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Welcome to Pay Talk, 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 Pay Talk, the podcast that brings you payroll's human side. I'm your host, Nina Talley, and today we're joined by Ginnette Clark, CPP, a consultant and employee-owner at Wise Consulting, and Vice President at the American Payroll Association. It's a new year, and we're examining a potential new career path for our listeners, payroll consulting.

Consulting in 2023 looks very different than it did even just five years ago. I'm really, really excited for the opportunity to speak with Ginnette about her personal journey into payroll consulting, and also to examine all the ways that you can mold payroll consulting to suit your needs and create an engaging and fulfilling career. So before we get started, Ginnette, I would love it if you could introduce yourself and tell our listeners a bit of your background.

Ginnette Clark:

Hi. My name is Ginnette Clark. I have been in payroll for over 20 years. I've been consulting for five years, and implementing payroll systems and HCM systems for probably close to 10 years. I love what I do. I love payroll. Loved managing, but consulting has really become my jam lately.

Nina Talley:

And, really only recently, five years out of a 20-year career. That's pretty new. So, why don't we talk a little bit about how you sort of found yourself transitioning into a payroll consultant and what that journey looked like for you.

Ginnette Clark:

Well, Nina, I would start out with... Gosh. Long time ago in the distant past, I actually went to a Payroll Leader's Conference. It was one of the first ones that the American Payroll Association hosted in Las Vegas. Martin Armstrong was one of the speakers for that week. Of course, it was one of the fall sessions, and it was an excellent opportunity to network and learn how to be a better payroll leader. As part of that networking, I ran into, or I met, the former APA President, Jane Holmes, and one of her colleagues. We kind of chatted a bit, talked about current trends and what we do for a living, and what we like about our jobs, and frankly even what we don't like about our jobs. Her colleague talked about the fact that she was a consultant. She had traveled all over the world, been to over 40 countries, and had been just living the dream.

I was so in awe of her that I decided right then and there I was going to start pursuing consulting as a profession. Now granted, this was over 10 years ago when I started this, and payroll consulting over 10 years ago looked a lot different than it does today. Today, there's a lot more services that are offered as part of consulting, whereas what I was looking at specifically was just implementation. As with anything, if you want a job somewhere, you have to learn how to do the work. So, my goal then became to bounce from job to job, to job until I got a really good handle on how to implement systems. So, I would say my next five jobs was a promotion for me, but B, also an opportunity for me to implement a new system. I used that experience to capture, I guess you'd say, the consulting job that I have today.

Over time the allure of traveling to distant countries has changed. As someone with adult children and grandchildren, that's not a priority, to be frank. So, today I virtually do no traveling, which is fine. I still love the consulting piece of it, and this is my end all be all, to be honest. I plan on spending my next 20 plus years in the consulting world.

Nina Talley:

I love that. The journey to get there was so smart and so deliberate. Then, also, it helps you bump up your pay grade with each step. You're learning new systems, you're getting paid more money, you're filling out that resume, and now you are a bit more of an implementations expert. Although consulting has changed, I think that that's a really wonderful foundation, and a good way to approach it. I also love the traveling bit because it's true at the beginning of your career you want to travel everywhere. After a certain amount of time, carry on bags don't have that much.

Ginnette Clark:

No. They don't, and hotel rooms don't have the same allure that they did. To be honest, you very rarely go some place exotic when you travel.

Nina Talley:

That's so true. It happens. It does happen. There is a way for payroll professionals to pursue specific opportunities that will put them in more exotic locales, but you don't get to choose. You're good to go.

Ginnette Clark:

Right.

Nina Talley:

I love that aspect of it. It's such a beautiful way to highlight the fact that consulting can evolve with you. Your preconceived notions about what it is and what it has to be, isn't true. You can continue to mold these opportunities. So, I definitely want to dive into that with you a bit more. Before we do, for those of our listeners who are maybe considering moving into consulting, how do they know that it's the right time, or maybe even the right move for them?

Ginnette Clark:

Well, I think the biggest thing that folks need to think about is, "What do they want to do?" So, for me it's implementations. I love doing implementations. I've always said, in the practitioner world, that it was your best opportunity to learn the most about the company that you're working for. You're dissecting every nuance of your company in order to make sure that your payrolls are correct, and the paychecks are delivered on time and accurately. But, for other folks, it could be maybe, "I like doing payroll, but I want to do something more like SWAT," for example.

