Speaker 1:

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

Nina Talley:

Hey, everyone. Thanks for joining us for PayTalk, the podcast that brings you payroll's human side. I'm your host Nina Talley. And today, we're joined by Sarah Chasney, CPP director of payroll and HRIS at Pacific Bells.

Today, we're going to take a deeper look into human resources information systems, which are otherwise known as HRIS, and how payroll professionals can leverage these technologies for more efficient and satisfying payroll processes.

The intersection of technology and payroll is always one of my favorite topics here at PayTalk. And I'm so excited for Sarah to be joining us and sharing her expertise. Sarah, before we dive in, why don't you give our listeners a bit of your background in the payroll space?

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, thank you so much, Nina. I am beyond humbled to be here. I am an avid listener of PayTalk, and just truly honored to have been asked to have this conversation with you. So thank you for that. For my history in payroll, so many I've heard talk about in the past, I kind of just stumbled into it.

I was working as a hotel auditor, working 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM in the morning and wanted to get into an office job. Wanted to work 9:00 to 5:00 in a fun office environment. And so I went to a staffing agency and took one of those skills tests and found myself later on interviewing at this crazy white, big building in on the Bluffs of Carpinteria, California with this happy star on it.

I ended up being in the payroll department and finding this job in the payroll department at Carl's Jr. and Hardee's. And so I was really lucky to have been mentored by what I would consider some of the, I think, industry greats, some really innovative, awesome people, not just in payroll or HRIS, but just across the whole company.

I had a VP who was just beyond his time in innovation and best practices and automation and getting things digital. And I absorbed everything I could form him and from our manager who was just a classy leader. And so eventually I worked my way through different roles, different specialist roles, customer support, corporate payroll, small scale international payroll, then eventually moved into HRIS payroll systems and then up through supervision and management.

So really great experience there. We had some good implementations, some bad ones. I got a ton of really good experience. And we went through RFPs and BPOs and learned to manage acquisitions and divestitures where we just sold company restaurants off to franchise. Just a whole host of really great payroll and HRIS experience.

So after about 10 years of my adult life there and most of my payroll career, the offices were shutting down in California and I found myself meeting with this crazy long haired, kind of cool looking, whisky drinking, chief people officer, who was telling me all about the Pacific Northwest and about Pacific Bells and telling me that franchise could be my next home.

So he was talking about the team and how they were small and I really needed some management. And so came here to Pacific Northwest to Pacific Bells. We dealt with a ton and we really

have had the chance to build an amazing team, what I consider true rock stars, I would say, of the industry.

And then here at Pacific Bells, we actually have three different divisions to our department under payroll. So we have payroll production and support, compliance tax and audits, and then our HRIS division. So real spread out among the different tasks, but all kind of reporting out through payroll.

Nina Talley:

Wow. That is truly a full payroll journey. And I love how you've been sort of involved in larger businesses the entire time, and yet you were still able to connect with a smaller team and help them develop new practices. I think that's a lovely thing.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, absolutely. And a team here when I got here was about two payroll specialists and a part-timer as well.

Nina Talley:

Wow.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, when they started processing payroll. And this team actually now we've grown. It's sized to be able to support, but we process and provide payroll for over 265 Taco Bells across the country.

We're a major franchise of Buffalo Wild Wings and European Wax Centers, and we even have a few other companies as well. So multiple industries, multiple pay calendars, thousands of employees. And we did about 25,000 W2s last year under 16 different IDs. We were really proud of that.

Nina Talley:

Wow, that's really impressive. And I think that it also gives you such a great experience and background in HRIS specifically and how it can solve both small scale and large scale problems. So I'm really excited to dive into this with you.

Sarah Chasney:

Me too. You're absolutely correct. HRIS is the bread and butter of that. So, absolutely.

Nina Talley:

So let's start with the basics just for our listeners who maybe aren't familiar with an HRIS system. What is an HRIS?

