

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 payrolls human side. This month, we're continuing our conversation with Davida Lara, CPP, Executive Vice President of Payroll Services at Entertainment Partners. This is part two of my conversation with Davida, so if you haven't listened to our last episode, make sure you go back and do so now, otherwise you may miss out on crucial information and context. Now, without further ado, let's jump back into the conversation. What would you say technology is doing to help with some of the disparities that maybe payroll practices differ from country to country?

Davida Lara:

I think it's creating consistency and delivery, right? And any opportunity that you can utilize the technology to help your process is be consistent, and allows them to be scalable, and technology, obviously, the biggest contribution is the scalability, right? So the number of people that you can pay, obviously, will be impacted on how good your technology is, right? So... And then helps significantly with the compliance part of it. The fact that I know how to do a gross to net by hand is not something that I want to do, right? I think about when I used to deal with global mobility, and doing equalizations, and stuff, do you really want to do that by hand?

Nina Talley:

Yeah.

Davida Lara:

Even though that was our comfort place, "Oh, let me show you how I do this grows up," and I don't want to do it. It's that ability to pay 1,000 people at a time, right? The ability to start... Think about payroll, what it is end to end, from the onboarding to remittance, technology is huge when it comes to that. So imagine if we had to do that all manually, no one would want to, so you definitely need it. We used to, and I always love the payroll professionals to say, "I remember when I used to hand write a check," how would you like to write 25,000 of them? You wouldn't, you just wouldn't, right?

So we think about the scale and the number of people we can touch, technology plays a huge part in that. And I think a lot of the best practices, the APA being such a leader in developing those best practices, honestly, software companies are taking that lead to utilize that information to say, "What can I do to make your world easier and make this better?" Not to replace the human element, and I think once upon a time, that's what people thought, "Oh, if I put this technology in place, for instance, if I use this electronic onboarding system, and not give you an entire folder of paperwork to fill out, that you won't need a person." No, what it does, technology transforms the role for the payroll professional, and makes it more consultative, and less transactional. That's when it gets super sexy, because-

Nina Talley:

Exactly.

Davidara Lara:

... now we're having a conversation of what you should and shouldn't do, instead of, "What number is this, again? I can't read," you know what I mean? It changes the conversation, and it allows the payroll professional to be smarter in the part that matters, right? They don't need to know that, it's because you put in a three more than they need to know that, if somebody worked there six day or a holiday or something or in this locality, those are the conversations that you want to have about what should happen, and not the transactional stuff. So technology plays a huge role and allow payroll professionals to really show what they got.

Nina Talley:

I think that's a really excellent point, and as you said, there was a little bit of a holdout that there are people who like the paperwork, and that there is the fear that they were getting replaced by automation, but I think that even in the two years that we've been doing this podcast, that conversation has shifted so much, and it's no longer... The fear is sort of gone because people were forced to embrace it, and now it's about figuring out what works the best for your business, for your processes, for your team, and I think that's where technology gets really exciting.

Davidara Lara:

Right. And I think people that have a conversation of about automation and efficiency, shouldn't be afraid of having that conversation, other fear that people might think you would need less people to do something, and I think that's the struggle, right? So as you talk about efficiencies, that means that someone won't be needed, it just means they won't need be needed in that aspect. That's why I'm very adamant about roles related to payroll being so inclusive, because if... Say for instance, if you only give a person a role where they stuff paychecks, then what happens when I'm no longer stuffing paychecks? Right? Why would you even create a role where people are required that that's all they do, and I think that's where it gets really interesting with the partnership, and that recipe that we talked about, knowing how much is to have a conversation of what needs to be done, and technology plays a huge role in this, is let me tell you what needs to be done, and let me tell you where people are involved, and how, if they weren't involved, they could do this, and that's how I want you to help me, right? But then the reality check, and this is, CFOs would be happy with me again, is that the efficiency does require less people to do certain things.