Someone comes in and says, "Hey, I just lost my payroll manager. I need someone to help me to fill in the gap." Or, "My payroll person is going on maternity leave." So what SWAT does, at least that's what we call it at my job. What SWAT does, they kind of swoop in, learn your system, learn how you do your work, and then process the payroll for you. In other instances, maybe they need help with process improvements. So, that would be kind of that area. Or, maybe you love payroll, you just want to do it for somebody different. There are managed payroll consultants out there. That's what they do. They commit and process payrolls for other companies.

I would say the biggest thing is, generally, consulting work is remote work. So, the first thing is, you need to make sure that you like remote work because remote work isn't for everyone. Some folks don't mind being by themselves. Some folks don't mind working independently, and then, other people really need that social piece. There's ways to navigate around that, but you have to first be certain that that's what you want to do. Once you make that decision, then it really... I mean, for me, I had specific requirements when I looked for a job in consulting. I had to be a W2 employee. I didn't want a 1099 because I didn't want to hassle with all the taxes. As payroll people, we know what all those taxes are. It's kind of like the mechanic that never fixes his own car or the landscaper-

Nina Talley:

Exactly.

Ginnette Clark:

... his own yard. The last thing I want to do is process my own payroll mess, and tax, and [inaudible 00:08:29] into my taxes. Some people do and some people love it, some people don't mind. For me, it had to be a W2 employee. So, that was my first criteria. Then, the next ones really depended on how long had the company been in business, what did the culture look like, how big was the company and how much travel was going to be required. Then, based on that, I followed the process for interviewing to decide if that culture was the right fit for me, and if it was the right fit for the company that I was looking for. Really, a lot of the same stuff that you do today when you look for another job. So, I guess the biggest thing is really just understanding, "Do you want to make a move," and "Where do you want that move to be?"

Nina Talley:

I love that point. Given what we've talked about with how your career as a payroll consultant shifted as your needs did, as well, I think that... Something about payroll consulting, although there will be certain constraints placed upon you, it's easier for you to move a little bit more freely, maybe, from specialization to specialization, to not traveling as much, or traveling. It starts that way from the beginning, and it seems to give you a lot of control over what is happening in your life. I think that that's something that might really appeal to people who are okay with a remote lifestyle. It does involve a bit of isolation, and as you said, there are some ways to circumvent that. I think that most companies now have an internal Slack, or something like that, some type of internal communication system, that can help bring some of that social aspect into it. You do need to really know yourself, and know what you want. When you put that intention out there, from at least what I have seen, the payroll consulting puzzle just sort of starts to fall into place.

Ginnette Clark:

That's exactly right.

Nina Talley:

So, how can someone best prepare themselves for a potential consulting career? You know? Let's talk about what somebody could do today, tomorrow, next month, to make this sort of transition.

Ginnette Clark:

The first thing you need to do, or I guess in my opinion you should do, is decide what you want to do. Do you want to implement systems? Do you want to process managed payroll for other clients, or do you want to do something on the other side like consulting services, build best practices, that sort of thing? That would be the first thing. For me, it was implementation services, which meant I felt like I needed to get a good handle on how implementations work and understand... I mean, with every implementation, it's kind of like with payroll. We all have the basic same steps. We might use 10 different systems, if you had put 10 of us in a room, but the same basic steps are there. That's the same thing with implementations. The same basic steps are there. You still have to load your payroll elections, and you still have to load your deductions, and you still have to configure the time and attendance piece.

So, there's all of those same steps. It's really going to be about understanding what you do best and what kind of work you want to do going forward. Once you figure that out, then the important piece is to really hone into that, and make sure you have a good grasp on that and a good understanding. That's what your path really needs to be about. For me, it was all about implementation. I wanted to be able to implement. That's why I hopped from business, or job to job, so to speak, in order to get that good understanding. There's an equal number of jobs out there. It's managed payroll all the way, and that's what they do.