Sarah Chasney:

That is a question I get a lot actually. HRIS in its plaintiffs form to me is a system used to collect and store data on an organization's employees. At a very broad level to me, the HRIS or human resource information systems is a software or an online solution for, man, everything from data entry to data tracking and data information needs for everyone from human resources, to payroll, to management and even accounting functions within a business.

So it's really useful for all processes, things you want to track in which you want to gather like that useful, purposeful data, those storytelling data that we've heard about on PayTalk before. HRIS it contains, I would say, all of the basic functions of human resource management and everything you need to do within it.

This is my favorite way of thinking of it. I always think of human resource information systems as the system which contains all of the resources and all the information and data for our humans. Human resource information systems, it's got all the data, right?

Nina Talley:

That is a pretty concise way to wrap it up. It is just the data for your human resources. And I think that something that I discovered as I looked more into it is that an HRIS is sort of what you need it to be and what your department needs it to be. There's no cookie cutter way of doing it.

It can really be customizable to your specific and individual needs. And I think that's something that as we dive in more to the specifics of it, that everyone should keep in mind that we're talking about one specific use case scenario most of the times when we're going to have this conversation here with Sarah, but that an HRIS can really transform into what you need it to be.

Sarah Chasney:

Absolutely correct, Nina. There's so many different modules and so many different components of what people consider an HRIS system. And there's always that conversation over what's HRIS? What's HCM? What's HRM? What are the different systems? And really it's whatever you need it to be and what you're making of it. So totally agree.

Nina Talley:

Excellent. And so what sort of made you first take the transition from a standard payroll position to an HRIS manager?

Sarah Chasney:

I love this question just because I remember so vividly being a payroll specialist for my last employer, and we had this timeframe when you would go to process payroll, it was two, three hour timeframe where it was just pure, utter chaos. Everyone had these stacks of papers that you would enter in time off requests and things that you needed to process for the payroll.

And it was just you'd run out of your cube and say, all right, I finished my stack. Where's the next stack. And who's got next thing to enter. And of course, there were errors and data entry issues and not nearly enough time to audit or make sure you were doing things right. But then oddly enough, there was this process where we had these bonuses.

It took weeks to calculate these bonuses, spreadsheets upon spreadsheets and calculations. But at the end of that process, this couple week long process, you'd have this file that you would then import into the system. And I remember thinking and asking my payroll manager like, hey, if we can import those bonuses, why can't we do that with everything else?

It's just crazy. This chaos time is nuts. And she goes, it's a really good question. Let's go talk to HRIS. And so I remember walking over to HRIS and kind of giving them our concept and our idea and saying, hey, is this possible?

And so we kind of sketched out our thoughts and sketched out what we wanted and what we wanted to see and what files we needed afterwards, what output reports and data we would need to review to make sure everything loaded correctly. And it went to testing and developments and then more testing.

And before we knew it, we had this file that we were able to upload, and we eliminated these hours upon hours of data entry during this crunch time. And our payroll got more accurate, and it just totally opened my eyes up to this world where you could take a process or an organizational need and analyze or visualize a solution that could come to fruition. It was the most magical thing to me.

And then ironically enough, so one of the next projects we worked on working with payroll and HRIS was building a process in the system that would calculate and take all that logic and those spreadsheets that we did in that weeks' long bonus process. And we were able to create a very quick and easy process that did those calculations for us in the system.

So also opened my eyes up to payroll strategy and what you could do, and my love for payroll and being creative, finding solutions to these serviced based positions that don't really generate revenue. How could you save time? How could you do more for your company and better your accuracy? It was fun.

Nina Talley:

I love that story so much because I think it sort of showcases how whether you've been in a position for a long time or you're new to a company, that oftentimes things are just done the way that they're done even if they're not the most efficient and that sometimes all it takes to change that is asking the question.

Sarah Chasney:

Yes, just ask.

Nina Talley:

And I think that HRIS really empowers payroll professionals to question, how is your data working for you? Can you make it work more efficiently for you? Can you make it work harder for you? Can it slow down on redundancies or audits or any type of mistake because we are all human? And once you sort of put the HRIS process in place, it does remove a bit of that human element.

