

Ray Rogers (00:06):

I'm Ray Rogers.

Annie Evans (00:07):

And I'm Annie Evans, co-host of today's episode.

Ray Rogers (00:11):

You're listening to *Fix This*, a podcast exploring tech ideas and solutions to some of today's largest challenges.

From the buildings we inhabit to the text messages we send and all of the services we use, nearly everything we do depends on some form of infrastructure—whether that's a data center or a physical building. And ultimately, everything we do has an impact on the climate, which means we also have a massive opportunity to be more sustainable in individual and collective choices. Businesses can lead by example and work toward a more sustainable future for all by building sustainable changes into the systems we all rely on every day.

Annie Evans (00:50):

Salesforce is a customer relationship management company with a global and strategic partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS). It's also a leader in sustainable business practices. Salesforce uses AWS to create new business applications, new regions, and so much more, but one of its most notable innovations is its advancement in climate action. Salesforce has made climate action contractual by integrating climate provisions into supply chain contracts to help suppliers reduce their carbon emissions.

Ray Rogers (01:22):

Salesforce is an Amazon Climate Pledge signatory, and it also builds in partners with AWS to create sustainable infrastructure internally and enables other companies with the digital tools they need to lead and build their own sustainable futures.

Annie Evans (01:36):

Patrick Flynn, senior vice president and global head of sustainability at Salesforce, joins Ray to chat about Salesforce's progress over the years in meeting sustainability goals and where the company is headed next in its sustainability mission. Take a listen.

Ray Rogers (01:51):

Can you tell us about your role at Salesforce, what it entails, and how your career has led you to work in sustainability?

Patrick Flynn (01:57):

Well, first, Ray, it's so awesome to be here with you. Like so many of my peers, my journey was a bit of an unexpected one and has been a bit meandering as well. I'm a mechanical engineer, and I started out designing high-rise building, heating, ventilation and air conditioning. We made some green buildings. We made some buildings that were not that efficient. Seeing how badly we make our buildings for the most part, you have situations like a developer who's really focused on minimizing the construction

costs, even if that means trimming on energy efficiency, which, over the long term, would be a financially great thing to optimize forth.

Patrick Flynn ([02:44](#)):

And I felt a responsibility as an engineer to try to improve that, to fix that puzzle, whether it was the misaligned financial incentives or disconnected information, and that was really what set me on my career of sustainability. And now at Salesforce, for the past seven years or so, leading sustainability for the company, and the way I think about that is, really, I work for planet Earth, and my team and I think all day every day about the opportunities that we have to create positive impact with this amazing platform of a company that we call Salesforce.

Ray Rogers ([03:24](#)):

In 2021, Salesforce had quite a few sustainability achievements. Can you walk us through what Salesforce has accomplished, and what company sustainability goals look like now?

Patrick Flynn ([03:35](#)):

2021 was a banner year for Salesforce. I'm so proud of everything we were able to accomplish leading up to that. We signed on to the Amazon Climate Pledge committing us to near zero emissions by 2040, essentially the Paris Agreement 10 years early. We also came out with our climate action plan, which goes further into our climate strategy.

Patrick Flynn ([03:59](#)):

And on top of the commitments under the Climate Pledge, we've also got a really ambitious one for carbon reduction as a business. Everything from travel, infrastructure, real estate and supply chain, we put forward all of the strategies we're deploying in order to bring emissions down. And our commitment is that our full value chain emissions will match a decline that the planet really needs to see globally to meet a 1.5-degree Celsius future.

Patrick Flynn ([04:33](#)):

We also made it about halfway towards our 100-million tree goal. That's a decade-long goal that we set a couple of years ago under the Trillion Tree initiative. We're already 43 million trees out of that 100 million goal. We announced a \$100 million ecosystem restoration and climate justice fund in partnership with the philanthropy team here.

Patrick Flynn ([04:57](#)):

We made a commitment to blue carbon, which is carbon credits that come from ocean projects, a million tons of blue carbon credits to be purchased by Salesforce over the next handful of years. And we issued a \$1 billion sustainability bond. So that's just a small sample actually. Really proud of everything we've been able to do. It comes from the fact that really everyone at Salesforce is on the sustainability team, and we try to work through the business and through the leaders of this business in order to do everything that we can.

Ray Rogers ([05:37](#)):

Salesforce is a cloud company, of course. From your perspective, what opportunities lie in the intersection of cloud, infrastructure, and sustainability?