I know at Wise Consulting, for example, we have a managed payroll division, and we've got a junior payroll position. It's folks that are coming brand new into the payroll world, on up to an advanced managed payroll. That's what they do, is they process payroll for different clients. I tend to be one of those folks that I like to swoop in, fix something, and then swoop back out a lot. So, if I'm not doing implementation, that's the kind of work I'm doing. I'm kind of swooping, in fixing something, creating something, and then swooping back out. That would be the biggest thing that they need to do. You really got to understand yourself, understand what you want to do, and then move forward from there.

The next thing that you would need to do, I guess I would challenge folks to take a look at the consulting firms that are out there. What kind of culture do they have? What kind of services do they offer? How big is the company? Definitely, keep in mind that you may be offered a little bit less in an annual salary than what you're making today. Make sure you're taking into account the money that you save in commuting fees, wardrobe, lunches, that sort of thing. I came in making a little bit less than where I ended up at my last job. When I factor in the savings I would get, the wear and tear on my vehicle. The fact that I didn't have to keep an updated wardrobe. I mean, frankly, my wardrobe, it's a pair of leggings and a t-shirt most days.

Nina Talley:

It's when you do your best work.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. And, some days it's my pajamas. It really depends. You really need to take that into account, those expenses that you aren't going to have any longer. Make sure you have a dedicated space to work. Being able to move around your house in different areas is a good thing to do when you are doing remote work. If you have a nice sunny day, working outside on your patio or on your deck. Having a dedicated space is super important, especially when you have calls when you need to put your head down and focus. You've got to have those things.

Nina Talley:

I would completely agree with that. I think our next question sort of ties in with what we were just discussing, which is, how does a payroll consultant stay up-to-date on the technology changes in the payroll landscape? I think that because you're a little bit more isolated and you don't necessarily have that social aspect, that can be a key component of learning new technologies and processes. So, when you're sort of on the outset of things, how do you stay up-to-date?

Ginnette Clark:

Well, that's the beauty of the American Payroll Association, to be frank. So, you stay involved with your local chapter, stay involved at the state and the national level, make sure you maintain your membership with the APA, purchase items in the bookshelf from the American Payroll Association. Those are important things to make sure that you stay abreast of changes in compliance and technology. You do learn those things at your job, but I've always found that it's much better to be a little bit more proactive than it is to let things come to you. Any consulting firm worth their weight in gold will supplement and make sure that you have the tools that you need to stay abreast of things.

Nina Talley:

That's very true. That's probably something that our listeners should be looking out for when they are considering which consulting firm they want to partner with. Are they offering any educational benefits so that you can stay abreast of the constantly changing technology landscape in payroll. That's a lovely point. That should be something you should be looking for because that's just bolstering your career. It's good for the company, but it's incredible for your own future.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. Exactly. I will say, as well, you can't... This is why I say any consulting firm worth its weight in gold will allow those expenses, I guess if you will, to do those things to stay abreast. The more knowledgeable you are, the better best practice that you can give to a client that maybe isn't doing what they're supposed to be doing in the way that they're supposed to be doing it. You'll know where to go find those regulations that say, "This is how you need to do it." I can't tell you the number of clients that I've worked with that still pre-note their direct deposits, not because they really want to, but because they weren't aware that they didn't have to. Having that knowledge and being able to say, "You don't have to anymore and this is why," kind of a thing, you can speak to all of that. You've been educated, and any company that you work for should always allow for those expenses.

Nina Talley:

I love that. It's also a wonderful way to highlight your own worth within the company. It's one of those things that I really think... We constantly talk about it, here, at Pay Talk. Our listeners are probably right now, are like, "Yes, yes. Ongoing education." Ongoing education, listeners, it's a new year-

Ginnette Clark:

Right.

Nina Talley:

... get a new certification.

Ginnette Clark:

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My dad once told me that education determines a person's standard of living.

Nina Talley:

I think that's probably a really good point.

Ginnette Clark:

It is. It was the first thing he said to me when I decided I was going to college. I did it backwards. I got married and had kids, and then went to college. I would not recommend that.

Nina Talley:

You know? You found your path. However you found your path, it worked.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. But, it's very true. It's very true. The education that I've received both in the collegiate level and through what I've learned through the American Payroll Association, my local chapter, my statewide chapter, attending payroll congress, all of those things together has built value for me. I do hold true value in my company, and people seek me out for advice and best practices. I don't feel that I'm that smart, but I at least know where to go find the answer. I know where to go find the answer because the American Payroll Association has taught me how to do that.