Sarah Chasney:

It does. But systems are not perfect.

Nina Talley:

That's very true

Sarah Chasney:

And you need to be able to build and design those systems as best as possible and those processes as cleanly and scalable as possible too. So some of that human entry goes away, but humans will never go away.

Nina Talley:

No, never. And I hope that that is another thing that we really sort of talk about a little bit more in this conversation is that you can put the process in place, but you should always be updating your processes. You should always be questioning how the data is working for you. And the system isn't going to do that. The system is just going to take your instructions and spit something out for you.

Sarah Chasney:

That is so right. I feel like I shout that from the rooftops all the time, all day long.

Nina Talley:

So let's talk specifics, what does HRIS do at Pacific Bells? And how do you see it evolving in the future?

Sarah Chasney:

So here, our HRIS team is really payroll professionals who have been promoted. I like to call them payroll professionals on steroids. That's kind of what it is to me, but they handle cool maintenance, a cool administration, time off administration reporting and analytics, masters of data.

They do integration maintenance, connecting and monitoring rather the functionalities between the different systems from module to module, whether it's time and attendance or talent acquisition, onboarding, payroll, business intelligence, benefits, self-service.

I mean, everything from roles and access, manager self-service and the workflows and the approval processes, all of that is built and maintained by our HRIS team. They connect all the modules, all the data. And I always like to look at it as we're connecting all that data to our own roles, making us responsible for everything within the entire life cycle of the HRIS system.

And we take it seriously. We take that responsibility seriously. We want that life cycle of the employees data. We want to be able to be entrusted, managing securely and confidentially on all the data that's put into our systems. So it's really exciting.

And what I think is great for our listeners here is that at Pacific Bells, HRIS is very much a payroll position. It's got a really close partnership to HR. We partner with IT and other departments across the company, not just to support, but to work on different projects and really work cross functionally to help maintain the structure and the architecture of our system.

And ultimately, all that is really done with that goal to attain what I know everyone wants to hear, which is that perfectly processed, compliant, timely and accurate, wonderful payroll.

Nina Talley:

And I think that that's something that's good to point out for our listeners is that this is truly going to be a partnership between departments in your company and that you can pick their brains about how an HRIS could integrate in.

You don't have to be the sole ideator there. You can work with people who know the technology already and just sort of brainstorm on how the technology can help solve your biggest headaches. And everyone loves solving headaches in payroll. So everyone will get behind it.

Sarah Chasney:

Absolutely. There's some really smart people throughout different organizations who take different approaches and really see things from a different perspective. I know for us, it's really important to remember operations. What are our managers doing in the stores?

How can we support them and make these processes better? And almost every time it involves working with HR and IT, and partnering as one cohesive team and really figuring out what the best strategy is for our organization.

Nina Talley:

And what would you say since you've integrated HRIS a little bit more into your payroll department since when you first came on, what would you say has been the biggest benefit of having an integrated HRIS?

Sarah Chasney:

I would say the biggest benefit of having integrated HRIS is the data, being able to access all of the data that's used then for decision making and analysis. And we've heard it so many times in PayTalk, we've heard it so many times before where it's you need the data, you need to be able to tell the story and you need to be able to assess what's happening.

And leaders want that now. And with the world changing and evolving with technology, I mean, you need a clean database with all sorts of knowledge and maintenance and eyes monitoring all the timing of things. And if you can get that right, you've got a hell of a lot of strategy there.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. And as you've said, we talk about it a lot on PayTalk is how important data is to making sure that your voice is heard, because you can say that something is a problem or that you can fix something, but if you don't actually have hard data to back it up, it can often be difficult at times to get that buy-in from either the higher ups or the departments that you need alongside you.

So I think that's a very excellent point, is that HRIS is going to collect and correlate data to the standards that you need it to be met. It's very important.