Nina Talley:

But I do think when you're optimizing your processes, and you don't want to optimize people out of a job, it's again about taking that sort of holistic approach to your team, and going, "Well, where can I put them? What do we need? Maybe they can take some courses, and work their way up and become a little bit more helpful." I think that looking at your team as human beings and not cogs in the machine is something that really needs to happen as we are optimizing, I don't believe that we're automating people out of jobs in payroll, but I do know that there is a fear, and a stress of that, and that you can help alleviate that.

Davidara Lara:

That's right. And I think let's just call it why that it is because that's how it started out, right?

Nina Talley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dauida Lara:

There's just even some of the... Oh, well, technology started to take a negative connotation, offshore our services there at one point, "Oh, if we take it over here, it's cheaper to do it that way," payroll people are not making widgets, they're literally paying people for a living. So to have that conversation that you would, if you were doing... And not to take away from that industry either, right? But even that has found the automotive in industry, if there were ways to make it more efficient, to make things that people used to physically make. But I think payroll gets to get in the conversation of that personal touch again, what do you get from your payroll professional is that personal touch, that knowledge, that knowing of the people they're paying, that need, right? That's what we get to go back to, and that's super exciting for me. I think it's a great opportunity for us to change the conversation, and see where technology helps.

And when you think about the operational ability of payroll people is better than I've seen in many industries, and all they need is the additional education and tools to run any operation they want. I used to be head of operations for HIV records, and the only reason I even applied for the job is because I knew payroll, and I knew the people. All right, so when I'm in... I'm 20 something years old thinking, "Well, what else can I do?" I do believe it's because I had the payroll, and all the HR work under my belt, that put me in a position where I felt confident enough to basically go against some of these people who had been running store operations for years, and I wound up getting the role.

Nina Talley:

I think that that really goes back to what I said earlier about payroll being a multifaceted gem, and it's just about how you want to focus that lens. And that's a really beautiful story of just... I knew how to do one thing, and I knew that I could operate that.

Dauida Lara:

Exactly.

Nina Talley:

So how much harder could these other operations be?

Dauida Lara:

Exactly. And we always looking at payroll as, if you lifted the hood of a car, it's all those people underneath there just kind of running the mechanics, and that's not what we are-

Nina Talley:

Exactly.

Dauida Lara:

... you know what I mean? We are part of that whole structure, everything that came to be a hole, that inside was running, I think I said it in my video, I always wanted to know what was under the hood, and now we're actually adding to what's under that hood, and making companies go.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. And I do really think that it is all about how you engage the topic, how you choose to engage it with passion, because it can really ignite passion for others. I know that in my personal life, I am now sort of the person that you want to talk to about what's going on in payroll, and that I talk about it in a way that gets people really engaged. It's-

Davida Lara:

And it's everything.

Nina Talley:

... it is everything, and there's so many interesting dynamics in compliance and how you can utilize technology to work with different municipalities. It's so interesting, and there's always a new thing to learn and find.

Davida Lara:

Absolutely. And I think it's not boring, it's not a boring conversation-

Nina Talley:

It's not.

Davida Lara:

... when you're talking about people's money.

Nina Talley:

It's not.

Davida Lara:

And helping them describe it in a way that people can absorb it that don't do it every day, I like to tell people I had a very proud moment with my daughter when she came to me and said, "Mom, can you look at my pay stub? I've reviewed it, the gross-net looks right, but can you just look at it?" And the fact that she reviewed her pay stub made me smile, because-

Nina Talley:

My heart.

Davida Lara:

... people don't do that. I know, but these are also kids that were doing year-end W2 work when they were four, so they get it honestly, for sure, but it does make me proud that in her adult life that she's looking to make sure those things are right, because it matters.

Nina Talley:

It does, and I think that's a really interesting story in that it shows how it trickles down, and that your passion for payroll is trickling down to your children, so what can it do for the people in your team, and the people in your business?