Nina Talley:

I think that that might be the definition of wisdom, knowing that you're not smart enough to answer it outright, but knowing where to go looking for the answer. Well, you may not feel like you're that smart. You're very wise to even know that. That's a huge hurdle for a lot of people to even get over.

Ginnette Clark:

Well, thank you-

Nina Talley:

You're very welcome.

Ginnette Clark:

... wise, old one.

Nina Talley:

So, I think that we've talked a lot about practical skills, getting certifications from the APA, and staying up to date on emerging technologies. What would you say is one of the most unexpectedly useful skills, something you didn't expect to use as a consultant, but something that our listeners could maybe bring to the table that would really highlight them?

Ginnette Clark:

My patience. I didn't expect to-

Nina Talley:

Oh, yes.

Ginnette Clark:

... patience so much [inaudible 00:19:36]. I don't know. I mean, with payroll it's inherent. We're driven by deadlines. Right? So, we all have an inherent skill to know what our deadline is, and then be able to back into it. So in consulting, especially with implementations, we know when we're going live with that implementation. Then, we have to back all the tests into it so we know when to begin and when each task happens. So, that's always good. Strong organizational skills is always important. I never really thought that I would use my leadership skills as much as I did working-

Nina Talley:

Really?

Ginnette Clark:

Yeah. I really thought that I would just do the work and move on. I didn't realize at the onset, I think, that I was going to have to prepare root cause analysis, and I was going to have to be diplomatic. I had to really work hard on my relationship building. Relationship building and consulting has to be a forefront skill that you hone over years.

Nina Talley:

I'd completely agree with that.

Ginnette Clark:

Because we don't have a lot of time with clients, it's really important to solidify some of those relationships right away. I had to learn, quickly, how to start doing that. If you start a traditional job, you have time over the course of however long to build that relationship with clients. Even from an implementation standpoint, you might have four to six months to build that relationship. If you're just going in and do some configurations... Like at Wise, we do system reviews. I mean, those are a month-long thing. You always want to build those relationships because, to be honest, you want those people to think of you again the next time they have something that needs a solution. So, I would say I didn't realize that relationship building would be such a big piece of my job when I first started.

Nina Talley:

There's no doubt that payroll is a crucial business function. After all, payroll is the reason people come to work. But in this age of digital transformation and big data, payroll is a strategic asset that can be leveraged to improve the overall business strategy, employee experience, and the organization's financial well-being. The data that payroll is responsible for drives business results across the entire organization. Today, every payroll staff member is accountable for understanding and interpreting that data. That's why the American Payroll Association's Foundations of Payroll Analytics is a must attend course for payroll professionals who want to ensure their seat at the table and participate in planning business strategy, demonstrate dynamic leadership, leverage the value of data, identify trends for process improvements, and measure real success in your payroll operations. Register today for this interactive program offered virtually, or in person, at americanpayroll.org.

I think that everybody should have more patience. I'm sure we're all too impatient for our own good. I do find the leadership aspect of it, and I think that patience is a part of being a good leader. A little

surprising because you do sort of think of payroll consulting and consulting in general... You're a lone wolf, cutting your own path. You're coming in to assist people, and you're building relationships. Like you said, if you're only there for a month, you need to be able to make an impact on people's lives, not just by doing good work, but by being somebody that they enjoy working with.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. Exactly. I mean, if they don't enjoy working with me or if I can't build that relationship, I can do the best job all day long, but I'd become easily forgettable, if you will.

Nina Talley:

I completely agree with that. I think making sure that you stand out from the crowd is really important, especially in consulting. Making sure that if they can't remember your face, they remember your name. If they can't remember your name, they remember your face. Just making sure that you leave an impression so that they, like you said, continue to return to you because it is so important. I think that a lot of us overlook how important it can be to have those sort of returning relationships, and leaving a good enough impression. It's sort of a passive return, as well, because you set things up so well in the beginning.

Ginnette Clark:

Correct.

Nina Talley:

So, I think that something that is really interesting to think about, especially given how much payroll consulting has changed over the last five years, is what will payroll consulting look like in five years time from now? I would love to get your thoughts on what those future projections might look like.

