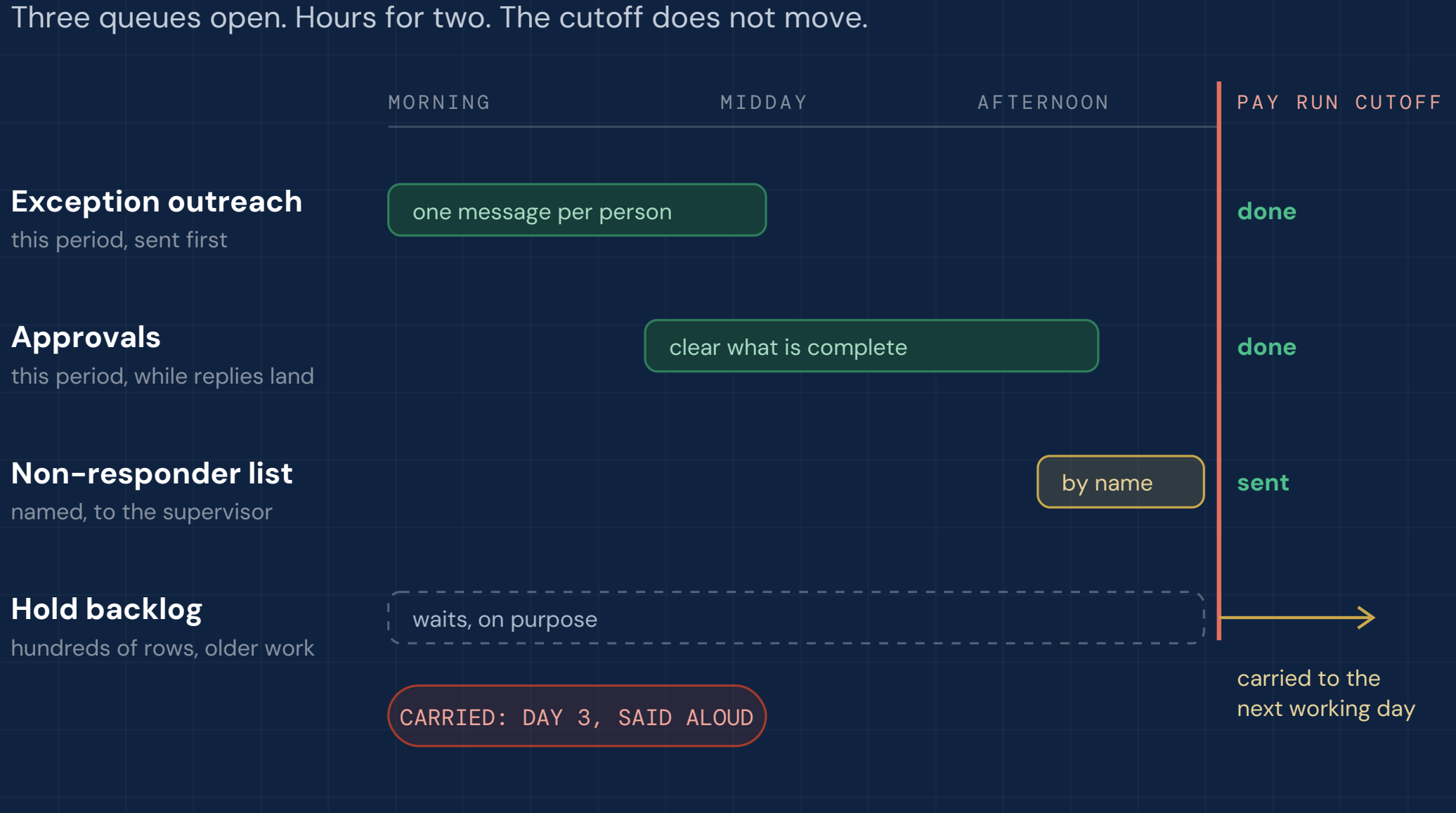
A SHORT BRIEF FOR FOUNDERS AND OPERATIONS LEADS

The Deadline Gap

Before a pay run there are always more open queues than hours. Most teams split the day evenly and finish nothing that matters this period.

THE LAST WORKING DAY BEFORE A PAY RUN

Three queues open. Hours for two. The cutoff does not move.



Old holds feel urgent because they are old.

This period's pay is urgent because it is due.

Protect this period first, and name what you are carrying.

A carried backlog is fine. A carried backlog nobody mentions is how it becomes permanent.

78 percent of US workers surveyed would struggle to meet obligations if pay were a week late. PayrollOrg, Getting Paid In America, 2025.

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A NOTE ON THE NUMBERS

Pay errors are common. Most of them are hours.

