

Paymasters' expertise much in demand

Provided by *Les Affaires* By *Judith Lussier*

Published 20/03/2014

March 22, 2014 edition

In Canada, they administer 26 million T4s and 8 million T4As, their transactions amount to \$830 billion in pay and taxable benefits, \$260 billion in remittances, and \$90 billion in health and retirement benefits... and they comply with 190 federal and provincial laws while doing so.

One could say that paymasters are sitting pretty. And since in this field the slightest mistake can lead to huge penalties, their expertise is in demand. So much in demand that the talk is now of a manpower shortage.

“Yes, it is a highly sought after expertise,” says Marie Lyne Dion, Vice Chairman of the Board of the Canadian Payroll Association (CPA). “We are seeing a manpower shortage both in basic technicians and in more advanced technicians and payroll managers,” she says.

A quick search of employment sites confirms the high demand for paymasters, payroll processing agents and other payroll specialists in the province.

In the payroll field, employers face a staff retention challenge. “Payroll experts are not always recognized in terms of the value they can bring to a business. Their role is wrongly assumed to be one of pressing a button,” Marie Lyne Dion points out. “When businesses are audited by the government and have to pay penalties, that's when they realize that payroll is an important function.”

The manpower scarcity goes some way to explaining a new phenomenon, says Denis Lesieur, President at Algo Paie. More and more major companies are outsourcing their payroll department.

“Formerly, big companies tended to manage their payroll internally,” he says. “But it is getting harder and harder to find payroll professionals. Not just clerks, but experts able to interpret the implications of collective agreements, laws, and so on,” he explains.

“Maintaining an in-house payroll department entails substantial costs,” Marie Lyne Dion confirms. “There are also costs involved in outsourcing; the choice depends on a host of factors, but being able to find qualified personnel is a key factor.”

And yet the CPA provides professional training programs to meet market requirements. Certified Payroll Manager (CPM) and Payroll Compliance Practitioner (PCP) training programs offered by Collège Marie-Victorin attract both students seeking to enter the job market and employees who are already active.

These training programs, which provide employers with reassurance about their payroll department's compliance, are gaining in popularity. Since 2010, they have increased by 91% in Québec, according to the CPA. A sign that companies are taking their payroll service ever more seriously.