Ginnette Clark:

Well, I've noticed a big, upward trend, to be honest, in clients coming to... They're not just implementing new systems. With the ever-changing landscape of workers, we have to provide better end user experience year over year to employers, or to employees rather. So employers are constantly looking for ways to say, "Yeah. But, we have this. We have early wage access. We have a one-stop shop to do everything." You don't have 15 or more different places that you have to log in in order to do your benefits, change your taxes, your address. It's all a one-stop shop. Those are big things, too. Inherently, I've seen a large, upward trend of clients that are looking to downsize their existing payroll departments, and take it fully external. For example, at Wise Consulting, we are always looking for people in managed payroll to help process payroll, year end, just payrolls over the pay period, all of that, always looking for. It's gotten, I hate to say worse, because it's not really worse, it's just a bigger-

Nina Talley:

Demand has increased.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. Demand has increased for that. Demand has increased for folks that are taking their vacation now, but maybe they didn't before. I mean, the one thing that COVID has taught a lot of us is to value your time away from work, and to use it-

Nina Talley:

Completely.

Ginnette Clark:

As people use it, you're finding gaps in the system, and finding inconsistencies that maybe you could build some efficiencies on to make work smarter, not harder. So, those are the biggest things that I see, Nina. The other big thing. Lately, I've seen a lot of work with implementations, but more so around the offerings that are being offered. So, I've seen employers, or clients in my case, that are looking to beef up their 401(k) match programs, for example. So, I've seen a lot of that. Folks that are looking to automate reporting for business analytics. They want instant analytics to be able to look at what their company is doing today. They can look at turnover. They can look at their budget based on their comp history. I mean, they're looking a lot at that. That's a big thing that's coming around the corner lately, is folks getting this BI.

You know? Another shameless plug. If you haven't taken the analytics classes through the American Payroll Association, now would probably be a good time to do it. I mean, that's coming, and folks are demanding it more and more. I get it. Right? So, when I was managing a large payroll department, we had our team doing all of that work manually. Then, putting it in these pretty graphs, and then posting it on this widget someplace. Well, now the systems are being able to do that automatically. If you have a fully integrated system, it helps it even more, to give you even more robust analytics. Those are the big things that I've been seeing lately.

Nina Talley:

It's also possible that the push for fully distributed payroll departments, as well as sort of these deeper data analytics and business analysis, seem to sort of go hand in hand. We're doing less hands-on paper and more general management and more data optimizations. While I do think that data optimization is such an underutilized tool within payroll departments, often, as a consultant, the data will help bolster your ability to better serve your clients. Then, also it gives you a wonderful ability to also showcase your own skills. When you implement these sort of data analysis systems and projects like that, you can then pull and show the benefits that you're actually giving to that client. So, it makes a lot of sense to me that you're seeing this push as we head into the new year and beyond.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. I think business intelligence, as a whole, has been underutilized by the payroll departments. What we all need to understand a little bit better is that being able to do those analytics, and having facts to back them up, helps us to make our companies better equipped to make good decisions about what they do in the company, especially as it relates to their employees and staffing. We've seen those classes, years over years, getting payroll into the C-suite, for example, trying to get a seat at the table. It's all around analytics and being able to draw true facts because numbers don't lie.

Nina Talley:

Exactly. I know, also, data analytics can be a little scary to some of us just because it can feel like it's coming to do our jobs. Automation is coming to do all of our jobs. One thing that I always love to underline is that you need clean data in order to make those algorithms run appropriately. The only person who can make sure that your data is clean is a human being. That's the only thing that can do it. We can't really train them at this moment to identify bad data. There is something behind taking the

reins into your own hands, and making sure that you're implementing those systems with clean data, and acknowledging to those who are benefiting from it that it was your clean data that made the algorithm run.

Ginnette Clark:

Correct. I find that the term automation and efficiency tends to freak out clients a little bit, especially in payroll and HR staff. The thing that I always tell them is, "By automating these manual tasks, you can be true payroll professionals, or human resource professionals, in your industry and audit the data that comes through, not key the data that comes through." There's a difference, to be frank. There's a difference in the wage band between keying the data and auditing the data. As a payroll manager, or a manager of a payroll department, I have more bargaining power to increase my client's staff wages if they can say, "I'm no longer keying the data, I'm auditing the data," because we've built these automations in place to do these things.

