

## PBS Episode 135: Enhancing the Client Experience with Putnam Investment's Cathy Saunders

**Patti Brennan:** Hi, everybody. Welcome to "The Patti Brennan Show." Whether you have \$20, \$20 million, or \$100 billion for that matter, what you have is what you have. It's important that you protect it and grow it so that you can live your very best life.

You know, one of the things I want to do is maybe change the intro, because everybody's talking about their best life. Like that seems to be the thing now. I think it's so important that we put that all in perspective to define what that is, and how different it is for everybody. Because that's what we get to do, that is what makes this whole process so much fun.

Joining me again today is Cathy Saunders. Guys, wait till you hear her. She is so amazing. Cathy has been at Putnam Investments for 35 years, maybe 34, I can't remember. Anyway, she's been there a long time. She's worn many different hats. Cathy, maybe you can tell us the current hat that you are wearing. Welcome to the show.

**Cathy Saunders:** Sure, Patti. First of all, it's such a privilege to be here with you. I know we've talked an awful lot about doing this show. We got a little sidetracked with COVID, but nonetheless, I was so excited when we had a chance to reconvene and talk about doing this podcast. Thank you for having me.

Today, I am Head of Corporate Sustainability and Public Policy for Putnam Investments.

**Patti:** Amazing. Just amazing because that sounds so relevant, especially today. When I think about Putnam Investments, of all the firms that we work with and we partner with, I think Putnam Investments probably has the best business model for enhancing client experiences.

For those of you who are listening from the industry perspective, we are Cathy's client. That's the relationship we have.

We meet with Putnam on an ongoing basis, find out what they're working on, what they've learned, and it helps us to stay on our game and to introduce the latest and greatest research and whether it's portfolio approaches or tax approaches. It's an important partnership in our business life and it's such a privilege to have such quality people at Putnam Investments as partners.

**Cathy:** Thank you so much, Patti. We appreciate it, and I have the honor of being part of it. Just an incredible team here at the firm, people who you work with every single day -- Lindsay Lucas, John Cooley, just to name a few. They're incredible individuals.

There are so many people here who I've worked with for over half my life and thus, still learning every single day, and really, really excited about being here.

**Patti:** When I think about what you do for us and what we do for our clients, I think about little kids and the bubbles that we would blow when they were toddlers. I've got some bubbles here in the studio and I'm going to blow them up in the air just for everybody to stay. Hopefully, this will work.

See them, they're nice and shiny, and they're blowing in the air. For those of you who have done this with little children, you'll see that they're up in the air and they're beautiful and shiny, and you run after them, then when you go to grab them, they pop. That's a bummer.

To me, that's an important metaphor for what you do for us and for what we do for our clients. It's not just about the shiny bubbles floating in the air, it's got to have substance because when we're running after that thing, our clients are running after the things that are important to them.

They don't want to get to it and have it pop right before their very eyes. To me, the client experience is so important to have substance, to do the things that we say we're going to do, to create an experience that they will never forget, to give them that confidence, that financial freedom so that they can go and live their lives the way that they were meant to live.

Let's start off, Cathy. Why don't you share with me and all of us who are listening today the building blocks for a great client experience?

**Cathy:** Patti, it's a great question. I know we touched on this a little bit earlier before we went live here. First off, I would say, one of the biggest privileges I've had here at the firm is, I've been a beneficiary of some of the best training on "Wall Street." It's training that started from the very first day that I came here and training that happens every single day.

We're very much an apprenticeship, if you will, culture and a collaborative culture in every single way, but there's some building blocks that we learned from the very beginning that have proven to be everlasting over time.

One of the first things that I learned is, there's four things that you need to do every single day to provide excellent and superior client service. Number one, show up on time. Number two, do what you say. Number three, finish what you start, and number four, say please and thank you.

Now, you're probably thinking none of those things are innovative. None of those things are disruptive technology. None of those things are this massive, brilliant, life-changing idea.

That's true, but can you do those four things consistently over time? Can you do it for a week? Can you do it for a month? Can you do it over a five-year period? Can you do it over a 10-year period? Can you do it over an entire career?