Dauida Lara:

Oh, how about that? I think it does now, I look at it, obviously Entertainment payroll, as we deliver a payroll for Hollywood as one thing, but in any industry, when you have a conversation, it's, "Who's your payroll team and what they do." And I just remember over the years hearing the payroll team sat in the finance organization kind of quiet, no one really knew who they were. And it's unfortunate because everywhere I've gone, I've pulled them in HR where of people conversations needed to happen. So I grew up HR, so that's where payroll belongs, because human resources is just human resources, and what is Payroll if it's not a human resource?

Nina Talley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dauida Lara:

I can have that argument all day, Nina.

Nina Talley:

I have also had that argument, but it's... I have a little less grounding than you do Dauida, I think.

Dauida Lara:

I can be convincing.

Nina Talley:

So we touched a little bit on technology, and I also want to dive into the data that drives technology. So how would you say payroll data is impacting strategic decision making on the part of companies, and how is the availability of payroll data sort of changing global operations?

Dauida Lara:

Data is what we do, it's data we trust, right? I hate to use old analogies, garbage in, garbage out, is only as good as the data, what we do, but it also makes it to be the most powerful thing in the organization. The person who has access to the people data is the most powerful person in the room, right? They are able to make decisions about what are people making, and what regions, and all of this. And in my industry in particular, we're starting to see trends using data, and do analysis in data across populations of people that you wouldn't have had visibility to unless you pulled it from the payroll system, right? Even when you think about HRIS, right? And you know how we rallied around what that is that doesn't exist, there's people data that's required to get payroll done. So much of what we want to gather on people, the core of it starts with the fact you need this information to pay them. So now people are starting to use that information, and needing access to that information to make strategic decisions, and being able to pull that information from different sources is huge, right?

Nina Talley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dauida Lara:

So technology has been huge, especially for me where all this data sits, and being able to aggregate it, and tell a story is important. So I think when we are needing to make big decisions for a company, that's the first thing they do is ask for reports about their people, right? Consider it's the biggest investment they need to make.

Nina Talley:

I think the data driven storytelling is such a huge thing in the technology industry right now, but it's often underutilized, I think that the way that our brains interpret information, we want it to be a story, and so having data on a spreadsheet, it's not really any longer going to cut it, you need to make an engaging story with the data, and what's more, the story is there waiting for you to tell it.

Davidara Lara:

Exactly. And there's an opportunity there, right? First of all, the data helps us separate facts from fiction. And it...

Nina Talley:

Exactly.

Davidara Lara:

I talk to my team about that all the time when they come with me with the emotional response to something I'll ask, "Well, show me. Show me where it says that in the data," I think it's a great opportunity, and talk about playbook, and something we can add to it is teaching people how to tell that story instead of looking at the data, and the way we look at it today. And I think people are trying with dashboards, and things of that nature, but I don't think we use it at the highest level of the organization, we do at Entertainment Partners, for sure, data drives out decisions every day, but I think more companies are going to start to see the need for that, because it can help you make better decisions, operationally and faster. The quicker you can get access to the information, the faster you can pivot, and data allows you to be more nimble to adjust, and I think that's why payroll has led in that space during the pandemic, is our ability to look at the data and see what's happening.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. I think there's obviously a wealth of knowledge in the data, but it is really about mining it, and compiling it in a meaningful way, and that is what's going to make a payroller's life easier. It's one thing to talk about how we affect other people's lives, but we also want to make your life more efficient, and take stress off of your shoulders, and I think one of the best ways to do that is to just turn to the data.

Davidara Lara:

Absolutely. And I think that would be the biggest change for this space going forward is for us to do what we can, put processes in place that impact how we gather that data so the data's always clean, right? So usually when we ask for it-

Nina Talley:

Don't we jump data?

Davidara Lara:

... "Yeah, hold on, give me a second, let me scrub the data, right?" Just the whole idea of needing to scrub-

Nina Talley:

Scrub data.

