

# LEADERS' TALK

Blog Interview with Neeyamo (IN)

## Women in Global Payroll

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### MARY Holland, CPP

Mary is the Global Director of Strategy, Development, and Training at the Global Payroll Management Institute.

She was conferred with “The Payroll Woman of the Year” award by the American Payroll Association in 2016.

Mary is a certified payroll professional and holds in-depth knowledge about global payroll.

IN Team from Neeyamo caught up with Mary Holland at Neeyamo’s flagship event Rendezvous with Neeyamo at Goa in Feb 2017.

### Women in Global Payroll

Mary Holland is a leading authority in Global Payroll. From being a global payroll practitioner, to training and equipping others in the subject, Mary has come a long way. This article weaves around her journey in the field of global payroll and is bound to be an inspiration to others who wish to set their course to traverse in this field.

### IN: Tell us about yourself, GPMI and your role there?

My name is Mary Holland. I am a certified payroll professional (CPP) with the American Payroll Association (APA). I work for the Global Payroll Management Institute (GPMI), which is a non-profit organization and subsidiary of APA whose goal and mission is to provide global payroll education and networking opportunities across the globe.

GPMI provides world-class education programs, webinars, on-demand courses, virtual classrooms, and an annual global conference (Global Payroll Management Forum at the APA Congress) to promote the payroll profession for payroll providers and practitioners across the globe. The goal of GPMI is to provide payroll professionals with the tools and skills to excel at global payroll for their respective organizations and become strong leaders. We have a community with approximately 8,500 subscribers. GPMI has its e-magazine that is published 11 times in a year with pertinent global articles. GPMI offers in depth education for several countries and conducts virtual and in-person classroom sessions for professionals who wish to get earn a certificate in various aspects of payroll. Classes are also available on demand.

At GPMI, I am the global director of strategy, development, and training. My role is to look for ways to promote global payroll, education, partnerships, and vendor opportunities, attend trade shows to help promote GPMI and the global payroll profession, and look for training opportunities and ways that we can all connect across the globe. I look for subject matter experts who are willing to help and donate their time to GPMI by writing articles, presenting webinars, participating in twitter chats, or posting on LinkedIn on our behalf.

## IN: How do you see payroll as a viable career option for women in this age?

Payroll is a functional role present in any organization that employs people. I feel payroll is a very strategic role. I've witnessed people referring to it in some countries as a female-dominated role, but in most cases, I believe it is a healthy mix of both genders. The role has certainly evolved over time. It has moved from being looked upon as just a back-office function to being viewed as a more strategic role.

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*“Payroll will provide you with a seat at the executive table and will let you be a part of discussions around mergers and acquisitions, organizational cost projections, compensation reviews, and the like.”*

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For women who are entering the role, you are going to have an opportunity to advance in many areas. There is never a dull moment. In the global space, you are always learning something new every day. You have an opportunity to meet and work with people from different cultures, connect and gain vendor management skills, use project management skills, and work with the accounting and finance teams. So, roles change drastically. The world has gotten smaller, and the roles in payroll have changed as well to adapt to changing times. The value an individual can bring to the table to various sets of stakeholders is of paramount importance to meet the company's goals, because at the end of the day we are really working to help support the company so that it can become profitable and be a leader in its industry.

## IN: You have been interacting with so many different companies giving them ideas about how they could firm up their payroll, and their strategies that they build around their payroll management process. Do you see more women emerging as leaders?

Globally, we are seeing women being given the opportunity to be in what we call higher level roles within payroll – be it senior managers, directors, or vice presidents. In larger organizations, we see a compartmentalized approach; wherein there are leaders identified for specific segments of payroll such as tax. I'm aware of organizations that have vice presidents who supervise transactions around tax and only tax – and this is simply because of the volumes of transactions that they handle under that banner. The skill-set here will require coordinating with the executives, communicating with management, and letting them know of impending risks and then partnering with teams within the organization to mitigate the risks. In smaller organizations, you may have a payroll manager who takes care of all aspects of payroll. He/she may, however, be the custodian of information that drives business decisions and hence works hand in hand with the strategic layer of the organization.

I believe, global payroll provides ample opportunities for individuals who would like to venture in that direction. That being said, we are seeing a surge in the job market from companies that are seeking individuals with experience in managing multi-country payroll. As organizations opt to go global, they expect the payroll team to be able to support and drive initiatives as required.

**IN: You were named Payroll Woman of the Year in 2016. So, can you give us a feel about your journey to get there?**

The first thing I am going to say is I am extremely honored to have received the award. I was truly surprised. It was a complete shock for me.