It must be something that you can take and make sure that it's everlasting, that it's enduring, and that it can serve the test of time. Those are four behaviors that you must have and delivered consistently over time, will provide superior customer service over time.

**Patti:** You're right, Cathy. It sounds so basic. Again, that's how trust is developed. You must earn it. It's not something that is just given arbitrarily. It's something that is built over time.

You do those four things and people are going to trust you because you show up on time, you do what you say you're going to do. I don't even remember all four of them, but they make so much sense to me.

For some of us, it's intuitive and for other people, it's not because they get distracted. They're chasing after that next shiny thing. They think it's technology. They think it's this or that.

In the end, it's about the relationship. It's not even talking, it's listening, and I'm not just talking about listening for listening sake. People don't want to just be listened to, Cathy. They want to be heard.

**Cathy:** They want to be heard.

**Patti:** When we hear people, then it allows those four things to fall into place. When we hear our clients, whether it be sharing the things that they aspire to or the things that they're worried about, then we get to fill the gaps in their life. Everybody's got them. That's what we get to do, is to hear what's going on in their lives.

It's like we talked about before. Clients' lives are always changing with whether it be tax laws or market, but more importantly, things that are happening in their lives. Whether they're insecure about their jobs or worried about their adult children, or somebody is drinking more than they should drink. This is real life.

When we get to be real and we hear what's on our client's mind, then we get to solve real problems. Again, it's not the shiny bubble. These are real issues that people go through every single day.

After 30-plus years, we know how to solve them. If we don't know how to do it, I'll call Putnam and I say, "Hey, Cathy Saunders, we got A, B, and C going on, do you know anybody that could help us with this?"

I think back to some of the issues and the questions that we had. Let's go back to the Ukraine war - I don't know anything about war and the impact that it could have economically worldwide. I don't know anything about Russia, Putin, and all that... so we make a phone call to Cathy Saunders and Putnam, and you introduced us to certain people for a podcast.

That was really neat because we get to learn right alongside with our clients. What a privilege that is. The thing about all of this is that, again, we are hearing what's going on in our clients' lives to enhance their life experiences. Again, they're not their money, they're not their portfolio.

Yes, their portfolios are important. Performance is important - it either builds or it detracts. They're going to lose money on paper from time to time. Tell them in advance. At least, that's what I try to do.

In fact, before they even become a client, we're running scenarios. We're not shooting from the hip here. We are running numbers based on their personal situation, their cash flow, their tax situation. What their wills and trust actually say, not what they think that they say.

Let's show them on paper the implications of decisions that have already been made. By the way, if this terrible thing that we're all worried about actually occurs, would they be OK? If they won't, let's make sure, let's do what's necessary to remove or at least reduce the impact of whatever that thing could be. Loss of job, an illness, you name it, it's happened. Let's be ready.

**Cathy:** Patti, all those things are so irrelevant. If you really think about it, your clients need to like you, respect you, and trust you. The way that you build that respect and trust is through transparency and reporting back on when things are working, absolutely.

When things aren't working and if there's impact to a portfolio that they need to know about, they need to know that they can trust you and that you're going to be fully transparent and have an opportunity to manage those expectations before it happens.

**Patti:** 100 percent, it's the clarity that brings it all together. It's the impact. Yes, it has happened. What are we going to do about what happened? That's the most important thing, for them to know that we're on it, we're aware of the impact. We were aware of what could happen even before it happened, and we got it. We got this.

I don't know about you, Cathy, but I find that the most important times are not when things are going well, it's when they're not. When we're sending out an email, we're on the phone with them, we're touching base. That really means a lot because, to your point, we're showing up, we're not hiding in our offices. We're not pretending that things are wonderful because they're not.

It's the pits. To recognize that and be real and yet to be able to have the clarity and that steady hand to say, "We've been through this before. Yes, the catalyst was different. We never know when these things are going to happen, but we know what to do when it does, so we're going to go through this together and we will get to the other side together. Don't know how long it's going to take it either."

