

Mindset over matter

National Payroll Week speaker suggests how payroll professionals can successfully tackle their expanding roles and responsibilities

| BY JEFFREY R. SMITH |

THE PAYROLL professional's job has become more complex and the responsibilities have become greater, according to the Canadian Payroll Association, so maximizing job performance and efficiency are top priorities for many. While it's easy to get bogged down under the weight and details of daily life in payroll, having the right mindset and approach is the best way to do the best and most efficient job, says Michelle Ray, an author and certified speaker.

Ray was rated the top speaker at the 2009 national CPA conference will be speaking about enhancing performance in the workplace at CPA events in Surrey, B.C., Prince George, B.C., Victoria and Yellowknife during National Payroll Week, which runs from Sept. 14 to Sept. 18.

Payroll has a lot of challenges each day and payroll professionals have a large amount of knowledge to acquire. Coupled with regular deadlines, there's a lot of pressure to make sure the job gets done. And it's a common refrain in workplaces right now that people are being asked to do more with less. While some concepts Ray pushes might seem like common sense, it's not always easy to apply them when things get dicey. The key to successfully handling these pressures and successful job performance is not just time management but also a mindset and resiliency for the long haul, says Ray. Mindset is one of the key traits of peak performance she considers important to managing oneself and enhancing job performance.

"Attitude translates to actions such as interaction with others at work and

time management," says Ray. "Successful athletes are self-determining in attitude and the same applies to the business world."

Communication and prioritization can reduce stress

Part of a positive work attitude is the ability to effectively communicate what can and can't get done, something Ray says a lot of people struggle with by trying to do things with lower priority they simply don't have the time to do, or allow these tasks to add to the pressure to the degree they don't perform well at work and are affected at home. This creates a downward spiral that isn't conducive to good and efficient performance at work.

"Payroll is far more than an administrative function — decisions made affect the lives of co-workers."

"There's a difference between doing things right and doing the right things," says Ray. "It's the difference between efficiency and effectiveness — where am I spending my time?"

Collaboration maximizes strengths

Communication also brings about collaboration, which is another trait that helps job performance, says Ray. It builds strong relationships and helps people recognize the strengths and ideas of others. This maximizes the strengths of the entire workplace.

With the diversity of many workplaces, collaboration can be challenging, but the positive mindset can overcome these challenges. Payroll in particular as one of the oldest workforces in the world, says Ray, and

there is an influx of new professionals coming in which is creating a multi-generational workplace within payroll, not to mention more ethnic diversity. Flexibility and openmindedness are essential to peak performance.

"With the pace and speed of change, we must adapt and understand others, be flexible and knowledgeable about different backgrounds and be non-judgmental," says Ray.

Payroll is also increasingly becoming more involved with other areas within organizations, often playing a close role with HR and finance, as well as being a resource for other areas. Payroll work affects other departments so open and positive communication is essential.

"Payroll can set an example of how one takes care of oneself and handles the job," says Ray. "Performance will be better if overall well-being is better."

Effective communication also helps clarify what the priorities are, which can help people feel more comfortable with their duties, have better relationships with co-workers and feel good about being at work, which leads to another trait of peak performance — engagement.

Engagement comes from a positive connection to work, which is a key to job satisfaction for employees and retention for employers.

Many payroll professionals tend to be perfectionists in their work, which isn't a bad thing when accuracy is involved but it can interfere with efficiency and getting things done if they task doesn't require absolute perfection.

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“Being perfectionist, you can’t always move forward because you’re always looking for perfection which isn’t always realistic,” says Ray.

Payroll uniquely positioned within organizations

Payroll professionals are seeing their roles in organizations increase in importance and as a result their responsibilities are also increasing in size and importance. Achieving peak performance within their role is important not only for them, but for their organizations and they should see themselves as partners with all departments, especially HR and organizational leadership, says Ray.

“Payroll is far more than an administrative function; decisions made affect the lives of co-workers,” says Ray. “Payroll is uniquely positioned as an asset to their organization with the knowledge they have, so knowing what to focus on when it’s required will enhance their performance as a key resource.”