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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:

Welcome to PayTalk, the podcast that brings you payroll's human side. I'm your host, Nina Talley, and today we're diving into a very crucial topic for payroll professionals, how to elevate your career and increase your visibility within your organization.

So joining us today is Brandi Britton. She's executive director for the contract finance and accounting practice at Robert Half, and she brings a wealth of experience in payroll staffing and career development with her. Brandi is a regular contributor to PAYTECH Magazine and has been a familiar face at Payroll Congress for the past three years. So some of our listeners out there may have had some face-to-face time. Brandi has real earned insights that I know all of us can learn from and I'm very excited to hear from her.

But before we get started, we would really love to hear from our listeners about their own career growth experiences in payroll. Share your stories or maybe even a question by emailing [podcasts@payroll.org](mailto:podcasts@payroll.org) or leave us a comment on PayrollOrg's Facebook page. We might feature some of your insights in a future episode.

Brandi, thank you so much again for joining us today. Could you take a moment to introduce yourself and maybe share a bit of your background with our listeners?

Brandi Britton:

Yes. Well, thank you for having me again, Nina. Yes, my name is Brandi Britton. I am the executive director for Robert Half. I oversee the strategy for our contract finance and accounting group, and I've been with Robert Half for over 25 years now. And as you mentioned in the beginning, I've contributed for a number of years to PAYTECH Magazine. I have enjoyed many individuals presenting at Payroll Congress for the last three years and look forward to this discussion.

I'll give a little bit of a plug for your audience, and that this year, Robert Half has placed over 22,000 people in either contract positions or full-time positions with some sort of payroll background, whether it's an administrative assistant doing payroll on up to a vice president of payroll. So again, looking forward to being with you and your audience today.

Nina Talley:

That's really amazing and I think that it just showcases the expertise that you're bringing with you in that you have deep, deep knowledge and insight as to what the industry is currently looking for and how payroll professionals are getting placed. So thank you again for sharing your insights with us.

I think that we know, and many of us know, that payroll professionals play an absolutely vital role to any organization, but they're almost always sort of behind the scenes, which is a big change that we are pushing here at Paytalk, and I know many payroll professionals are. So how can payroll professionals increase their visibility within a company and get their voices heard in leadership meetings or maybe even have a standard seat at leadership meetings?

Brandi Britton:

Absolutely. Well, one of the things that we see very prevalent right now, and this really applies to payroll, is the importance of communication, so verbal and non-verbal. What I mean by that is payroll professionals often have challenges or issues or problems that come up, but they're often urgent and they have to be resolved quickly. So payroll professional gets the problem, they resolve it, and no one knows about it because they just handled it.

Well, payroll professionals can certainly be more vocal in leadership meetings or meetings about the problems that have come up and then share with other individuals how they've resolved that issue. So one, being their own advocate in meetings on how they've resolved issues because at the end of the day, like you mentioned, it's behind the scenes. And oftentimes those issues are just fixed, but nobody knows that there was even an issue because the payroll team handled it.

Then another key area is highlighting the strategic impact of payroll. And so what I mean by that is, how does payroll professionals can articulate how does payroll impact the broader financial and operational goals of a company, whether it's compliance, cash flow, and employee satisfaction. And what I mean by employee satisfaction is when everything's going smoothly in payroll, people are happy. But when there start to be problems in payroll, that can negatively impact employee satisfaction. So understanding their role and being able to articulate what they're doing to contribute with those overall initiatives.

The last piece I would add here is building cross-department relationships. For years now, especially in larger organizations, payroll works hand-in-hand with human resources. That's already an area that those relationships are being strengthened and worked. But as of late, IT has become an integral part of payroll and those relationships are really, really key to keep up. And if you're a company that's remote or hybrid, those relationships are harder to keep. So you have to be very intentional about proactively staying in touch with those counterparts in the other departments if you are in a remote or hybrid work environment.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that. And I would say to our listeners that there's a lot of creative ways of doing that. Most of us are using some type of team collaboration software, Slack teams, some way that we're staying communicating and connected even though we're remote. And maybe if you want to develop those relationships, there is a pathway that is built on friendship a little bit that makes it easier to maintain. It's easier to ask somebody in IT for a favor when you talk to them earlier this month about your favorite TV show and it's not the first time that they've ever heard from you and it's an emergency and you need it done right now.