Sarah Chasney:

Absolutely. And it's absolutely helped us here in terms of evolving and quantifying things and being able to, again, take those ideas and those concepts and projects and bring them to fruition. So totally agree.

Nina Talley:

And for somebody who's looking to sort of expand their HRIS knowledge or get HRIS involved into their payroll department, are there any courses or experiences that could help a payroll professional sort of get a leg up on that?

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah. As far as courses, I would say, look at the APA. There's a ton of opportunities. There really are. Whether it's to earn RCH or to educate yourself. I remember just at virtual congress alone last year, there were some really good opportunities to learn from people like Biggie and Josh Aston and Pete Tiliakos, who I know has been on PayTalk before.

Keep your eyes up for those sessions, those courses because, man, I used some of that material with my team and they're great resources. So I definitely would say as far as courses, that's a great place to start. For experience, get into an implementation. Figure out what you want to do, what you want to implement, learn where the data lives, which tables and which modules are used and which fields and how it all kind of connects.

Knowing that and knowing how it works and knowing the specifics of a system is so pertinent to operating efficiently. And I always think knowing it is also how it helps me to challenge the system, challenge what doesn't work and what limits us. So right now, for example, we have current limitations. There's always limitations and no perfect process or system.

And with our current limitations in our system, we're big, we have processes that aren't really efficient for us. And so we just conceptualize ideas. We think through what might work, which fields we might want to use and find these unique ways to use the system and maximize it. So we're fortunate we were able to make suggestions to our HCM vendor.

And I always say like, man, if the system can't do something, like you said earlier, why. Just ask why? Because I could think about the logic that it takes and I could think about what fields I would need to use as a reference maybe to clean up data when it's inevitably put in wrong or when people onboard using the wrong codes.

And maybe the system could clean that up on its own if you could just tell it how to do so. And so just having that opportunity to be able to maximize the system is a benefit I'm grateful for. So I always say, just get into an implementation, drill into the systems, drill into the issues, and you're halfway there, you're in HRIS.

Nina Talley:

And I think a lot of what you just described is also really interesting from a standpoint of somebody who is looking to expand their payroll career and maybe they've either gone as far as they can in payroll, or they're looking for something a little different in their payroll experience.

Maybe they were always a little bit more technology minded, but they didn't quite know how to break into that space and they already have a really strong payroll career. Going into HRIS management and just asking these logic questions is a wonderful way to expand your skillset, but also scratch that learning itch that some of us have where we can feel a little maybe stagnant in our positions.

And there's endless processes that you can learn about and endless ways to cut up your data. And going into HRIS management, I think, is an excellent way of discovering a new side to your career.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, absolutely. And that's very much a large part of what I experienced. And I would say it's easy in life and in payroll, especially to get daunted on what you do and to feel stunted a little bit perhaps. And so HRIS totally opens up that door. For me, it opened up my world, my eyes. It allowed me to teach as well and to see my team.

And gaining this passion for payroll, the same passion for payroll and HRIS that I had just kind of watching that grow is awesome. I wanted to share this. I asked someone on my team this question and I loved their answer. And I think coming from someone who is in that moment right now where they're just were a payroll specialist evolved. So I wanted to see if I could share her answer with you guys and give you her perspective.

Nina Talley:

Yes, please.

Sarah Chasney:

Awesome. So she says, when I started as a temp, I had zero payroll experience. To be honest, I didn't even know there were careers in the payroll department and I had a degree in business. I had only learned about finance, HR, and the accounting department functions and none of them appealed to me enough to specialize in one over the other.

So she went on to say, I loved working with people and systems, but I also enjoyed working through complex legislator and math problems. The payroll department allowed me to have experience in all of the above. So then she was promoted then, like I said to HRIS. And so when she went on to talk about HRIS, she says, my career in HRIS has really brought payroll together for me.

HRIS has improved my payroll knowledge as much as it's improved my knowledge of systems and integrations. Having knowledge of the systems and how they communicate has allowed me to work through payroll processes with more clarity and confidence than I had previously. Personally, HRIS has not only provided me with the knowledge to work through the complex issues, but the confidence to do so.

