

Fast forward to building her confidence, she was payroll woman of the year. Would've given a good speech there. And when she got back to work, they found with a company restructuring, she no longer had a job.

Now this had nothing to do with her talent, her dedication, her expertise. It was what happens to many of our friends. They lose jobs and that has nothing to do with them. It's just the way business is.

However, Patty, with her network and her communication skills, she reached out to all her pals and said, "I will accept interviews anywhere in the country. My husband will follow me." And she had many offers. And the one she accepted was much bigger, prestigious, and better paying than the one she had lost. And she had the confidence of saying to the leadership who were offering the job is, "I will take it. However, this is the way I'm going to run my department. I am not going to read any files on what anyone else thinks of the associates. I'm going to interview them all myself and I am going to make up my own mind."

And I used to tell her story of what she learned and how she developed people in leadership presentations. But that was like so many of my payroll friends, you begin, you're very smart, you're willing to learn, but you're shy and modest. So the answer is you begin. You begin where you are and you take baby steps.

I tell all my clients at PayrollOrg and every other client, "Once you have your presentation, you're only halfway done. Now you have to get it in your body." So you have to practice with safe people. You practice with your team, you practice with your spouse. You build your skills.

Training in any area of our jobs is not something we did. It is what we do. Training is ongoing, consistent, and relentless. And perhaps, it is a matter of just thinking at the end of the week, "What did I learn this week that I didn't know the week before?"

It might be what is considered a soft skill or a hard skill. And I do not, and I push my clients when they say, "Well, we want some soft skills as well. So we'd like you to work with us on presentation skills." I said, "Presentation skills is not a soft skill. It is a very important skill if you want to do well in your career, whatever role yours is." Presentation skills is not a soft skill. When you consider how you communicate at every stage of your career in every industry you might find yourself will get you promoted and represent your company well. It is a hard, mandatory skill for every ambitious professional.

Nina Talley:

That is I think one of the more succinct lessons that any of us can take with us. So thank you so much for highlighting that for us. But now is the time in our podcast for something that we like to call payroll nightmares, where we share stories of payroll payroll as a help for reminder to our listeners. And yes, also to myself that yes, it does happen to all of us. So Patricia, do you have a nightmare that you can share with us today?

Patricia Fripp:

I have heard quite a few. My favorites were, I believe it was 2003. We were in Las Vegas, and we had a circus theme for congress. And I was giving a presentation tying the circus to payroll. You keep the plate spinning, you're walking on a tight rope, all the clowns keep coming out of the little car.

So what I did, and I talked to Dan Maddux about this because I had heard some great stories. And rather than tell the stories myself, I included the speakers to tell their story in my program. [inaudible 00:35:15] past president told the story. That was a very popular story to hear at the time.

He was working at Starbucks, and there was an earthquake, and the walls were crumbling around them. And you talk calm leadership skills. He had to get everyone to leave their offices and follow him down the emergency stairs to get out as the building is falling down. Now that takes calm leadership. So daring on a totally other different... She sent the 1099 of her executive leader to his ex-wife's house.

Now she was very nervous telling him that, but fortunately he said, "Sue, that was my mistake. I didn't change my address." Which is a good lesson, because if the boss forgets to do it, maybe you should give your employees a little slack.

Nina Talley:

Yes.

Patricia Fripp:

However, it's a great reminder of why you have to keep all your information updated, or your ex-wife or ex-husband will find out exactly what all your benefits are. Then Don Girardi, another great friend of mine. These were before we were quite so technical and we didn't work virtually. And they had a new payroll system that very few people knew how to work. And of course, we all know in payroll, some people really live paycheck to paycheck, so you have to pay people.

And in the state they were living, they were snowed in. I mean, there was no traffic. And he had to dig out the drive, and really took his life in his hands to go to the office. And again, he was communicating on the phone with his team.

So they were three examples, rather dramatic. Earthquakes, boss' 1099 to his ex-wife, and taking your life in your hands to get people paid. I would think they are great lessons for all of us. And of course when you retell them, they were all hysterically funny, terrifying at the time when it happened.

Nina Talley:

That was a wild ride of nightmares. I'm going to say we really ran the gamut there. But it is such an incredible reminder. I really loved the 1099 one. With the CEO and sending his 1099 to his ex-wife, it could have gone so differently.

Patricia Fripp:

Yes.

Nina Talley:

It could have gone so differently. That one really feels like the bullet dodged. Everything else feels a little like like, "Okay. There was so much going on, clearly outside of my control," but I love that. Thank you so much for sharing those, Patricia. My heart rate is a little elevated, but I think we'll be able to finish our conversation somehow.

Patricia Fripp:

Good.

Nina Talley:

So do you want to hear how our expert guests would've handled a payroll nightmare that you are familiar with? You can send an email to [podcasts@payroll.org](mailto:podcasts@payroll.org) or leave us a comment on PayrollOrg's Facebook page to get involved in these types of conversations.

And we don't want to leave an episode on a negative note here at PayTalk. So my last question is always a positive one. And it is, what is the best piece of advice you have ever been given? Or, what is the piece of advice that you wish you had been given early on in your career?

Patricia Fripp:

Well, I am looking back over a very long life. One piece of advice that I got from my father, the first day I went to work to serve my three-year apprenticeship to be a lady's hairstylist was, "In your career, don't concentrate on making a lot of money. Rather concentrate on becoming the type of person people want to do business with, and you most likely will make a lot of money."

And then I can't quote my dad without telling you what my mother said. She said, "Of course, it's the inner you that counts. However you have to dress up, look good, so that you can attract people. And then they will find out how nice you are, how smart you are, and how valuable you can be to them."

Nina Talley:

Your parents knew what was up, Patricia. That is such huge foundational advice. What do we always say? It's a certain amount of hard work and then a certain amount of good luck and opportunity. And in order for you to seize those opportunities that make their way, you have to present yourself in such a way that those opportunities will find you.

Patricia Fripp:

And at congress, we learn this and so many other valuable life lessons.

Nina Talley:

I love that. And all of our listeners, you can sign up to see Patricia live in person. She'll go into this conversation much, much more in depth. And also, she's just a wonderful presence. If you've ever gotten the time to be around Patricia, please make sure that you take the time to do so in Nashville at Payroll Congress this year.

And Patricia, this was just a really lovely conversation. I know that our listeners took a lot from it, but also I did too. And I know that I'm not going to say I think as much as I did before this conversation.

Patricia Fripp:

Then my mission is completed.

Nina Talley:

Well, thank you so much for joining us today and all of the lessons that you've shared with our listeners. I know that we're very excited to see you at congress once again this year.

Patricia Fripp:

Thank you.

Nina Talley:

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

Speaker 1:

Thank you so much for joining us for PayTalk, the payroll people's podcast, created by PayrollOrg. You can find additional information about our guests and the topics discussed in the episode description. For more insightful payroll content, make sure to join PayrollOrg as an official member at [payroll.org](https://payroll.org).

Don't forget to like and subscribe to PayTalk on your preferred podcast platform, and to follow PayrollOrg for PayTalk updates on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. We'll talk with you next month.