Davida Lara:

... scrub data, right? The fact is your processes should make sure that that data is accurate, and I think there's an opportunity for us in the payroll world to look up stream. You know what those processes are, knowing that the end result will be that, we're going to be presenting that data or telling the story.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree. And with everything that we just talked about in mind, let's look ahead. So what do you think the future of payroll looks in a broad sense, but then also more specific? What does it look like for you and your team?

Davida Lara:

Well, I think broadly, I actually expect to see more Executive Vice Presidents of Payroll Services at companies. I look forward to more payroll professionals being the C-suite. You can call us what you want, COOs, CEOs or whatever, but I wouldn't mind if we saw more roles that had the term payroll in it at that level. So I think there's an opportunity for that coming, and companies are going to start looking into the importance of doing that going forward, but for my team specifically, it is us tweaking that playbook, and being reminded of how we love what it is we are doing. So I'm going to spend a ton of time getting back to what you and I talked about earlier, and that mental health, and going back to the secret sauce, which is the passion for what you do, because then people get to be more creative about how we are able to deliver, and delivering to more people, not just making sure payroll is getting in the hands of the people who matter.

I think that there's nothing new, just go to refining what it is that we're able to do, we do a lot of things great, but I do want to create focus for the team next year, because we were very reactive in sort of doing what we need to support everybody, but now I think even... And we know that this is not over by any means, but I want everybody to exhale for a moment, and look at all the great things that we do, and tweak those, and then look at the things that we don't do well, and determine how we can make them better or decide whether we need to do them anymore. And I think I'm okay with people being less comfortable with what they're used to going forward that change management, and I tend to use that word loosely, because being an agent of change, I'm clearly with all the jobs I've had in my career, but being able to express to people that change is good, and change doesn't have to be dramatic in order for it to be effective. So that will be the biggest lesson for my team going into the new year, for sure.

Nina Talley:

That's a really beautiful lesson, and I think that as you sort of invest into the human side of it, and making sure that your team is well taken care of, and that they also have the support they need to find new solutions, that it just creates opportunities for more diverse thought. And as you were saying, I think the last sort of two years, we've been very reactive, it's just about getting things done, but I do

agree that I... I don't know if we're out of the woods yet, I don't feel that we're out of the woods, but I do think that, to mix metaphors, we have all sort of gotten our sea legs at this point.

Dauida Lara:

Exactly.

Nina Talley:

We understand... And the boat's still going to pitch, and we're going to have to scramble occasionally, but we have our sea legs, and now is the time to get proactive about what we can do so that the deck's not so wobbly.

Dauida Lara:

That's right, and I think what is going to help us with that is... And I hate to use this because it's not a very sexy way of saying it, but their basic stuff is getting people paid accurately and on time needs to just be done, there's no question on the importance of doing that at a minimum, right? And what we are doing every day is getting to that, making sure people are paid accurately on time point. At any point your processes or your people or your technology is not getting that done, the strategic conversation doesn't get to happen, you don't even get to get in a room to have a conversation about what you can do to take the discipline forward or the company forward. If that very basic, and I'm using basic differently, because my daughter would say basic is not good, but in Payroll, basic is good. Let just focus on the fact that getting that done is a really great thing. If you get that done, then you can contribute to the conversation strategically, I believe.

Nina Talley:

And maybe we don't use the term basic, maybe we use the term vanilla, it's the base layer of our cake, but vanilla is actually a very complex flavor that was very hard to get, I hold of for a long time, and I don't know if anybody's had to do any grocery shopping for the holiday season that just passed, but it was hard to get vanilla beans.

Dauida Lara:

They get vanilla beans. Do you know what? That is a brilliant analogy, that is brilliant analogy.

Nina Talley:

They're not basic, they're vanilla.

Dauida Lara:

They're the vanilla.

Nina Talley:

They're vanilla, it's still very complex.

Dauida Lara:

I love [inaudible 00:19:57] so much. That's a good job, Nina.