Technology is daunting and a career that focuses on systems can seem like something only meant for those that have multiple degrees in the field. But I feel lucky to have a company that recognized my potential and my dedication to learning. And I couldn't have even said that better myself. What a great way of describing what it's like to transition from payroll to HRIS.

Nina Talley:

Interested in finding the latest payroll technology for your company, check out the current solutions available by watching the Payroll Solution Showcase, a free APA and GPMI collaboration where you can gain insights on embracing automation, different pay options, and even payroll and HR information systems.

This free event now available on demand through October 31st 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 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.payrollsolutionsshowcase.com. Again, that's www.payrollsolutionsshowcase.com. So what would you say if you had to estimate, how quickly did your career evolve from standard payroll professional to HRIS manager?

Sarah Chasney:

Oh, that's good. So I would say, I remember being a payroll manager, just a payroll manager at the time and working on a big implementation. We were moving from one system to the next. It was a massive implementation. They had already implemented what we called Phase 1, which was HR and onboarding and talent.

And so payroll kind of came after the fact and wasn't too involved in the decision actually for which system and what process at the time. And we just kind of got stuck with this process system. And I remember saying to my leader at the time, my amazing mentor, I said, man, we just got to learn this system. We got to learn it in and out. And we did.

We learned how it worked. We learned what it did, how it fed to one part to the next. And that really just opened my eyes up. I had already been in HRIS. I had been an HRIS analyst and moved back onto the payroll system side.

And so kind of just that exposure to the implementation and to the structure, connecting all the pieces from the different modules, I knew I wanted to take on HRIS on my next role. So it wasn't too long. Maybe about a year or two of just that implementation experience before I moved on and got a role as both payroll and HRIS manager.

Nina Talley:

Yeah, that is pretty rapid. And so the learning curve is a little steep, but again, as you're not specifically the programmer who's engineering these processes, it's really just about understanding the concepts and working through the logic. And so if somebody wants to make the jump, you can do so fairly rapidly.

Sarah Chasney:

Absolutely. And I mean, with the way things are moving now, now is the time. Good time to get into technical.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. And that leads in so well to my next question, which is over the last two years, we've a really, really rapid digitization of payroll in general. And would you say that that need has elevated and turned the need for HRIS professionals?

Sarah Chasney:

Oh, Nina, yes. So I remember, I think it was your first episode actually with Linda Obertin and Dimitris. And I remember hearing them talk about this and thinking, man, they're just speaking to my heart. And I remember KPMG Jake and Forty or KPMG who also talked about the same thing. Payroll has evolved. It started evolving even before the pandemic.

It started getting more technical and more mobile and requiring more automation. And so we started to see this a couple of years before. We started to see imports, and automation, and integrations, and increased need for user facing abilities, users who could create self-sufficiencies. And I would say in this pandemic world, or at least hoping to get there.

Nina Talley:

One day.

Sarah Chasney:

One day, right? We've seen this industry just skyrocket with automation and integrating data and accessible data no less and mobilely through your phones. Everyone has got to access it. So I think that increased need for analytics and analytical thinkers, testers, designers, implementers, really strategic payroll leaders too.

We need to proactively design and scale a system to fit the growing needs of an organization all, again, with that overall goal of stellar employee experience and the correct and timely paycheck. So I think HRIS is going to be so pertinent. And we talked about this saying systems are not perfect. AI, automation, integrations, those have fallouts. They sometimes don't work.

Sometimes they don't even go. They just stop running sometimes. And so you're only as good as the processes you put in place, the data that's going into them and the people that are monitoring

them. So to me, HRIS and technical professionals are going to be so crucial to adding value to an organization throughout the next couple of years especially.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that. And I think that it bare saying again to just get in there and start asking questions. There's no reason to not. And you can make a position for yourself. If your company doesn't even know what HRIS can do for it or what the data in payroll can do for it, if you are the individual there asking the questions and thinking through the logic and trying to figure out how you can make things more efficient, it will pay back.