Brandi Britton:

That's so well said. There's different current events going on all the time. I remember many years ago when Paris Hilton was on the scene, and that was our water cooler talk. And so there's things like that occurring every single day. Finding those opportunities, yes, you've got to be productive. Absolutely. That is the first priority of all of our jobs. However, those relationships that we build help us get things done, but then they also improve our overall job satisfaction and then help contribute to that other person's job satisfaction when they've got a relationship with you as well. So sometimes right or wrong, in the work environment that we're in right now, you got to be intentional about reaching out and you got to calendar that time sometimes. As silly as that may sound, it's an important part of the overall well-being of all of us in our positions.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree. And looking at that a bit deeper and how we're moving into leadership roles with payroll professionals, if somebody was to make that intentional move towards leadership, what are some of, we would say, the key differences that they should be prepared for and how do they start developing those leadership skills ahead of time and how can they integrate some of those communication skills into that?

Brandi Britton:

Yes. So developing leadership skills is a great term, but how do you do it? Some of the things that you can do to strengthen and work on your leadership skills are, number one, volunteering to be on projects. Oftentimes, projects that are put out there don't have a leader. So offering to be the leader or acting like the leader is very helpful in that not everybody wants to do that. And so you can really position yourself to get some expertise by being the leader on the group. And then as everyone knows, if you've been a leader of a group, not everyone agrees. So you got to figure out how to work with different opinions to get things done, which really helps you once you are in the leadership role. So that would be one thing.

Two is invest in continuous learning. So certainly getting certifications like your CPP shows your commitment to that profession and it shows to potential employers or even to your leadership that you're serious about the role you're in and that you are invested in your own growth.

And then lastly, when the opportunity presents itself, demonstrating your strategic thinking. And what I mean by that is how do business goals connect to what payroll contributes? And bringing that some visibility to that in various meetings and various conversations with leadership can really open the eyes of leadership and also put you in a position to be seen as a leader. And I think particularly for individuals who are looking to grow within their company, you often hear the term, "Do the job before you get the job." So what are the opportunities for you to take on additional responsibilities so that if that leadership job becomes vacant, it's obvious that you're the one that should be the one that gets promoted into that role.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that, and it goes so well with that classic statement of, "Luck is when preparation meets opportunity." And if you are looking to elevate your role, your position, your standing, if you're looking to make the next step in your career, that is the name of the game. Luck is when preparation meets opportunity and you need to, A, prepare to step into those positions, but then B, when the opportunity presents itself, seize it.

Brandi Britton:

Absolutely. Make yourself known before the job is vacant or available. And I love the term you used. I actually remember many years ago I was at a lunch, and Eli Broad, the very famous philanthropist and founder of AIG was at my table and I asked him, so young up and comer in the workforce and excited to be at this table with him, and I said, "What pieces of advice do you have for me as someone who wants to move up within the organization?" And he said, "Well, what I can tell you is the harder I work, the luckier I got."

Nina Talley:

Ooh, I love that.

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Brandi Britton:

Yeah, it was really good advice and, I think, speaks to what you just mentioned about how luck meets opportunity.

Nina Talley:

Completely. And I think it ties in really nicely with something I wanted to explore with you, which is, if somebody's looking for immediate growth within their current role, what are some really actionable steps they could take this week or maybe this month to actually start increasing their impact and their value in making themselves more visible so they can reach out and take those opportunities?

Brandi Britton:

Yes, I love this question because all good habits, we can all have great goals and ambitions, but if we don't act on them, it doesn't matter. So the things that you can do right away is seek mentorship. This is why one of the reasons I love Payroll Congress, because you get the opportunity to meet so many different people and establish relationships there that can provide you that mentorship, certainly mentorship within your own company. So immediately that's something that you can do.