The best-known payroll error study was paid for by a company that sells payroll software. It is still the most careful one available, so here it is with that fact attached, and the figure I am refusing to use.

1 in 5

US payrolls contains errors, in a survey of people who work with payroll

EY survey for Paycom, 2022

$291

average cost of each payroll error, with some errors costing up to $705

EY survey for Paycom, 2022

15

corrections per pay period, on average, at the organisations surveyed

EY survey for Paycom, 2022

WHO SAYS SO

508 payroll people at US companies of 250 to 10,000 staff

Ernst and Young ran the survey and Paycom, a payroll software company, released it. The sample is larger businesses, so treat the totals as indicative for a small team. The kinds of error are what carry over.

THE DETAIL

Time and attendance errors were the most common

They occurred, on average, more than once per employee per year. Missing and wrong hours, in other words, which is exactly the queue that has to be cleared before a pay run.

LEFT OUT

"49 percent will job hunt after two pay problems"

It is widely repeated, but it comes from a 2017 survey by a workforce software vendor, it measures what people say they would do rather than what they did, and its method is rarely shown. It does not need to be true for this brief to hold.

THE HONEST READING

Pay errors are routine, they cost real money to fix, and most of them start as hours nobody chased in time.

THE PROBLEM AS MOST OWNERS SEE IT

Everything is urgent. Only one thing is due.

Most owners see three open queues and try to move all three. The deadline only cares about one of them, and the people on the other end of it cannot absorb a late or wrong payment.

78%

of US workers who answered would find it somewhat or very difficult to meet obligations if pay were a week late

PayrollOrg, Getting Paid In America, 2025

$259m+

in back wages recovered for nearly 177,000 employees in one fiscal year

US Department of Labor, FY2025

$1,465

average back wages per worker in those recoveries

US Department of Labor, FY2025

HOW IT READS

The oldest work is the most embarrassing

So it gets done first. Or the day is split evenly so nobody can say anything was ignored. Both feel responsible and both leave this period's pay at risk.

WHAT IS REAL

Old holds are already late. This period is not, yet.

One more day changes little for a backlog that has waited a week. This period's missing hours and unapproved entries become wrong pay at the cutoff, and wrong pay lands on people who did nothing wrong.

WHY IT HIDES

The report says "in progress"

Carried work that is never counted out loud looks the same as work that is nearly finished. Nobody notices it ageing until someone asks.

THE ORDERING RULE

The deadline decides the order. Not the size of the queue, and not how long it has been waiting.

THE OPTIONS I CONSIDERED

Three ways to spend the hours. Each one costs something.

There was no option that finished everything. The choice was which work would wait, and whether the wait would be visible.

OPTION 01

Holds first

Work the old backlog while there is time. Clears old records and feels like progress on the biggest number on the board. Leaves people short for missing hours in the period that is actually due.

OPTION 02

Outreach and approvals first

Chase this period's exceptions early and clear approvals before the cutoff. Gets this period's pay right for everyone who replies. The old holds wait one more working day.

OPTION 03

Split the day

Give each queue a share of the hours. Both move, neither finishes, and the end-of-day report says progress everywhere and done nowhere. It looks fair and protects nobody.

OPTION 01 COSTS

This period's pay

The one thing with a hard date gets the leftover hours. The errors land on people who did nothing wrong, and each one then has to be corrected after the run.

OPTION 02 COSTS

One more day on old holds

A real cost, but a visible and bounded one, provided the report says so. The backlog does not get worse in a day; it gets worse when nobody counts it.

OPTION 03 COSTS

Everything, a little

Partial work on the due queue is still wrong pay at the cutoff. Partial work on the backlog is still a backlog the morning after.

> Old work can be late again tomorrow. This period cannot.
>
> From the decision log

THE CALL I MADE

Option 02. This period first, then name the rest.

The pay run is the only deadline that cannot move. Everything else gets carried, openly, with a count and an age.

FIRST	**Exception outreach, early** One message per person with a missing or broken entry, sent first thing so replies can land before the cutoff. Nothing dated today, because today is not finished.
SECOND	**Approvals while replies come in** Approve what is complete. Fix what can be fixed today. Hold nothing that only needed a reply that has now arrived.
THEN	**A named non-responder list for the supervisor** Everyone who did not reply, by registered name, with what is missing. The supervisor decides what happens to each before the run.
CARRIED	**Holds moved to the next working day** Stated as carried in the report, with the count. Not hidden, and not implied as done.

What I did not do

Quietly work old holds in the gaps and let the report blur the two. Or decide on the supervisor's behalf what happens to people who never replied.