Sarah Chasney:

So, so true. You just got to ask.

Nina Talley:

You just got to ask. So I heard that you got your CPP designation in this last year, which congratulations. We all know how hard and difficult that is to study for it and achieve, but I was curious as to how that has worked into HRIS and if it's helped in any way.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, thank you. CPP, something I have wanted to do for a long time and I think, like so many of us, implementations and life and kids and projects and all that just always seemed to take priority. But I wanted it and I committed to it. And much I think like my analyst, Shelby, had said earlier when I was reading off her experience, it gave me confidence.

The CCP just gave me this newfound confidence in what I do and why I do it. Speaking of which, I would be remised to not say this, but if you're listening, I highly recommend PayTrain if you're going for your CPP. It was fantastic and totally helped me click everything for me.

Nina Talley:

Oh great.

Sarah Chasney:

And just the other day, actually, I had an experience where I thanked my CPP and it was HRIS related in that I was trying to figure out why something wasn't working right and why a system was not displaying the values and the things I would expect to see. And so I was looking at it. It was actually on the Pay's tub. And my knowledge now of the gross to net calculation and what should be there helped us kind of buy in the issue pretty quickly.

So it's definitely helped me. It's kind of helped identify where I need to be looking and things. And then my favorite part of this in CPP is it has totally engaged my team. I think they're just jealous of the CCP certification. Just yesterday we finished a lunch and learn where we were learning. We went over FICA and taxable compensation and actually one of our team members is scheduled for her CPP exam in a few months.

Nina Talley:

Oh, good.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah. As a senior leader of this organization, I'm personally really proud that we make it a priority to educate and empower our teams to better their careers. So I'm super thankful for that.

Nina Talley:

We'll really be rooting for her over here. Good luck.

Sarah Chasney:

Totally.

Nina Talley:

And I think that what you had brought up about how your CPP knowledge allowed you to sort of check your HRIS system, that is such an excellent way to showcase the fact that there is still a human that is needed. You can implement the systems and the system can be wrong.

And we need the payroll professionals and the HRIS managers out there to have of the knowledge to catch it, because it can be easy to rest on your laurels. And you never should. You should, again, always question your data, always question how your data is working for you and question if it's being accurately collected or little things like that, that we need your human eyes on.

And so never feel intimidated by the HRIS coming in and "automating"... And you can't see it, but I am using air quotes, "automating" your job because you're just a manager of the processes as well as the rest of your payroll team.

Sarah Chasney:

It is so true. And I think it's so important to remember that. Like I said, processes are not perfect and you need humans to be able to apply that human aspect, that human side to what's happening these days. And people are a big part of it now. People are a big part of every organization, the experience, the people. The People don't want wrong paychecks. They don't want a really tough time.

Nina Talley:

Nobody wants a wrong paycheck.

Sarah Chasney:

No. And they certainly don't want a tough time getting into their systems or accessing things. So I think it's just super pertinent and super important. On another note for me, man, I've learned so much from the APA's committees, being able to volunteer and being able to just hear what other issues and problems people are experiencing because we all somehow have the same issues in different capacities.

And just kind of getting that exposure has also helped evolve my HRIS mind and payroll strategic leadership in terms of what can we do? What can we look at? How can we perfect and change things because humans are needed to do that. We are needed to make things better.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. So now is the time in our podcast for something we to call payroll nightmares. And I love sharing these stories with our listeners. And before we spoke for the actual podcast, Sarah let me know that she is a listener as well and that she particularly loves our payroll nightmares and that she's been percolating

on what she could bring to us for quite some time. So, Sarah, can you share your payroll nightmare with us?

Sarah Chasney:

Oh, yes. I've thought about this so many times throughout the last two years. I think it was [inaudible 00:32:14]. I could come up with the ones where I made ton of mistakes. I've made mistakes because, man, I have made my fair share. We all have, right? We're only human. But one of my favorite ones that I just think about way too often is where something just went wrong at every turn. It was one of those.

