



**Brandon Hall Group™**

# How Paylocity's Leading Advantage Program is Redefining Leadership Pipeline



2026

## Executive Interview



## About Paylocity



**Paylocity** is an award-winning provider of cloud-based HR, payroll and spend management software solutions. At Paylocity, we're more than a leading HR, payroll and spend management technology provider — we're a company driven by a simple truth: People matter most. Since 1997, we've been partnering with organizations to create workplaces where employees thrive and businesses excel. From our thousands of team members to the millions who use our platform, caring is in our DNA. For more information, visit [www.paylocity.com](http://www.paylocity.com).

## About Angela Ostermann

**Angela Ostermann** is the Senior Manager of Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness at Paylocity, where she serves as a leadership development strategist focused on designing practical, business-aligned solutions that develop confident and capable leaders. With more than 20 years of experience in corporate learning and leadership strategy across Fortune 10 and growth-stage technology companies, Ostermann specializes in building programs that translate organizational strategy into measurable behavior change. In her current role, she leads initiatives to develop leaders aligned with business KPIs and equipped to create high-performance team cultures across Paylocity's operations organization. She has been recognized for her work through Brandon Hall Group™ Excellence in Action awards, earning a Gold in Leadership Development and a Silver Award in Learning and Development.



## About Rachel Cooke

Today's conversation is moderated by **Rachel Cooke**, she is the Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research and Performance Improvement industries.



**Q Rachel**

Can you tell us a bit about your role at Paylocity and what drives your approach to leadership development?

**A Angela**

My role here at Paylocity is really as a leadership development strategist. My goal is to design very practical solutions to help move the business forward in alignment with KPIs and desired outcomes, thinking about the end in mind: what are we trying to accomplish with what we're providing to our learners to help set them up for success, in alignment with what the business needs at that particular time. The goal is to help leaders become confident, capable and to have very clear expectations and to really be able to translate strategy into real behavior change. That's where the magic meets the road: helping people feel like they're working at their best and that they're empowered because they have the knowledge and information they need. And they know they're driving the results the business needs as well.

**Q Rachel**

What challenge drove you to design the Leading Advantage program?

**A Angela**

This program was designed for Paylocity's operations group. Paylocity is a leading HR, payroll and spend management technology provider. We offer a software-as-a-service platform that helps businesses manage their workforce and the relationship we have with our clients is critically important. That reinforces the importance of leadership: our leaders need to set expectations, be role models and ensure that our clients get a top-notch experience from the frontline all the way up through leadership.

Our operations group encompasses implementation, tech support, benefits and client services. It's the largest group within Paylocity by employee headcount and also one of the most impactful when it comes to business outcomes. The stakes are high. When we looked at building a leadership bench for that group, we

wanted a program that would bring our top, high-performing individual contributors, those showing tremendous promise and commitment, into a structured path to give them an advantage when they become leaders. This program was born because we wanted to build a bench of leaders and design a pipeline. This isn't just training. We wanted to make sure these strong individual contributors were leader-ready for that next opportunity.

The program is designed to bridge their potential into performance, to help them with career mobility and their readiness for that next role. What makes it especially rich is how many hands have touched it. It was not designed in a silo. It was built in partnership with HR business partners, talent acquisition, business leaders and people already in the role. We hosted focus groups to understand the role intimately and immersed ourselves in the business unit to target the core competencies required for speed to competency.

## Q Rachel

How does Leading Advantage stand out from traditional leadership development programs?

## A Angela

It's built for application, not theory. We want participants to walk away with real experiences they can speak to in an interview. Every first-time leader stepping into an interview faces the question: tell me about a time when. We've solved for that by incorporating on-the-job activities that participants do in partnership with their direct leader between learning sessions. They're not only hearing concepts in the classroom but applying them on the job, with support from their leader and access to mentorship as well.

To round out that experience, we've incorporated professional coaching into the program to drive self-awareness and confidence. There are moments when you're figuring out a first assignment or learning how to manage up and you need an objective third party: a safe space to say,

“This is challenging for me, I’ve never navigated this before.” Each participant has a coach who provides that neutral, objective support.

We also wanted to create visibility for participants. There’s a capstone experience at the end where they get to showcase what they accomplished during the program and in their current role, a sort of talent profile. They have five to ten minutes on an all-leader, all-hands call to present to hiring managers: here’s what I’ve done, here’s what I can do, here are my areas of specialty. It’s not just about promotion. It’s also about raising a hand for stretch assignments and building their network and brand across the business beyond their own team or silo.

The program itself is approximately four months long and built as a three-part journey. The first section is about leading yourself: getting to know yourself as a leader, shaping who you are and understanding your drivers for wanting to lead. This grounding is critical for first-time leaders. Participants do things like 360 assessments to test whether others see them the way they see themselves.

The second section is about leading teams: performance management conversations, hosting one-on-ones and team meetings, setting expectations, building an accountability culture, cascading communications from senior leadership. There are on-the-job assignments as well, such as hosting a team call or adopting a mentee so they can practice developing someone and be able to articulate that experience in a future interview.