Nina Talley:

Thank you. What does the future of payroll look like? Find out if the payroll solution showcase of free APA and GPMI collaboration on March 3rd and fourth, where you can gain insights on reshaping the employee experience through embracing automation, different pay options, and payroll and HR information systems. This free event is for anyone in the payroll industry, seeking out the best solution for their company's challenges. This must attend showcase features multiple panel discussions for the opportunity to earn RCHs as well as product demos, case studies and product user interface sessions with more than a dozen vendors. Don't delay, invite your whole team today. Register at www.payrolsolutionsshowcase.com. Again, that's www.payrolsolutionsshowcase.com. So now is the time in our podcast for something that we like to call, "Payroll nightmares," and sharing these stories is often, I think, a sort of catharsis, and I love that it shows how Payroll is truly an even playing field. Davida, I know you have had a few nightmares under your belt, just a few, but do you particular that you would like to share with our listeners?

Davida Lara:

Oh my goodness, there so many and someone is going through one right now as we speak on this podcast. I'll give you two, and they'll be quick. The one that I think everybody has is the one that you do everything absolutely right, nothing could have went better, your deadlines are met, payrolls done, and then something happens with the banking file, and you're going to call that no direct deposits went through. That nightmare for me is too repetitive, but it goes back to what I said before, is the importance of understanding that payroll is a partnership, that you can't keep going to your payroll, people, and telling them to solve world peace when you don't realize that so many other people are involved with making sure that paycheck gets to you. So I always tell people, "Oh, well that's not a... People say that's not a payroll problem." It's all a payroll problem, because people think it's a payroll problem because they can't appreciate the partnership, and what we use, can't blame the banking system, you just got to work with the banking system to get it done, right? So that nightmare people go through all too often, just being able to hope that their money hits that account when you don't control it, right?

Nina Talley:

I think it's a payroll problem because who's going to get yelled at?

Davida Lara:

And that's another thing I like to... For every payroll person who's ever been yelled at, I've got some tips tricks in a future podcast to make sure that never happens again. We'll talk about how I combat that because that completely is unacceptable, and it is one of the things that I focus on most importantly, with my team in making sure that they feel appreciated for what they do.

Nina Talley:

Oh, that's wonderful.

Davida Lara:

Another thing is everybody who's gone into a situation where the company has decided to go global and forgot to tell the Payroll company or can't tell the payroll team or-

Nina Talley:

This happens surprisingly often.

Dauida Lara:

It's, "Oh, yes, we're global." "I'm sorry when?" "Yeah, we've had five people working in London." "Oh, have you?" Right? So that's always a nightmare that I've had way too often is learning that I was working for a global company, [inaudible 00:23:32] had a discussion with the Payroll department.

Nina Talley:

And have you figured out a process to sort of rapidly resolve that sort of global snafu?

Dauida Lara:

Well, yeah. Partnerships are huge, right? Luckily over the years I've built so many relationships that I can pick up a phone call. "Hey guys, can you get some people paid in this-"

Nina Talley:

Get that network.

Dauida Lara:

Yes, get that network and get somebody that can do it for you fast while you figure out strategically what it is you need to solve. That's why that local partnership and compliance is so important, because you got to be able to deliver fast, because they don't think about what happens if you don't do that right. So getting the company compliant is probably the most important thing for our payroll professional. Anyway, making sure you do it, because the penalties man, penalties that we get in our space, I think highlighting the risk of not doing it right way is what gets them doing it the right way.

Nina Talley:

Exactly.

Dauida Lara:

So all the Payroll listeners learn every pitfall that could happen if it's not done and present that people don't forget that.

Nina Talley:

It's very true, nothing will motivate your boss seeing how much money they will lose.

Dauida Lara:

Oh, absolutely. I'm a big fan, it's always about numbers. People, this is where numbers matter. I always say payrolls about people, but when it comes to penalty, highlight the numbers.

Nina Talley:

Highlight the numbers.