We had an acquisition. Before I had come here at Pacific Bells, we had taken over these 60 stores in California. So about 2000 employees. And at the time, they were actually all on paper checks. And so they had an old archaic system with servers onsite in California and they were processing the payroll in an office in California.

And so with this acquisition, we were taking on the payroll eventually and we were going to have some time to learn it and it gets exposed to it, but unfortunately the staff that was there had decided to move on at that time. And so it was kind of an abrupt takeover.

We had to kind of come in. We had about two weeks to learn this new process, new system, new people, new leaders. I mean, everything. It was abrupt, to say the least. And not only that, but it was a system that we had to remote into. We had to send our files through to the printer here from Washington.

Nina Talley:

Super fun.

Sarah Chasney:

Right. I mean, you could just imagine promoting in on a payroll and this is another payroll because we were already currently processing payrolls, multiple ones, in fact, because we were still in four other systems at the time. And so we were running into issues left and right. Everything that you could imagine.

We had system support helping us. I mean, ultimately, we just had to kind of let jobs run. That was their advice, just let the job run. And so it would run for hours and then it would time out. And so it was just this praying adventure where you were praying it would finish. And I actually slept here. I slept here one night on a Saturday night.

Nina Talley:

Oh my gosh.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, watching these jobs and just knowing if I didn't hit the button right at the right time, it might not work. And it was a Tuesday check date. It was Saturday at that time. And we were just running low on time at this point knowing that we're here in Washington and we had to get all these checks to California. And so I remember it was Monday morning and we finally got the payroll to process, got positive pay files out.

We were able to generate these. And started moving towards actually printing the checks. And so we started sending the job from the servers in California over to the printers here in Washington. And

we start printing and about halfway through the batch, the MICR toner starts running low. Starts running low.

Nina Talley:

It's always toner. How is it always toner?

Sarah Chasney:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And the signatures on the check were almost not even visible at this point. And so we couldn't open the printer or stop the jobs. It was an archaic printer, archaic jobs, archaic system. We couldn't easily reprint. And so I'm running around and I'm going to stores trying to find toner, the special toner.

And we have our office receptionist just kind of digging in corners looking for toner. And we eventually found some. And so we load it and we start printing checks. And so I go into my office and I take this deep breath of like, oh my gosh, I've only been here a few months too at the time. So I start breathing again until I hear a payroll specialist go wait, what's wrong with the printer? And my heart just totally sunk.

I walk out and I see that the check is actually printing so slow. This printer is on its dying breath. And I'm like, how many stores do we have left? And so we had 27 stores to print still. We had 20 to 25 employees per store and this check printer is printing a check every 30 seconds. And then every minute, and then it's taking two minutes just to print one check.

Nina Talley:

Oh no.

Sarah Chasney:

And it's like 4:00 PM, 3:00 PM at the time. And our latest pickup for UPS is not far from now, and it's Monday. Tomorrow is check date. And so I remember walking over to my CFO's office and I looked at him and I said, we're going to need to book me a flight. So I'm going to need to get on a plane tonight or tomorrow morning and deliver these checks to California. I'm not going to make payroll.

And I won't not make payroll. I got to get these employees paid. So let's get me on a flight. And now we were in the midst also of starting to plan with a new vendor for system implementation to consolidate. I'd slept there two nights earlier for a job. So I was exhausted. And fortunately, he had one of our finance guys jump on the plane. And so he actually hand delivered the checks the following morning.

Nina Talley:

Wow.

Sarah Chasney:

So, I mean, talk about a time where literally everything you can imagine went wrong, but we got payroll done. Wasn't perfect by any means, but everyone got paid.

Nina Talley:

It was done.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah. And then we were able to move into a new system. So it was great.

Nina Talley:

Perfect. That's truly the closer to that story that I was hoping for.

Sarah Chasney:

Right out of this. Never experience that again. I think one of the most important things to remember with any of these payroll nightmares is stuff goes wrong. It's all about how you deal with it. Diffuse, communicates, address, find proactive ways to make sure it doesn't happen again, and move on. Don't dwell. That's the advice I can give.