What each person got

The people being paid got this period right. The supervisor got a named list and the last decision. The next day got a backlog with a known size and age.

WHY NOT SPLIT

Splitting the day protects nobody. Ordering it protects this period's pay and makes the carried work visible.

WHAT TO WATCH AFTERWARD

Carried work has an age. Report it.

Carrying the backlog one day is a decision. Carrying it every day is drift, and the only defence is saying the number out loud.

WATCH 01

The backlog's age

Every report says plainly how many days the hold backlog has carried. Day one is a choice. Day five is a problem someone senior should see, with the oldest row named.

WATCH 02

Non-responders who repeat

The same names on the list two pay runs in a row are a pattern, not a coincidence. Raise it as a pattern, with the rows attached, rather than chasing each name again.

WATCH 03

Holds that hide money owed

Some old holds are people waiting to be paid. Group them first thing on the next working day so the ones that are money owed surface before the ones that are tidying.

Signs it is drifting

The report has said "in progress" on the backlog for a week. Nobody can say how old the oldest hold is. The carried count only ever goes up.

Signs it is under control

The carried count and its age appear in every report. The day after each pay run starts on the backlog, and the count falls.

THE TEST

If someone read only your last report, could they tell how long the backlog has been waiting? If not, the report is hiding it.

EVIDENCE, NOT ADJECTIVES

I have run this call before a hard cutoff.

Pay run priorities, exception outreach and backlog reporting are operations work. It is work I have done, on a back-office queue of hundreds of rows.

GROUPED

Hundreds of rows, a few dozen decisions

A hold backlog in the hundreds, sitting under one misleading label, grouped by the smallest key where one decision fixes every row. About 5x fewer decisions, and roughly half cleared in one morning.

CHASED

One message per person, sent early

Exception outreach batched by person, not by row, with the template chosen per case. About 2 in 3 of a full batch replied and were fixed the same day.

HANDED OVER

A named list before every pay run

The supervisor gets everyone who did not reply, by registered name, with what is missing, before the cutoff. The last call stays with the person who owns it.

THE HABIT

Report what was not done

A carried item with its count and age is more useful than a report that sounds finished. It is the line most reports leave out, and the one a supervisor most needs.

CREDENTIALS

Google Project Management Professional Certificate and Google AI Essentials

Plus Anthropic AI Fluency and Model Context Protocol. 31 certifications in total, every one independently verifiable.

> "Paul is incredibly reliable and always delivers top-quality work under pressure.
>
> Omar Kenneth Benosa · Colleague · Tier 2 on the Quicken account

HOW TO START

Write the order down before the deadline day.

On the day, everything looks urgent. Decide the order in advance, while it is calm, and the day mostly runs itself.

OPTION 01

Draft the outreach in advance

The free Exception Email Builder at me.kabuhayan.app/tool-exception-email-builder turns a list of missing entries into one message per person, ready to send first thing on the day.

OPTION 02

Group the carried backlog

The Backlog Grouper at me.kabuhayan.app/tool-backlog-grouper collapses rows into decisions by a stable key, so the carried holds become a short list the morning after the pay run.

OPTION 03

Use The Backlog playbook

The full method: classify, group, route to named owners, and report the age of whatever is carried until it reaches zero. Written for a small back office, not a payroll department.

WHAT I WOULD EXPECT YOU TO FIND

A backlog older than anyone has said out loud, a handful of people who never reply before a pay run, and a report that has said "in progress" for weeks.

Available now for remote work

Chief of Staff · Operations · Senior Executive Assistant · Project Manager
Tell me how many days your oldest backlog has carried.

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linkedin.com/in/paulpacardo
me.kabuhayan.app

Sources: Ernst and Young payroll survey, released by Paycom, 22 December 2022; 508 people who work with payroll at US-headquartered companies of 250 to 10,000 employees; used for the share of payrolls with errors (one in five), average cost per error ($291, up to $705), corrections per pay period (15) and the most common error type (time and attendance); Paycom sells payroll software. PayrollOrg, Getting Paid In America, 2025; more than 25,900 respondents, 23,005 of whom answered the question used; used for the share who would find a one-week pay delay somewhat or very difficult (78 percent); a self-selected survey, not a random sample. US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, news release of 8 January 2026; fiscal year 2025 back wages recovered ($259 million for nearly 177,000 employees, an average of $1,465); these are enforcement recoveries for wage violations, not a measure of processing errors. Deliberately excluded: the claim that 49 percent of workers job hunt after two pay problems (Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2017), a stated-intention survey from a workforce software vendor, rarely quoted with its method. Figures are third-party research, not results I am claiming. Practice figures are banded from real work and describe patterns, not a client.