The third section is about leading business, which helps with business acumen: understanding where you sit in the business infrastructure, how the company makes money, why your role matters and how to inspire your team to mobilize around KPIs and results. One of the on-the-job assignments involves preparing a book of business for executive-level reviews, because they need to understand exactly what leaders are looking for, what the key points are and why they matter. After that comes the capstone presentation.

**Q Rachel**

Can you walk us through how coaching is administered within the program?

**A Angela**

We actually use internal professional coaches, not a third party. We have roughly six internal coaches who are ICF certified as well as Gallup CliftonStrengths certified, so there's a double layer of perspective to help people live into their full talents and strengths. When we assign coaches, we consider the leadership level of the participant and what each coach brings to the relationship. We go all hands-on deck and at times we divide and conquer, but we've consistently had strong matches. It's not part of our platform specifically, but it's an internal operational structure we've built here at Paylocity.

**Q Rachel**

What results and impact have you seen from the program?

**A Angela**

We're really proud to share that 63% of participants have either been promoted or have had an expanded scope within 12 months of completing the program. I attribute that to the breadth of support and exposure participants receive throughout, as well as the overall design.

We've also created a badge that goes into each participant's HR file so that when leaders and hiring managers are looking for someone with a particular skill foundation, they can quickly identify who's completed the program. It makes participants easier to find and easier to be seen.

The program is nomination-based and we work closely with leaders on the front end to identify the right people and stack-rank candidates based on what the business needs in that moment. We also partner with talent acquisition to forecast anticipated hiring for the fiscal year so that we're building a bench that's the right size for the opportunities available. That alignment keeps participants feeling that pull-through and maintains their engagement

and commitment to Paylocity, which helps us retain top talent.

On assessments, we run pre and post evaluations with both participants and their direct leaders. Both groups reported a 10% increase in leadership confidence after completing the program. The retention rate for all participants who have gone through the program is 90%, with a learner sentiment score of 4.8 out of 5. Qualitatively, we're also seeing reduced onboarding cycle time, improved knowledge sharing, better networking among leaders and a strengthened Ready Now leadership bench.

### **Q** Rachel

Is there anything more you'd like to share about the learner experience?

### **A** Angela

It's very rewarding to watch learners build their confidence in becoming a leader. Any of us who have moved into a first-time leadership role know the hesitance, the insecurities, the

imposter syndrome that can come with that. Being able to help learners work through that through experiential learning, paired with coaching and the support of their direct leader, is a really meaningful thing to witness.

The program helps participants adopt Paylocity's competencies in operations and makes those expectations crystal clear, along with our leadership values. One of the most exciting outcomes is that they begin behaving as leaders before they actually become leaders, because of the experience the program gives them.

### **Q** Rachel

What support exists for participants after the four-month program ends?

### **A** Angela

We have another program called Leading Now, which is a continuing education program for all of our leaders. Through that program, we offer five courses every year that reinforce leadership concepts and

address whatever relevant business challenges are happening in the moment. If we're navigating change management, we build skill sets there. If we're in a performance management cycle, we address the crucial conversations that are necessary. So, participants continue to receive relevant, timely leadership support.

We also have something of an alumni group where people who have been through the program continue to gather. There's mentoring from alumni to current participants, a kind of reach-your-hand-back dynamic. And we bring everyone together periodically so they can continue to network and connect.

## **Q** Rachel

What advice would you give organizations looking to build leadership pipelines of their own?

## **A** Angela

The thing that has made Leading Advantage most successful is that

we immersed ourselves in the role we were developing leaders for. We hosted many focus groups with top-performing leaders to identify, granularly and behind the scenes, what competency, what traits, what attributes and what skills we needed to develop for someone to be highly successful in that role. Immersion into the business is really important because there's a lot of theoretical leadership content out there and its good content, but it's about taking that theory and making it applicable to your specific audience, meeting them where they are and having a clear picture of where you need to take them.

I'd also strongly recommend building with multiple perspectives. Identify who your partners should be and who will make the program better than you could make it alone. For us, that included HR business partners, talent acquisition, functional leaders and people already in the role. Do a thorough scope on the work. Spend the most time in the planning and scoping phases, because the building tends to roll out clearly and quickly once that pre-work is done.

Think carefully about learner experience: what does their day-to-day look like and what can you build that's feasible for them without pulling them too far from their regular responsibilities? Our on-the-job activities are designed to contribute to the team the participant is already part of. It's not stepping away from the day job to do the program. They're developing while also giving back in a richer way to the team they're responsible to.

Listen to the learners throughout. We iterate after every cohort, making small tweaks to ensure the program is working for the business and getting the results we're looking for. And meet learners where they are in their readiness, their experience and their career goals. Not everyone in a cohort will have the same goals or background. Get to know each person individually and help them see the vision and milestones relevant to their own journey.

Finally, everything we do is anchored in Paylocity's culture: our values, our role expectations, our current KPI focus and the problems we're actively working to solve. Some of that drives the iterations we make within the

program alongside learner feedback. Those are all really important considerations when building a leadership program like this.



Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:





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