Number two is get interested and involved in mastering technology tools. Technology is evolving at a rapid pace and it just keeps getting more and more advanced and changing. There's all this talk around AI and automation and you hear about how companies are evolving and incorporating it. But I talk to a lot of individuals that say, "Oh, well that's not impacting me yet." Well, there's so many things that you can do right now on your own to get familiar with it.

I personally loved when I understood ChatGPT before many others did because I wanted to experience it. It's very easy. So just getting involved, being curious from a technology standpoint. Then asking for stretch assignments. I know sometimes that can be difficult when you're already busy. You may be working on a lean team, but making sure that your leadership knows that you're willing to take on additional responsibilities and that you'd like to stretch yourself. And so volunteering and making sure on a frequent basis that your leadership is aware that you're willing to do that.

And then lastly, how visible are you? It comes back to what we were talking about a few minutes ago, establishing those relationships cross-department. Are you speaking up in meetings? Are you volunteering solutions? Do you have ideas? And I think it comes back to that second point about technology. If you're curious about that, you're able to give ideas that maybe everybody in the room doesn't necessarily have. So making yourself visible in that way when you can.

Nina Talley:

Those are really great actionable steps, and I know that many of our listeners can begin applying them right now.

We're celebrating 30 years of partnership between Robert Half and PayrollOrg, and you get all the benefits. Right now, take advantage of resources designed to boost your career like tips for creating a winning resume and acing a job interview, nationwide payroll job opportunities from every level of management and leadership roles all at your fingertips, and the 2025 salary guide from Robert Half so you can make smarter salary decisions. Visit PayrollOrg's career advancement page for these resources and much more.

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Taking that sort of granular approach, I want to now zoom out a bit, get the 40,000-foot view. When it comes to long-term career planning, how can payroll professionals strategically position themselves for executive or maybe C-level even, leadership roles in the future leader, and what skills or even experiences should they be cultivating now to strategically position themselves in the future?

Brandi Britton:

Yeah. So one of the things that I hear from senior leaders all of the time that they're looking for in their up and coming leaders is very strong communication skills because leadership has to convey the goals, the plans, and they have to keep their department running. And the way they keep their department running is by having happy employees. What makes a happy employee is a leader who has strong communication skills and works with them on a regular basis. So developing really good verbal communication skills. And I can't underscore that enough, in an environment where there's a lot more texting, there's a lot more chats that go on, a lot more emailing, people almost avoid phone conversations or in-person communication skills. That can really set you apart as a leader when you can articulate your points well, you're comfortable speaking to a larger audience. Certainly you don't have to be comfortable speaking to 500 people, but comfortable being the voice in a room of 10, 15, 20 is really, really key.

And then in addition to that, the written communication skills are something that stand out as well in a text message world where we don't use capitalization and punctuation.

Nina Talley:

Periods are aggressive now.

Brandi Britton:

Right? Right? That written communication and how you articulate yourself, utilizing proper grammar really does set you apart. And it is different, but it positions yourself as the professional in the room. So that would be my immediate advice for those seeking executive leadership roles in the long term.

Nina Talley:

And let's say that one of our listeners has applied all of these tips and they have made themselves more visible in their payroll position and they're now in a leadership meeting and they're very new to this. What would you say are some of the common mistakes that they should avoid? Is there any way to better present data or insights that makes an impact beyond just, "Here is the payroll data spreadsheet?"

Brandi Britton:

Yes. Yes. That's a great question. So certainly as accounting professionals or payroll professionals, we're so accustomed to the data. What does the data say? And so, some of the mistakes we see are just presenting the raw data, knowing the audience, "So what does this mean?" People can read the numbers on a slide or in a chart, but the presentation itself needs to be, "What is this telling us?" So articulating that. Being concise and solution-oriented. So I think we've all probably sat in a meeting either virtually or in-person, and especially you notice this when you listen to recordings of meetings,

and that is being concise and solution-oriented and to the point when you're speaking. What is it that you're trying to convey?