Dauida Lara:

I like the numbers.

Nina Talley:

Do you want to hear how our expert guests would've handled the payroll nightmare that you are familiar with? Send an email to podcasts@americanpayroll.org or leave us a call on the APAs Facebook page to get involved in the conversation, who knows you might be featured next month. So now let's flesh that nightmare away with some positivity, I have one more question for you Davida, and that is what is the best piece of Payroll advice that you have ever been given or what is the piece of advice that you wish somebody had given you?

Davida Lara:

That's such a hard one because I think the best piece of advice was me learning from it, and now I give that advice to everybody. It's really appreciating and I hate to be repetitive, but it's really important to do this, is appreciating what you do is about people, and the human aspect of it, right? Don't look at, it is just a job, because I think payroll can't be just a job in order for you to do it well. I think you have to understand that you're there to do that very same thing, which is get paid, and if you actually thought about what that means, if someone consistently didn't get that right to you, and then your life, what that would do to your life, then you wouldn't screw it up. I tell everybody in any job, whether it's payroll or making widgets since I use that or whatever it is you do, if you don't appreciate that passion that you have on the outcome, you won't do it well. It doesn't mean that your job has to be a passion, it just means you have to have passion for delivering that outcome. Does that make sense to you Nina?

Nina Talley:

It does, it's a passion for the person that you're serving.

Davida Lara:

Exactly, right? I didn't get that. I wish someone had told me that because I probably would've gotten myself deeper into payroll in this discipline a lot sooner, and who knows? I speak a lot about it now, but I think it would've gone, and I'm not to say that I would've been able to claim it, but I think payroll would've been a lot further along in many organizations that I belong to, if I had known that.

Nina Talley:

I think that's probably very true. And I think it... Again, it ties into that human element, and we keep going back to it, and I think it's because it's so important that... It can just be numbers to some people, but you won't find a lot of satisfaction in that, just crunching the numbers and not remembering the lives that you're affecting.

Davida Lara:

And then the other part of it, Nina, that I think is extremely important is don't let... I wish somebody would told me that payroll wasn't just something to do, that it was an opportunity for me to walk through a door with so many other opportunities. There's so many other opportunities for you because you know payroll, and use that as an advantage, and not as a hindrance. So when you see that role, and you're saying to yourself, "I don't know if I have the experience to do that, because I've only done payroll." The reason why you have the experience to do that is because you've done payroll. The other stuff, you can figure out what you need to learn, but if you take all the things that you've learned and do

in payroll, and then apply them to what you see, you'll be very surprised at how well the match work for that new role that you didn't think you were able to get.

Nina Talley:

I think that that's going to be one of my main takeaways from this episode is that payroll is not just payroll.

Dauida Lara:

That's right.

Nina Talley:

Payroll is not just payroll, it can really be what you want to make of it, just about having that fire and that passion.

Dauida Lara:

That's amazing, I'm glad that's what you got out of it because that's what I live every day, and I hope I'm an example for that, for so many people.

Nina Talley:

Well, I think so.

Dauida Lara:

Thank you, thank you so much.

Nina Talley:

Well, talk about a way to start the year. Dauida, you were such a lovely guest, thank you so, so, so much for sharing your expertise, and your time, and your enthusiasm with our listeners. It's a truly very transformative time in payroll, and I know that this conversation has given us all something to think about as we prepare for 2022.

Dauida Lara:

Well, thank you for having me Nina, and hi to all the payroll listeners, and remember to be proud of what you do because payroll is absolutely sexy.

Nina Talley:

That's such a lovely point, and I want to take a moment to thank all of our loyal listeners out there without you pay talk would not be possible. Make sure you rate, review, and subscribe on your preferred podcast streaming service, that is the absolute best way to support this podcast, and ensure that we can continue to bring you the human stories that make payroll so very personal. Until next time folks, this has been your host, Nina Talley with PayTalk.

Speaker 1:

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