Patrick Flynn (05:46):

Not everybody realizes that every time you send an email, every time you refresh that webpage, some server somewhere is spinning a little bit more, generating a little bit more heat, requiring a little bit more cooling. There's more energy and more emissions with every digital activity that we take. And the engineers who are designing that system, everything from those who are designing the utility grid that powers the data center, the facility itself from cooling, lighting, security, fire suppression, the servers inside the data center and the software that's running that application, all of those different engineering dimensions carry an opportunity to do more with less and to think about elegant design. The incentives of financial optimization, doing more with less, making things happen efficiently, those are really well aligned to the environmental objectives.

Patrick Flynn (06:53):

Previously, I led sustainability for a data center company. I actually didn't find myself speaking about the environmental implications of what we were trying to do all that often. I could speak like a finance person and talk about financial optimization, knowing full well that there was such high alignment with the environmental objectives that everything we did from energy efficiency to renewable energy to higher utilization was all having tremendous environmental benefits as well.

Ray Rogers (07:22):

And Salesforce is also an AWS customer. There is a long working history together between AWS and Salesforce. When the company was weighing its cloud options, why choose AWS as it relates to sustainability?

Patrick Flynn (07:36):

One of the new ways that the connection is happening between customer and supplier is around climate. And so, it's really important to Salesforce, to work with suppliers like AWS, who are committed to climate action. And our goals are inseparable from the forward progress of our full supply chain, including AWS, where we have reached net zero residual emissions across all of our value chain, all of what's called scope 1, 2, and 3. And two-thirds of that net zero commitment has to do with emissions that fall upstream in our supply chain. We also need suppliers who are really transparent with us, like AWS is, how they're doing, what's next, how we might help one another. And so, this values alignment around climate action is a really strong bridge that connects AWS and Salesforce together.

Ray Rogers (08:43):

AWS recently released a new tool, the AWS customer carbon footprint tool. Salesforce is an early adopter of this. What has that process been like for the company? And what's the use of the tool looking like?

Patrick Flynn (08:53):

A lot of the calculation has to do with emissions that might not fall within the four walls of your own company. And so, we need information from AWS, like the total carbon emissions associated with Salesforce's use of AWS products and services, but we also want to go much deeper, site-level specifics so that we can determine which geography to place a workload in. We want information on AWS's forward progress around renewable energy so that we can apply those emissions reduction strategies to our own carbon footprint.

Patrick Flynn (09:35):

The data that we'll need to get handed back and forth between AWS and Salesforce and really any company and its suppliers and customers is going to grow exponentially, especially as we start to see greenhouse gas disclosure becoming more and more regulated and required. The partnership with AWS and the exchange of data is so helpful because you need two leaders to really innovate and pilot that sort of information exchange, and then build it into our product that we call Net Zero Cloud, which is the single source of truth for any of our customers' greenhouse gas emissions, and really innovate with AWS in partnership to figure out how this full value chain accounting is going to take place.

Ray Rogers (10:24):

How are you thinking about working with other organizations even beyond AWS to achieve Salesforce's sustainability goals and also to help define them looking forward?

Patrick Flynn (10:34):

This next wave of forward progress, I believe, is going to come from those strategies that really require two companies or more than two companies working together in close partnership, complementing what each other can bring to the table. And some of the best parts about joining the Climate Pledge have been these moments of actually getting together in person, whether that was in New York or in Glasgow at COP26, coming together and having really transparent conversations among ourselves and with other companies to try to figure out how we can go faster together.

Ray Rogers (11:19):

What role is data playing in your own planning and also in driving these collaborations and partnerships?

Patrick Flynn (11:26):

I think we're at the dawn of a new form of capitalism, where rather than just thinking about shareholders, businesses think about all stakeholders, including planet Earth. And in that moment, what you need are metrics that can be shown in a trusted, transparent, comparable, timely way in order to differentiate those who are delivering returns to the planet, to communities, to their values and those who are not. I'm particularly focused on greenhouse gas emissions data. To me, climate change is the biggest, most important and most complex challenge our species has ever faced, and in order to meet the urgency of climate change, we need the speed that capitalism can bring. We need the innovation that the private sector can bring. And so we really fundamentally need better data out there in the world to help get the tailwind behind those companies that are really moving fast.

