

Raising the Payroll Department's Profile

By Robert Half/Accountemps

Payroll is a crucial business function, but because the work happens primarily behind the scenes, the department is often invisible to the organization at large. Even though regulatory demands and a heightened focus on ensuring ethical business practices has today's payroll professionals doing much more than simply making sure everyone is paid accurately and on time, most non-finance employees rarely interact with payroll staff, let alone understand the scope or importance of their work.

It is a valuable exercise for the payroll team to find ways to build a stronger connection with others outside their department. Why? While the team itself might be very close-knit, working in a "silo" prevents payroll staff from understanding what's happening throughout the firm and contributing directly to the achievement of broader business objectives.

Another reason to improve communication: More Millennials are entering the workforce, and attracting and retaining talent from this more "social" demographic group is requiring employers to foster an environment that facilitates idea sharing and face-to-face dialogue among coworkers. Millennials polled for the Robert Half and Yahoo HotJobs survey, *What Millennial Workers Want*, said they want to feel connected to their coworkers – and are likely to be more productive and satisfied in their jobs if they do.

So, how can payroll raise its profile *and* improve communication?

One approach is to embrace more of a customer-service attitude. While customer service has always been important to a business, according to Robert Half's publication, *Go the Extra Mile*, many leading businesses are encouraging staff to become even more attentive to clients to help the firm earn new business and enhance their reputation. This push goes beyond the traditional realm of customer-facing employees to include those often thought of as non-customer-facing or internal. These businesses are building a "service culture" and looking to all employees who provide support – whether to external customers or internal clients – to be more service-minded and provide personalized customer care. Taking time to treat each colleague at the firm as a unique individual can go a long way toward making others more aware and appreciative of the payroll team.

Another strategy is to take every opportunity to spread the news about the payroll department's accomplishments. For example, regularly contribute content to the company newsletter or intranet that underscores how other departments have benefitted from payroll's work. And make a special point to highlight how payroll staff worked directly with others in the organization to accomplish specific goals.

Building awareness about the payroll function and growing relationships with other departments may take time, but the long-term benefits are worth the effort in terms of enhancing morale, cooperation and productivity. By making a concerted effort, you can be assured other groups in the firm will not only sit up and take notice, but also hold a new level of respect for their colleagues in payroll.

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