Nina Talley:

Yes. That's such a wonderful point. You know? I think that there are so many different ways that you can make payroll automation work for you. It's really just about being fierce and doing it, and not being afraid to highlight your work that made the automation so successful. I love that. That it even happens in consulting and knowing that the clients that you're going into, the payroll departments, they don't want to be automated out of a job. They're concerned. By approaching them, knowing that that's their fear, that's that empathy and that business leadership, and that relationship management that we've been talking about. You know that they're likely afraid of it, and just sort of selling it to those departments in the way that it can help them develop their own career and not just even your own. I think there's true beauty in that.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. That's where, as a former practitioner, I bring more value to the table than your average consultant. I can say, "Not only can I implement your system, but I've got practitioner experience. I've come up against some of the same issues, losses, and wins that you have, and here's how I mitigated them."

Nina Talley:

Yeah. That's so powerful. It really is. I love that view of how your previous work as an actual payroll manager then made you a more powerful consultant. I don't think that maybe necessarily a lot of payroll managers are out there thinking that that experience would make them a more powerful consultant, or more able to evolve to client needs. So, thank you for making sure to underline that for us.

So, now is the time in our podcast for something we like to call Payroll Nightmares. I really love sharing these stories. I just think it's such a humbling and human experience to get into. So many of us have been in and out of these sort of tough professional situations, and there's so many fun lessons to learn. So, Ginnette, do you have a payroll nightmare, and maybe a lesson learned, that you can share with our listeners?

Ginnette Clark:

Oh, boy. Do I ever. I could probably regale you for hours on payroll nightmares because we've all made crazy, dumb mistakes in the past. One thing that really stands out, and actually I use it as an example when I talk to any new employee at our company. So in our company when new employees come on, they're usually given a list of other folks in their area of expertise, or who they may come in contact with. They do brief meet and greets, I guess you'd say. They'll do brief meet and greets. I always talk about making sure that you put your documentation in the right place because you never know what's going to happen. You need to be able to make sure that folks can get to it.

One classic example that stands out, and I use it almost every time I have one of these little meet and greets. Our company uses SharePoint to house all of our client documentation. So, we have sensitive files that has an automatic purge after so many days after a project is finished.

Nina Talley:

Oh, no. I already see where it's going.

Ginnette Clark:

Oh, no. Not quite, not quite, not quite. So, I was working with a client that was managing a 401(k) true-up because they had some incorrect configuration. I met with the client. We talked about what this client needed. I thought I had a really good understanding of what they wanted, so I built out the new 401(k) match configuration for them. Then, I built out this very complicated Excel spreadsheet that would calculate the correct match so that the team could go in and fix it as they needed to, until a certain point when this other match would take effect at the first of the year. That was all grand and good. The other piece of that was they had to go back several years, and recalculate all of those years' worth of 401(k). All payroll people are already probably cringing at this going, "Oh, my gosh."

The problem was I didn't have as good of an understanding of what needed to be done as I thought I did. I went away on vacation and I received several phone calls, several emails, several voicemails about this issue with this other client. Things were kind of blowing up, so to speak. It was all because I did not have my documentation where it was supposed to be. It was sitting in my personal OneDrive on SharePoint. It was not sitting in the correct client file, which meant no one was able to go in and assess what I had done and what was going on, in order to help mitigate this problem. I tend to be someone that never truly disconnects from electronics. There's only been one [inaudible 00:37:16]. It was when we went on vacation. My husband took mine, and all of my children's phones, the minute we got off the plane. We got it back when we got back on. Thank heavens, this wasn't one of those-

Nina Talley:

I respect that.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. This wasn't one of those situations. I had to log in to my computer, that I happened to bring with me, and move all of those files where they had to be so that that team could do the work that needed to be done. It ended up being an additional 100 hours of work to do that, those past years. I felt terrible because everybody had to drop everything to do this work, all because I didn't have my stuff where it needed to be. Honestly, I felt so bad I bought a gift card for everybody on the team that picked up my slack, to be honest.