I became involved with payroll probably 15 years back as a finance manager and having payroll responsibilities as an add-on. (I had a payroll manager reporting to me, and hence I was initially not hands-on with the payroll processing part.) As the economy changed, I had to be the hands-on person monitoring payroll and stock, and at that point, I realized that I needed the right education to excel in payroll.

Back then, I did not know anything about the American Payroll Association. I had just seen an ad in the local paper about a payroll class that was offered at a community college. I decided to go and take the class, which was indeed an eye-opener for me to payroll. It was a nine-month class that kind of went through everything that you needed to know about payroll. I found out about the courses and the various publications offered by the APA and that it also offered a certification exam. The instructor in the class encouraged me to get my certification. I did not have a real requirement to become a Certified Payroll Professional (CPP) because payroll was not my only function in the organization. I was responsible for other pieces of finance, including fixed assets, and general ledger, but took the opportunity to take the CPP exam.

So, I took the time to study and then sat for the exam. When I passed, I realized that I needed to give back to the people who wanted to take the exam like I had done or needed some help and support. I volunteered to teach classes for a local APA chapter in the Silicon Valley in California, and then I ended up being the director of the chapter's education programs. I later had an opportunity to go to the California payroll conference event and that is when I first met Dan Maddux, Executive Director of the APA. He gave an opening speech on the American Payroll Association - about its benefits, the rewards of giving back to the community, and a little about the organization.

From that point, I got more involved and volunteered for more chapter committees where I realized that I was learning something new and was well outside my comfort zone. I later signed up for committees on the national level with a wide array of working models - such as the hotline committee where we receive questions on payroll topics from APA members and we assist them with finding answers. I later became the chapter treasurer, and then was elected to a two-year term as president. Following that, I took charge of chapter hospitality for two years and then moved into being the director of the California payroll conference for a couple of years. For me, volunteering my

time became more about helping others. The payroll community is a group of people who you can network with and develop friendships with, helping you through good and bad times in your life.

The APA awards education grants to individuals who show an ability and desire to improve themselves (one can easily apply for them) and I won one such grant through which I was given the opportunity to attend any of their classes for free for one year. I also got to attend the APA Congress for free, which was an experience in itself. Virtual classes also were made available, and I remember taking most of them – I saw this as an opportunity to enhance my skill-set to be able to continue to move forward and help my organization.

Later, I joined a global committee for the APA and worked with expatriates and on various global projects. We did not have GPMI at the time, but we worked on articles that had content about doing payroll in countries outside of the United States. One of the projects that came to the committee was developing a new educational opportunity – the Global Payroll Management Certificate Program. I volunteered to participate in making that program a reality as we worked through several global outlines and produced content for the course. – I was then asked to be one of the presenters for the course when it was offered for the first time later that year.

I received the Meritorious Service Award from the APA for in May 2011. Two years later, I won the Special Recognition Award.. My career slowly and steadily transformed from handling just U.S. payroll to global payroll, and I started getting involved with global operations for my company. That is when I volunteered to write articles on global payroll. I was pretty much hooked on global payroll, and the APA knew that. I felt truly honored for receiving these prestigious awards, which were capped by being named Payroll Woman of the Year in 2016. Through this journey I have gotten to interact with some wonderful people and make friends for life. If you ask me what has been the best part of this journey thus far, I would say it would be an opportunity to help payroll professionals expand their horizons and giving back to the association through the services that I render as they help me do what I like doing best.

### **IN: How can payroll professionals expand their career?**

I would encourage payroll professionals to constantly learn. – At this time, it is pivotal to keep your skills updated. In addition to that, I would advise the seniors to mentor young professionals. Being a mentor helps you see the newer challenges that people encounter in their roles. You are indirectly helping yourself go a long way while you are helping someone else be successful.

At times, it is overwhelming to step outside of one's comfort zone to ask for help – to admit that you do not understand something and that you require training. This could mean that you might have to juggle your personal life, sacrifice a few pleasures like weekends off, and allot time just to study. If you want to achieve what you want, you will have to put in those hours of study and more importantly, believe in yourself and your dreams.

## Contact Us

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*Nothing is going to be easy, but at the end of the day, once you've achieved your dream, you have the very reward that you wanted – YOU MADE IT!*

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## IN'S TAKE

Payroll is a functional role present in any organization that employs people. The role has certainly evolved over time from being looked upon as just a back-office function to a more strategic role.

As organizations opt to go global, the payroll team is expected to be able to support and drive initiatives and for that payroll professionals should constantly learn and keep their skills updated.

Mary has a wealth of knowledge in the field and we've always found her very engaging. She is a wonderful human being and is a pleasure to talk to. We wish Mary the very best in all her endeavors.