

Elevating the Voice of Payroll through Teamwork and Leadership

By Kimberley Fiume, Managing Director of Best Practices and Compliance, Sability

The payroll profession has changed significantly in the last several decades, and the COVID-19 pandemic shone a light on its strategic value. There's an opportunity now for payroll professionals to maintain this momentum, highlighting the ongoing importance of the payroll function as well as the dynamic skills required to perform it, to elevate the profession.

To help you work as a team and demonstrate payroll as a leader in your organization, we sat down with Letha Hall, who leads the Managed Services Payroll Group at Sability, a Human Capital Management (HCM) consulting firm in North America. The Managed Services team is a collection of expert payroll professionals that act as an extension of an organization's payroll team, giving them insider experience into the key teamwork and leadership skills needed to help a payroll group increase the power of their voice. They spend their time guiding dozens of payroll professionals in organizations across Canada each month.





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If you had to say the first thing that comes to mind when asked what advice you give the most to payroll teams, what would it be?

Letha Hall (LH): Enhance the voice of payroll within your company! It doesn't matter whether you are in healthcare, retail, hospitality or any other industry, showcase the strategic role the function plays within the organization.

The first thing about finding your voice, and being confident in that voice, starts within your own team. Work on constructive communication within your team. You need each other. Speaking up in an effective manner within your own team helps prepare you for when it's time to speak up in meetings and with other internal stakeholders. Your confidence will grow with the success of your own team, and this will be reflected when speaking to other teams.

As confidence grows, so does your knowledge of your business. There's an opportunity to mine the detailed data that payroll has access to drive organizational success and meet performance objectives. Always support professional memberships with groups such as the National Payroll Institute, which are valuable to apply this knowledge effectively and stay apprised of current legislation and best practices. Designations also help individuals enhance their knowledge and skillsets.

Professionals with these types of backgrounds assure leadership and key stakeholders that they have all the necessary information to make informed decisions.

That's so true and sometimes a reminder is needed. How do you encourage teamwork and cross-functional communication? It's easy to get into a silo because everyone is busy and has deadlines to meet.

LH: Payroll cannot live in a silo. It takes everyone on the payroll team (as well as the HR, Finance and Management teams) to process payroll successfully each week. I encourage teams to do a weekly “Attitude & Gratitude” session: What from the week gave you an attitude? What from the week gave you gratitude? Then, you can focus on resolving or improving the issue that gave you the attitude, and appreciate something you did for someone else that gave them gratitude.

Again, it goes back to communication. The more you openly and consistently communicate in a positive manner, the more successful your team will be.

Say that the payroll team has great communication, positive attitudes and strong teamwork. How would you encourage them to increase their voice outside of their group and to senior management?

LH: Taking it up a level outside of your immediate group usually involves conversations around processes. It might be a process workflow within your HCM system itself, or it might be something outside of the system, like a paper time-off request. These involve management, other groups across the organization and other key stakeholders.



Because the teams we work with are confident and knowledgeable, they can easily step into these meetings as a positive presence and offer constructive solutions, which goes a long way. In this case, I'd advise the team to offer a solution in five steps:

1. Listen. Being able to listen and actually hear what others have to say with an open mind is a key skill. Then you can truly understand the need before offering a solution.
2. Show how beneficial tasks and strategic processes can be achieved through the payroll or HCM system with real-life illustrations.
3. Explain how your systems have the capabilities to increase efficiency for all levels of the organization.
4. Encourage them to educate themselves on the options — and offer to help.
5. Show how these changes can check all the boxes for their group and “why this would work for us.”

You're right. When it comes to the technology, it can be hard to keep up. How do you advise payroll professionals stay current on what's offered so they can have that united, knowledgeable, confident team?

LH: Get out of your rut — even if you don't think you're in a rut. Leverage the analytics of your payroll and HCM system, and take

advantage of the tools and resources your service and software providers offer. Many HCM providers, for instance, have user groups you can join to stay ahead of the curve.

I would also advise all organizations to have a trusted consulting firm for a disaster recovery plan (DRP) for backup processing in an emergency situation. A DRP should give you access to experts who can help make sure your team keeps up with the technology.

Also ensure someone on your team subscribes to industry newsletters, like those from the National Payroll Institute or your service provider, and government websites or list services to stay current on legislative changes.

Professional memberships, reputable newsletters and user groups can provide insight on leading trends, analytics, dashboard reporting, key topics, opportunities for ROI and enhanced experiences. Applying and communicating this knowledge effectively will elevate the voice of payroll in your organization and for future generations. ■

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