Nina Talley:

Don't dwell. Sometimes it's just how the cookie crumbles. And like you said, it is about how you react and coming up with those sort of dynamic problem solving skills of well, obviously, we're not going to hit FedEx today. So what do we do? Well, we book a plane ticket.

Sarah Chasney:

Jump on a plane. It gets you there.

Nina Talley:

Do you want to hear how our expert guests would've handled a payroll nightmare you're familiar with, send an email to podcasts@americanpayroll.org or leave us a comment on the APA's Facebook page to get involved in the conversation.

And we don't really like to leave things on a negative note with our nightmares. So I have one more question for you, Sarah. What is the best piece of payroll advice you've ever been given? Or what is the piece of advice you wish you had been given?

Sarah Chasney:

Oh, man, I ruminated on this one for a while too. I was very lucky in my career to have some really amazing mentors. My old mentor was one of those leaders who just had the best stories and the best analogies and slogans.

And he taught me everything from GEICO, which I've heard a ton of times throughout the APA and trusting the system, simplify kind of like a Ted Lasso poster on the wall for Believe and simplify, rising above the fray was a good line. And then similar to what Martin, I think, talked about a few episodes ago was just trust, but verify.

My mentor used to put it as inspect what you expect. And so there's all of these really good, cheesy, awesome slogans that just really have helped me kind of get through and become a good leader, at least one that I hope to be.

And I think for me, one of the ones I have on my wall that I look at every day that kind of helps ground me personally in terms of advice was may you be proud of the work you do, the person you are, and the difference you make. And I think that's just so important with payroll and HRIS is that you can make a difference and you should be proud of what you do. And I'm super proud of what we do here.

Nina Talley:

Yeah, that's a lovely point. And it is really something I love to drive home at PayTalk, which is payroll is a very human position and you should be proud of the work that you're doing and you should be proud of the fact that you're making sure that your company's employees are getting paid because it makes all the difference.

If somebody doesn't get paid, it brings down morale of the team, it brings down morale of that individual. You're less likely to retain your employees, which we know right now is a huge thing on the mind for most companies, is how do we retain our employees?

And if you're not paying them on time, it's not happening. And you're making somebody's life more difficult as well. Let's be real. A lot of us live paycheck to paycheck and you need that paycheck on that Tuesday, even if it means somebody has got to get on a plane.

Sarah Chasney:

Yeah, absolutely. It's so very important. And I think I personally have been blessed with that opportunity to really feel like I've made an impact, not just with the organization, but our employees.

And like I said before, our team just watching them grow and gain that same passion that I know so many of us in the industry have for what we do and what an impact we can make. So honored and blessed to be in the role and really feel like it's an exciting next couple years coming up.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree. And what an excellent way to end this episode, Sarah. Thank you so much for joining us today and giving us your insight into HRIS.

I know that it's going to be invaluable for our listeners moving forward and that you've really given them something to think about how they can change their lives and the lives of everyone that they work with and the lives of their department. It's a truly transformative time and a truly transformative technology that can be used.

Sarah Chasney:

Thank you so much, Nina. I enjoyed this more than you know. This has been quite the experience and I'm so grateful to have been here. And shout out to my team and to our employees, all of our stores. And really looking forward to seeing more faces throughout the APA and continuing to volunteer and learn more about what everyone does and what everyone's issues are. Really excited to be in this industry right now.

Nina Talley:

That's such a lovely way to top it off. And I want to also take a moment to give a shout out to all of our listeners out there, without you PayTalk would not be possible. So make sure that you rate, review, subscribe on your favorite podcast streaming service or multiple podcast streaming services, if you're feeling a little extra spicy.

That is truly the best way to support this podcast and ensure that we can continue to bring stories like Sarah's to you all to showcase the human side of payroll. Until next time, folks, this has been your host, Nina Talley, with PayTalk.

Speaker 1:

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