



A Very Important Payroll Professional

All payroll professionals know that payroll is so much more than pushing a button. It requires in-depth consideration of compliance issues, a knack for employee relationships and a clear understanding of payroll software and systems. Kevin Sokolowski, Vice President of Information Technology at Payworks, knows firsthand that payroll also requires a marriage of strong IT support and customer service. From Payworks' Winnipeg office, Kevin oversees a team of software programmers whose express purpose is building and supporting software that enables clients to deliver seamless payroll operations to their employees. *DIALOGUE* spoke with Kevin about his role in supporting payroll through IT, how IT is driving payroll innovation and about how to improve payroll through relationship-building.

Kevin Sokolowski, Vice President, Information Technology, Payworks

DIALOGUE: How do payroll and IT go hand in hand?

KEVIN: Those who do not work in payroll, and even some who do, may not understand the magnitude of how much technology is actually involved in ensuring an employee payment is made. Not only is there a user-facing product which provides access to information, there is a ton of underpinning back office infrastructure to ensure the data is secure, and the payments get into the banking system. In today's technologically-driven world, the two functions cannot be separated.

DIALOGUE: What are some upcoming technologies that will impact payroll?

KEVIN: Mobile payroll technologies that enable employees to view and interact with their payroll data on any device will certainly have an impact on payroll professionals in the future. However, I believe the biggest area where you will see an impact to the payroll profession is in artificial intelligence (AI). AI will enable payroll systems to become more intelligent, to the point where they will offer insights based on your behaviour to help answer compliance-related questions in real-time. It will move payroll software from merely being a tool that is used to run payroll into a team member you can utilize to help make your life as a payroll professional more efficient.

DIALOGUE: You have said that creating a sustainable technology solution for payroll also involves great people. How so?

KEVIN: In order to build payroll software, you need people. People to build it, people to support it, people to sell it, people to use it. Great payroll software and technology comes about when all of these people are able to contribute harmoniously to making a customer's experience the best it can be. Having an engaged, happy workforce will naturally lead to engaged and happy customers.

Payworks made a conscious decision to keep its programmers here in Canada. This is an extension of building with great people. Building software isn't "hard", almost anyone can do that. Building great payroll software involves relationships and a commitment to listening to the voice of your customers. When you have continuity in your development team, and they are committed to the software, they produce amazing results. In our organization, we find it extremely beneficial to have our service and support teams able to engage with our development team to help find solutions immediately to ensure the best possible result for the customer.

DIALOGUE: As a member of the CPA's e-ROE task force, do you think the government should continue to adopt e-Services to improve the payroll experience?

KEVIN: Adoption of e-Services will be critical for the government in their quest to find system efficiencies, and reduce the amount of manual intervention required to process payroll-related information. Automating processes, whether that be ROEs, T4s, or Statistics Canada's reporting, and bringing them into the 21st century is a win-win for the government and employers. E-Services will reduce the administrative burden for all stakeholders and will greatly reduce the headaches currently experienced with both the ROE and with year-end processing from an employers' perspective.

DIALOGUE: What do you do in your spare time?

KEVIN: My three and four year olds keep me extremely busy in my spare time. They are currently working on their skating skills, so they can be ready to play hockey next year. I am an absolute hockey nut, and still try to skate a few times a week. I also do coding projects in my spare time in order to keep my technical skills up to speed, so that I can have detailed technical discussions with our development team. Trust me, it is a lot more fun than it sounds! ■