



# USAA chief values time with his employees

## Putnam lends ear to workers' ideas

**Russ Wiles**

The Arizona Republic

Sept. 23, 2007 12:00 AM

Bill Putnam isn't like most people: He actually likes Monday mornings.

That's the time when he listens in on a few phone calls that customers make to USAA advisers on questions dealing with insurance, investments, banking and more.

The San Antonio-based company caters to military customers, and many of the calls come from personnel stationed in Iraq and other hot spots.

The sessions give Putnam, who heads the firm's Phoenix operation, an opportunity to sense what's on the minds of USAA members.

Monday mornings also are when he greets newly hired workers at the firm's sprawling north Phoenix campus.

USAA has been on a hiring binge in recent years, and a typical orientation might involve anywhere from six to 60 individuals.

"I ask them to let us know if there's anything we can do better," Putnam said.

"The message is simple - 'We're glad you're here.' "

Putnam spent 33 years in the Navy, retiring as a rear admiral, so he's plenty familiar with rank, protocol and hierarchy.

But his own management style is much more casual, and so is USAA's corporate culture.

"When push comes to shove, authority, accountability and responsibility are essential," he said.

"But day in and day out around here . . . so much can be done in a collaborative way."

Putnam took over the reins for USAA in Phoenix in early 2006.

It was his 28th career relocation, including assignments for the Navy.

He spends a good chunk of each work day just walking the halls and connecting to people, finding out about problems and helping to solve them.

He also participates in moments of employee recognition, whether it's to acknowledge someone for superior customer

service or someone else for reaching a tenure milestone.

Putnam emphasizes communication, and he even seeks feedback from three unnamed employees at the Phoenix center who provide insights on the workplace mood and his own performance.

"Their job is to watch me - how I walk around, communicate and interact," Putnam said.

"My responsibility is to take a pulse on how people are feeling about themselves and their company."

### Post a Comment

This is a public comment zone. Readers are solely responsible for the content of their posts and must comply with our [Terms of Service](#) and [Rules of Engagement](#). Report offensive content by clicking on the "Report abuse" link.

azcentral.com login required

- [sign in to post a comment](#) »
- [click here to register for a free account](#) »

Your Comment:



You must be logged in to post comments.

[Log In](#) | [Register](#)