Playbook for payroll problems: what one ABA CEO does in the first hour

Learn how to handle payroll issues effectively with expert insights on communication strategies from ABA leaders to ensure employee trust and retention.

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We've already made the case that a new hire's first paycheck is often the moment they decide if they made the right call. What hasn't been covered yet is what to actually do, in real time, when a payroll run goes wrong.

That's the specific, tactical piece of a recent panel discussion hosted by Behavioral Health Business, "The Recruitment-to-Retention Roadmap for Growing ABA Organizations." Moshé Papert (CEO, Kids Club ABA), Joey Toledano (CEO, Supportive ABA), and Adam Lewis (general manager of talent workforce development at Viventium and founder of Apploi) talked about why payroll accuracy matters, with Papert walking through exactly what his team did the last time it broke.

The incident: A banking issue

No payroll system is perfect, and the panel didn't pretend otherwise. Papert described a real situation where a third-party payroll provider had a banking issue on its end that disrupted a payroll run – something entirely outside his team's control. What mattered, in his account, was what happened in the hours after.

"We sent out that communication immediately once we found out," Papert said, describing a Friday when the issue surfaced. His team didn't wait until the problem was fully resolved to say something. They went out with what they knew, an acknowledgment, and a timeline.

"Don't disappear in that process," he said. "We recognize it. We're working on it. Here's our estimated timeframe. And if there's any possible solutions in the meantime, here's the best options."

Why the response matters more than the root cause

Lewis, who's seen this pattern across hundreds of healthcare organizations through Apploi and Viventium, agreed that ownership – not perfection – is what separates a payroll hiccup from a retention event.

"If you're not getting paid on time, why not?" he said. "Own it." For frontline caregivers who are often living paycheck to paycheck, silence during a payroll disruption reads as indifference at the exact moment an employee is deciding whether their new employer can be trusted with something that basic.

That's a distinct skill from preventing errors in the first place – it's crisis communication, applied to a function most HR teams don't think to build a playbook for until the day they need one.

Build the playbook before you need it

The panel's advice translates into three concrete steps any ABA organization can put in place this month, regardless of which payroll system you use:

- **Decide who owns the message before an incident happens.** Papert's team didn't debate internally while employees waited – the communication went out the same day. Know in advance who sends it, through which channel, and who signs off.
- **Say something before you have everything solved.** An acknowledgment plus an honest timeline beats silence while you investigate. Employees don't expect a payroll provider's banking issue to never happen – they're watching how you respond when it does.
- **Follow through with options, not just apologies.** Papert's team paired the communication with whatever interim solutions were available, rather than leaving employees to simply wait it out.

The root cause worth fixing separately

Underneath the response Papert described is a structural point Lewis raised repeatedly across the panel: incidents like this are far more likely, and far harder to resolve quickly, when recruiting, HR, and payroll data live in disconnected systems.

"If you have data that's in all these different systems and nothing's clicking well together, that's not just going to be an administrative burden – it's going to be a burden that will result in greater turnover," he said.

That's a longer-term fix than a communication protocol, but the two aren't in tension. Even organizations working toward more connected systems need a plan for the day something still goes wrong in the meantime.

Are you prepared for this moment? We can help you get there.

This post draws on insights from "The Recruitment-to-Retention Roadmap for Growing ABA Organizations," a webinar hosted by Behavioral Health Business and sponsored by Viventium and Apploi, featuring Adam Lewis (Viventium/Apploi), Moshé Papert (Kids Club ABA), and Joey Toledano (Supportive ABA).

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