

# Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript – Episode 44: Cheers to the Crew at Your Neighborhood Trader Joe's

Tara: On our final episode of the year, we say cheers to all the crew members at your neighborhood Trader Joe's. Here's a preview.

*[Banjo music begins behind...]*

Susan: I am given a lot of freedom to be able to decide what is going to be best for my section and what I feel is best for our customer and what she or he wants.

Matt: Okay. Salem favorite cut flower.

Salem: Oh my gosh. That is so hard to pick.

Matt: Get it.

Tara: (laughs)

Tara: I have taken the Williamsburg Bridge. So I've gone from Manhattan to Brooklyn to visit our new store.

Matt: This is just so much more beautiful and bright and full of all sorts of tasty food. Our brand is our people, our crew in our stores offering up our products to our customers.

NYC Customer: The cashiers are always so friendly and it's just like a warm inviting place to go into.

Sammy: When we provide that WOW customer experience, everyone's happy. We're happy. They're happy. Everyone's happy.

Brittany: Yeah. Let's have a party.

Group of Crew Members: Happy New Year! (applause & cheers)

Tara: Happy New Year.

Matt: Happy New Year. Let's go inside Trader Joe's.

*[Theme music begins, including 2 bells at your neighborhood Trader Joe's]*

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, director of words and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the marketing product guy.

Tara: Any New Year's resolutions this year?

Matt: Yeah, a few. And I will admit that some of them are the same as last year's.

Tara: Well, don't feel bad. According to a study published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, only 46% of people who make new year's resolutions are ultimately successful.

Matt: Well, we put together a list. Here are the top seven, the most common new year's resolutions.

Tara: Count 'em down, Casey.

*[Light music begins in background]*

Matt: Coming in at number seven, taking up a new hobby.

Tara: Okay. I'm going to go with curling.

Matt:

Next spending more time with family.

Tara: Always a good idea.

Matt: And then pursuing a career ambition.

Tara: I'm kind of already doing that, but okay.

Matt: Next improving diet. And number three on the list, saving more spending less.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: The second most commonly conceived new year's resolution to lose weight.

Tara: Again, very challenging in this particular career ambition. But given that list, I'm going to guess that number one must be...

Matt: Yeah. You're on it. It's more exercise.

*[Music ends]*

Tara: Good luck to everyone with all those resolutions. But what about the top seven new year's resolutions for Trader Joe's?

Matt: Well, they're not new and they don't change. Actually they're the seven points in our Values Guide. So let's go through a somewhat condensed review of the Values Guide.

Tara: Okay. Will there be a quiz?

Matt: Yes. Every day.

*[Soft acoustic guitar begins in background.]*

Tara: Well, the first one absolutely is integrity.

Matt: Think of it simply it's as basic as treating others, as you would like to be treated. It's an emphasis on relationships.

Tara: Value number two, we are a product driven company.

Matt: To differentiate our version of the grocery business, we travel the world to find products customers will love that great quality at outstanding prices.

Tara: Okay so that one really leads into the next value in our Values Guide, which is create a WOW customer experience.

Matt: Now, the WOW in this is really, it's the cumulative buildup of small things to show customers that we are honored to have them shop with us as if they were guests in our home.

Tara: For our crew. That's just what we do at Trader Joe's, but it's different.

Matt: Here's the Value Guide point number four, no bureaucracy. Think of it as always working to shorten the distance between a question and an answer.

Tara: Our crew members in the store are empowered to help solve those problems for the customer and not have to go up level after level after level of leadership to get an answer. The next value we are national chain of at grocery stores.

Matt: It's about the balance of our national business and the scale of our buying power as the purchasing agent for our customers, balanced with supporting individual stores in individual neighborhoods.

Tara: Being a neighborhood store is not just about opening your doors to people who live in the neighborhood, but it's also about being neighborly, being a part of the neighborhood. The designs on their walls may look like their neighborhood, the partners who they work with in their neighborhood shares program to donate food on a daily basis.

Matt: The sixth point in our Values Guide, kaizen, the relentless work to make little improvements every single day, summed up as we owe each other and our customers a better job today than we did yesterday.

Tara: And last, but certainly not least, number seven in the list of Trader Joe's values in our Values Guide is, the store is our brand.

Matt: Our brand is not just a logo that you slap on something. Our brand is not a commercial, this podcast notwithstanding. Our brand is our people, our crew, in our stores offering up our products to our customers. It's that connection each customer has with *their* neighborhood store, their Trader Joe's.