Patrick Flynn (12:37):

And an additional accomplishment from last year that I haven't mentioned quite yet is that we had all of our scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions assured by our big four audit firm, Ernst & Young. And they confirmed that, yes, indeed, we have net zero emissions across all of scope 1, 2, 3 after emissions reduction strategies, renewable energy, and then high quality carbon credits. To me, that's a really important last step. Carbon credits not left for the year 2050 or 2040 or 2030, but this year in addition to all of the emissions reduction strategies, I like to say carbon credits last but not left for later, because that allows the metrics to show up in this year's 10K that Salesforce is doing absolutely everything we can. Sure, the

long-term strategies are most important, but there's also the ability to net out all residual emissions each year.

Ray Rogers ([13:44](#)):

Can you explain the idea of a superpower? What does that mean at Salesforce?

Patrick Flynn ([13:47](#)):

The climate emergency is full of tremendous opportunity. Often, we think about the doom and gloom of it all, and sure, that's real, but there's also never been a greater opportunity for positive impact. I think superpowers show up at the individual level. We need accountants to do greenhouse gas accounting. We need artists to make art for climate change. But it's also true at the organizational level. We need every company to think about what they do best and bring that to bear in the climate emergency.

Patrick Flynn ([14:28](#)):

For Salesforce, I think what we do best is put digital tools in the hands of our customers to help them navigate successfully into the future. We've done that with mobile and social, IoT, AI, and we need to do it with climate change too. That's why we've got Net Zero Cloud, not just a single source of truth for greenhouse gas emissions, but also a place to find insight and to know what actions to take with forecasting and goal-setting and a carbon marketplace coming in September. We're trying to help all of our customers accelerate their own journey to net zero now and using our technology superpowers to do it.

Ray Rogers ([15:15](#)):

Can you tell us a little bit about what's next for Salesforce? What do you hope to help your customers achieve when it comes to sustainability?

Patrick Flynn ([15:24](#)):

We've got a big, bold mission at Salesforce sustainability, and it includes accelerating the world's largest organizations to net zero, sequestering a hundred gigatons of carbon through the conservation, restoration and protection of a trillion trees and ocean protection, and igniting an ecopreneur revolution.

Patrick Flynn ([15:49](#)):

What's next for us is continuing to use the full power of the company for sustainability. We just added sustainability as the fifth value here at Salesforce, which is just a further emphasis of how everyone at Salesforce is part of the sustainability team. The most important things we're going to work on facing forward are those that have the chance to deliver impact at a speed and scale that planet Earth will notice and that meets the urgency of this moment. And I believe data and collaborations that span the customer-supplier relationship are going to be the best strategies that can move big enough, fast enough.

Ray Rogers ([16:37](#)):

Is there any advice that you would give other organizations who might not be as far along in their own sustainability journey? Where do they start and how do they begin to approach this pervasive challenge and opportunity really?

Patrick Flynn ([16:49](#)):

First and foremost, what do you do? The second question to ask yourself is how do you do it? That's everything operational, if you have facilities or vehicles, employees commuting here and there. It's also the operational elements of who you buy from and whether you've got philanthropy integrated into your business model.

Patrick Flynn ([17:14](#)):

And then the third question is who can you influence, and are you using that influence as effectively as possible? We really think about four main types of stakeholders to be influenced that have the biggest potential for impact, and those four are governments, using your voice boldly and clearly in the moments that matter with policymakers and regulators, individuals, I think the closest are typically your own employees, but it's also the communities around you and your suppliers and customers. The third is other businesses. Usually, you've got a lot of influence over your suppliers. They're looking to you as a customer and trying to connect with you. And then the fourth stakeholder category is really the investor community. We talked about it in terms of getting trusted data out there in public filings that reflect climate action.

Patrick Flynn ([18:18](#)):

I would reflect on those three categories of questions if you're trying to think about where to start, which are what you do at your core, your primary reason for being, your superpower. Number two, how you do that thing operationally up and down your full value chain. And then finally, who you can influence, whether that's a government, an individual, a business, or the investor community.

Ray Rogers ([18:54](#)):

To learn more about Salesforce on AWS, visit aws.amazon.com/solutions/case-studies/innovators/salesforce.

Annie Evans ([19:06](#)):

If you like today's episode, listen back to episode 60 to hear how CarbonCure uses AWS to turn data into insights so that it can help customers reduce embodied carbon from concrete and new construction, or dig deeper in the archives and check out episode 47 to hear how Urban Systems Lab is using the cloud to build green infrastructure solutions and drive impact towards environmental justice. And remember to join the conversation on social media with #FixThisbyAWS.

Ray Rogers ([19:36](#)):

A huge thank you to our guest, Patrick, and thank you for tuning in. If you like today's show, please remember to subscribe, rate, review, and share. We'll be here on the next one.