Oftentimes, especially new leadership, I always recommend that new leadership, when they're going to be speaking in a meeting, they've run through those points to themselves first verbally. And how does that sound? Because then you'll get out some of the fluff that isn't necessary and then it just makes you more confident walking into the meeting.

And then lastly, aligning the presentation that you have with what the company's overall financial goals are or what their overall broader strategy is. So making that meeting a value add, not just here's the data, bringing it full circle. Here's why it matters, and then how it ties to the company's goal.

Nina Talley:

I always like to think that data is only powerful when it's applied to proper context, otherwise it is just numbers. It needs to be applied in context and shaped. I like what you said there about going through and sort of running through the talking points of something before you actually present it. And I would like to add to that, look at the data before you present it. What is the story that you can find there? How does that story align with leadership's goals so that you are aligning with the business goals, but if you align it with what you know to be leadership goals as well, you'll get allies on your side and you'll see that what payroll is doing is building impact for other members of leadership, which just gets you more and more buy-in.

Brandi Britton:

Absolutely. One little tidbit I'd add that I've noticed is very effective is if you've got your business partners in the room with you, that you've already talked to about this. Asking them to comment in the meeting, let them know on the front end that you may be calling on them to add their 2 cents. That really pulls in the members of the individuals in the conference room that you're with and also helps them be connected to what you're presenting and want to contribute to you more again in the future.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that. And I want to sort of look to the future. And Brandi, what trends are you currently seeing right now as you're placing payroll professionals and how should our listeners be prepared to adapt and thrive given the evolving landscape?

Brandi Britton:

Yes. Well, certainly we continue to see a heavy focus on compliance. I mean, I love you payroll professionals out there. You have to be on your toes at all times because state cities are always changing and updating their laws and their regulations. So there's just a continuous focus on compliance. Certainly the rise of automation. We see RPA and a lot of adjustments there and incorporating, as we mentioned, how can technology streamline and make things more efficient, which is then raising the level of individuals because something that may have been very mundane, that's now automated, so that individual is able to take on more complex tasks. So staying in the know of evolving technology.

And then from a leadership standpoint, even whether you're just an individual contributor, the role of remote work and payroll, that impacts you in two different ways. One, it's the laws associated to all of the employees working in hybrid or a remote environment. But two, as a payroll leader, how do you engage and keep your employees happy and connected to the organization? If you are in a hybrid

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environment or if you are in remote, or let's say you are a fully on-site employer, how do you compete with employers that are offering fully remote or hybrid roles and keeping that engagement high? So these are the three areas that we continue to see evolving in the payroll space and being top of mind.

Nina Talley:

I think so much of what you just said there ties in with what we've already been re-enforcing for our listeners, which is continuous education, staying on top of it and not being technology adverse. These are the things that really matter, is getting engaged and involved in the technology now because if it's not impacting you right now, it will be within the next two years, it's coming for you. It's not coming to take your job, but it is coming to integrate into your systems and you need to get a hold of it now. So I think that that's a really great place for our listeners to consider how to move forward. Things are evolving, but we're seeing the shifts coming, so stay on top of it.

Brandi Britton:

They're coming fast and furious, but at the end of the day, many of those technologies are there to help you with your job.

Nina Talley:

I always like to say that the technologies are nothing without clean data. And you are the stopgap for clean data. It will never be able to identify junk data. That is on you, the payroll professional. And as such, those tools are useless without you, and they can make your position so much more visible if you can tie storytelling to it.

Brandi Britton:

Yes, beautifully said, Nina. Beautifully said.

Nina Talley:

So now it's time for something that we like to call payroll nightmares. Brandi, I know that you have worked with so many payroll professional. Could you share a challenging situation or a nightmare that someone faced in their career journey and how it was overcome?

Brandi Britton:

Yes. Well, okay, here's a fun one for you. So a company that we were working with had an employee resign in late January 2020. This is important because of timing of all of this.

Nina Talley:

Yes.

Brandi Britton:

This person was a person who was receiving a bonus, so the calculations for their last paycheck was going to be a little bit more complicated. So they got a hard check with their last two weeks and what was expected from a bonus standpoint. Well, in addition to that, they got their check direct deposited as well.