It was a classic example of making sure that when you do client work, and this works for any payroll department, don't save stuff to your hard drive. Save it to the shared drives [inaudible 00:38:17] can

have access to it. It can potentially ruin your entire vacation because you then spend the rest of your vacation feeling terrible about what just happened. There is nothing you can do to fix it, other than load these files out and go, "Well, this is what I did. This is how it works, and this is what it needs." When in actuality it probably needed a whole lot more than I was able to provide.

Nina Talley:

I love that story. It's such a human mistake. Everything is done except this one key detail that topples the domino pile over.

Ginnette Clark:

Right. It all ended well. It truly did. It all ended well. The technical team was able to get involved and build some awesome database, something that did something. I'm not technical like that. So, they built this awesome something that did something, that gave them the data that they needed so that they could apply the appropriate interest and everything that they needed to do to manage this big mess that had been created. The only thing was if I would have put it where it was supposed to be, and followed up the way I should have before I left on vacation, we could have had this handled without the client ever really knowing that I didn't understand what they were trying to do.

For me, it's just like... Well, it's just like anything else. It's okay if I screw up, or anybody else does. I do my best not to let it be visible on the outside, if I can help it. That doesn't mean I'm going to go behind anything and fix something because I made a mess. It does mean that I'm going to own up to my errors and I'm going to own up to my shortcomings. I'm going to do what I can to fix it, or do what needs to be done, while still keeping my client satisfied and happy with my work.

Nina Talley:

That's a really wonderful point. I think we can all take it really hard when you make a mistake. Allowing yourself the grace to forgive yourself, and just learn from it. One of the most important things that you can do is learn from those mistakes and accept that they're going to happen. We're all human, and to be human is to err.

Ginnette Clark:

Yeah. And, we are our own worst enemy when it comes to that.

Nina Talley:

We don't like to leave things on a negative note, here, at Pay Talk. So, I have just one more question for you. What is the best piece of payroll advice you've ever been given? Or, what's the piece of advice that you wish somebody had given you?

Ginnette Clark:

The best advice that anyone gave me was when I first started in payroll. Just a little backstory. The payroll person that was doing the job had been there for 20 plus years. She had phantom employees. She was paying folks that didn't exist, and had her own direct deposit information in its place. She got caught. Of course, corporate office came down, and walked her out of the building. She was fired. What happened beyond that, I don't know.

I went into the controller and I said, "Hey, I would like to try this." To be honest, I really only wanted to do it because it was a Monday through Friday, 8:00 to 5:00 job. All the other jobs [inaudible 00:41:39].

That's the only reason why I wanted to do it. When we started my training, the thing that she said to me was, "The single most personal thing you can give to an employee is their paycheck. So when it's wrong, it's very personal to them." I took that to heart through all of my years processing payroll in the practitioner world and even into the consulting world, to remember that it's very personal when someone's check isn't correct. From an implementation standpoint, as well as from the practitioner's standpoint, I take it to heart in making sure that our paychecks are accurate and on time.

Nina Talley:

That's such a beautiful little sound bite. You know? "The most personal thing that you can give to somebody at your business is their paycheck." It really is. It's a livelihood. It's their family. It's their future, and their plans. I think that keeping that in mind, and taking it to heart, has probably made you a better payroll professional in general.

Ginnette Clark:

I'd like to think so.

Nina Talley:

Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Ginnette. I absolutely love talking with you, getting into consulting and all the different types of freedoms that it can provide to the right type of payroll professional. I learned so much. You were such a joy to speak with today, and I know that our listeners are definitely going to benefit from these types of unique insights.

Ginnette Clark:

Well, thank you. I've enjoyed this, as well. I would like to say if anyone has any questions, or any comments, or they want to talk about their career path, I of course am readily able and willing to listen, or guide, or mentor, whatever you need.

Nina Talley:

I love that. That's so generous of you. Thank you, Ginnette. If our listeners are interested in reaching out to Jeanette, I think that LinkedIn is probably the best place.

Ginnette Clark:

Yes.

Nina Talley:

I also just want to take a moment to thank all of our listeners. You guys are so amazing, and without you Pay Talk would not be possible. So if you can, make sure you rate, review, and subscribe on your preferred podcast streaming service. That is the best way to support this podcast and ensure that we can continue to bring you the human stories that make payroll so personal. Until next time, folks, this has been your host, Nina Talley, with Pay Talk.

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