**Cathy:** Patti, you're so right. It reminds me of the importance of context. We were sucked into a 24/7 news cycle that keeps us focused on what's happening right now which, yes, is relevant, but in the broader context of a plan that's been put in place for a lifetime, isn't as relevant as the news would lead us to believe.

A lot of times we go through different periods like we are right now in the markets.

**Patti:** We think about context, and we can apply this to any industry. Let's talk about the Four Seasons as the example that you and I were talking about before we went on live.

**Cathy:** Patti, it's so funny that you bring up the Four Seasons because if you think about a franchise that is playing at the highest levels of the game and customer service, this must be a business and an enterprise that is front of mind from start to finish.

It's interesting, we had an opportunity to meet Scott Taber who is Senior Vice President and Head of Global Hospitality for the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. He's responsible for the client experience, whether you're staying at the Four Seasons Hotel, whether you're out of Four Seasons Resort, or whether you're in the air, flying on one of the Four Seasons aircraft as well.

It's interesting to hear his insight. He says that the Four Seasons' client experience ignites and goes into overdrive when things go wrong.

Getting back to this whole idea, when things are working, you don't really think about client service, but boy, when you've lost your cellphone at the airport or if you forgot a ring light and you must do a podcast or a video call the next day, this is when the Four Seasons really shines.

As a matter of fact, he talked about a guest he checked into their Georgetown property. As soon as he checked in, he realized that he'd left his cellphone at the gate in the Dulles Airport.

Within 10 minutes, there was a Four Seasons employee in the car, on their way to Dulles Airport to try to find this phone. No surprise they found it, brought it back to the club.

It also is no surprise that whenever this client has an option of where they're going to stay, it's going to be at the Four Seasons every single time. Usually, we think about the client's experience when things are working.

The best people who are delivering the client experience think about it in the context of when things are moving in a different direction and maybe not really moving exactly as planned. Those are some of the things that happened behind the scenes at the Four Seasons.

There is nothing that feels more luxurious than the art of anticipation and anticipating what's going to happen for that client who's staying as a guest in the hotel. The whole idea that you've got a full staff and team behind you and they are predicting what you're going to need next, there's nothing that feels more luxurious and better than just that.

It reminds me of some of the things that we see in our environment and in every single business today. There's so many analytics that are available and so much data that is available to us today. It really helps inform what clients need more than ever. It really helps influence what that next best action should be when we're providing clients service to our customers.

**Patti:** Your point is an excellent point. First of all, as a sidebar, I did not know that the Four Seasons had aircraft. That's pretty cool.

**Cathy:** [laughs]

**Patti:** I can't imagine what an amazing client experience that probably is.

Your point about predictive analytics, there's so much data, but data is meaningless unless we can apply it to a client's situation and use it to give them some clarity of potential impact, good and bad. That's the neat thing about some of the tools that we've learned about even just this year.

I've learned about something new every single week and we apply. We tested, we made sure that it's not creating a fairy tale. Then we learn because this is a learning business. It's a knowing business. Most importantly, it's a doing business.

What are we going to do about it? How are we going to use it to impact our clients' lives, impact the experience that they're having with our firm?

Cathy Saunders, I can't thank you enough for your time today. I love your stories, your experience. We have learned so much about enhancing client experiences and what to do when because of our relationship with Putnam Investments.

Thank you so much for your time today. I hope you have a safe flight to Washington DC. Thank you for everything that you have done for my firm, as well as the entire industry.

**Cathy:** Patti, it was such a pleasure to be with you today. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

**Patti:** Thanks to all of you who have tuned in again today. Thank you for watching, hope you like the bubble action. That was fun to do. If you have any questions, please go to our website at [keyfinancialinc.com](http://keyfinancialinc.com). Let us know what you think. Let us know if there's a topic that you'd like to learn about.

We're going to be doing more of the "Ask Patti Brennan" series because a lot of you have given us feedback that you really like those short, to the point, this is the issue, here is how we think about it. We're going to be doing a lot more of those. I appreciate the feedback that you're liking that approach as well.

I hope you all have a wonderful day. Again, thank you to Putnam Investments and Cathy Saunders for your insights, your experience, and your wisdom. Take care.