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Nina Talley:

Wooh!

Brandi Britton:

Uh-huh. Okay, fast-forward, the company realizes this about a month later, so in late February, February 2020. And they reach out to the employee to say, "Uh-uh, we noticed you were overpaid. Can you repay us?" And the employee says, "I don't know. Was I over overpaid? I don't think I was. Let me do some calculations and I'll get back to you." And the employer, wanting to be gentle and have a good post-employee experience says, "Okay, please take a look." And ultimately, the employee or former employee doesn't return any phone calls, doesn't call back. The payroll department is calling to say, "Hey, have you had a chance to take a look? We're expecting repayment." And then Covid hits, everybody goes remote. And that manager was faced with a difficult situation and that the employee was unwilling to repay it. The only choice was they thought was, "Uh-oh. How are we going to do? Is this worth pursuing other legal tactics to get the money back?"

And so to make a long story short, the employee never paid the money back. The company took the loss. I was sharing the story with friends and family, and I learned that there are two camps in the world. There's one camp that says, "Oh, it's the company's fault. They have to write it off." And then there's another camp that says, "Wow, that employee should not be eligible for rehire because they stole money because they were overpaid and they knew better." So Nina, which camp are you?

Nina Talley:

I sort of feel like both. I think that it was the company's fault. This is a mistake that the company made, and the timing just made it incredibly difficult. And I think that probably pursuing it legally would've cost them more money, so that was the right choice to make. But I, if I was that person and I made that choice, I would never expect to be rehired there. That would be like, "I'm out the door. I can't ask for a reference, anything. We're done." And so I say both. But I would also, if I was the type of person to make that type of decision to not repay my former employer, I think that I would make an educated decision that I would likely not be getting reemployed there.

Brandi Britton:

Yes, yes, yes. I think you're in the cab for most people. I didn't realize this is the kind of thing at Thanksgiving that's always fun to bring up at a big dinner because everybody has a different opinion on this, which I was fascinated by.

Nina Talley:

I love this. I'm keeping it in my pocket. And this is going to be a good congress question of just asking people, and we could take the poll and release the stats after. It could be really compelling.

Well, do you want to hear how our expert guests would handle a payroll nightmare that you are familiar with? Send an email to podcasts at payroll.org or leave us a comment on PayrollOrg's Facebook page and get involved in the conversation.

But we don't really like to leave things on a negative note here at PayTalk. So I have one more question, and that is, what is the best piece of payroll advice that you've ever, I guess, given to someone would probably be a great way to state it? Or what's a piece of career advice that maybe you wish you had been given at the beginning of your career?



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Brandi Britton:

Good. Okay, so I've got two. The first one is a piece of advice related to payroll. And this isn't necessarily for payroll professionals, but this is for any employee out there, and that as good as a payroll department or team is, it's always the best practice to read your pay stub every single week.

Nina Talley:

Everybody read your pay stubs. Everybody read your pay stubs.

Brandi Britton:

Every week. You can save a lot of hassle and trouble for yourself in the long run by reading your pay stub. So that's one. From a career advice standpoint, something that I wish that I had heard early on in my career is really the piece we talked about throughout the podcast, and that is be willing to take on additional responsibility and start getting comfortable vocalizing your ideas. You can certainly read the room. And if your ideas aren't being well received, read the room. But by having a voice and being the one that speaks up is always a great thing and will really get you further ahead in many, many ways.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that. Brandi, thank you so much for sharing your insights and that advice with us. I know that your thoughts on career growth and just visibility for payroll professionals, it's absolutely invaluable. I'm sure our listeners will find plenty of actionable advice to apply in their own careers moving forward.

Brandi Britton:

Well, thank you for having me today. It's been a pleasure to be with your audience. And I look forward to seeing everyone again in five, six months at Congress.

Nina Talley:

Excellent. 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 make sure that you rate, review, and subscribe on your preferred podcast streaming service. That is absolutely the best way to support this podcast and ensure that we can continue to bring 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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