Tara: And we'd like to demonstrate that today, by speaking with crew members at neighborhood Trader Joe's stores all around the country really.

*[Sound: Telephone speed dialing]*

Tara: We need to call Salem at our Charlotte Midtown store.

*[Sound: CLICK as the phone is answered]*

Salem (on telephone): Hello.

*[Music begins with soft bass line underneath...]*

Tara: Hi, is this Salem?

Salem: Yeah, this is Salem.

Tara: Hey, this is Tara. How are you?

Salem: I'm great. How are you?

Tara: I am doing well. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk to us for the podcast.

Salem: Thanks for having me on.

Tara: We understand that as part of your job as a crew member there, that you are the section leader for the floral section.

Salem: That's correct. I pick the flowers and plants that come into the store, and I will set up the merchandising. And if something comes in that looks really great, we'll go ahead and order a pretty heavy inventory of that. We have a lot of fun.

Tara: So if it's a brand new product, no one's telling you, you have to take 30 cases of this. You're just saying, Ooh, that looks really great. We're going to buy it. We're going to bring in a lot of that because we think our customers will love it.

Salem: Yes. I can make the decision like, hey, let's bring in 20 cases of this. This looks awesome. There's a lot of shortages in the flower world. So we kind of do the best we can with what's available.

Matt: Salem, I was lucky enough just to be at your store in that sort of midtown Charlotte location and it looked great. So whatever it is, you and the crew are doing...

Salem: Oh, thanks.

Matt: ...any shortage that you might be grappling with figuring out how to wrangle is not apparent on the customer side. Because there's just ample abundant flowers there. You're not there seven days a week and this is a seven day a week business. How do you coordinate what happens in your section when you're not there?

Salem: I will leave notes on the log on my days off as to what the plan will be. I always feel like I'm leaving this in such great hands. And sometimes I walk into some surprises when I come in from my days off. And I just kind of change it to what I feel like the vision should be for that day. It's nice to have that flexibility to make those decisions.

Matt: That's pretty cool.

Salem: I love it. It's probably my favorite part of the job. I have like very strong opinions about flowers and plants and I'm one of those like crazy plant moms that has like 57 house plants in my house right now.

Tara: I've heard of dance moms, and I've heard of soccer moms, but until right now I've never heard of plant moms.

Matt: So Salem, was this a pre-existing condition? Like, were you a plant mom before taking over the section?

Salem: Yes.

Matt: What's your favorite plant then?

*[Soft music begins.]*

Salem: Oh my gosh. I hope none of my plants can hear this.

Matt: It's like Tim, that philodendron. He's so cute.

Salem: Yes. I have an asparagus fern. We're coexisting very well.

Matt: Okay. Salem favorite cut flower...?

Salem: Oh my gosh. That is so hard to pick.

Matt: Get it?

Tara & Salem: (laugh)

Salem: I do love our garden roses. I think they're also called country roses.

Tara: All right. Salem you have surpassed our expectations for this conversation, and we thank you so much for making this time.

Salem: Thanks so much. I really enjoy talking to you guys.

Matt: Likewise.

*[Music ends.]*

*[Sound: a busy Trader Joe's store in the background, checkout scanner beeping, murmur of distant voices]*

Tara: Okay. Are we ready?

Susan (in background): Yes.

Matt: And through the miracle of podcasting, Tara is reporting on location from a neighborhood Trader Joe's store here in Southern California.

*[Mid-tempo music begins in background]*

Tara: I am Matt. I am at one of our fantastic Trader Joe's locations in West Hollywood.

Matt: Great area. And you know, say hi to Susan, our section leader there for the grocery category.

Tara: You just did.

Susan: Hi Matt.

Tara: So Susan, can you explain to me what it means to be a section leader?

Susan: Oh, well. A section leader is a great way to be able to contribute to the business. Part of our responsibilities are writing orders, making sure that we're merchandising our section, keeping it clean, neat and tidy, the signs. And of course, the most important thing, product knowledge so that we can WOW our customers.

Tara: That's like the best explanation of section leader that I have heard, honestly.

Susan: Yeah. I am given a lot of freedom to be able to decide what is going to be best for my section and what I feel is best for our customer and what she or he wants when they come into shop. So I really enjoy that piece of the section leading.

Tara: So what happens if you order something, and then it doesn't come in, and then it's not there for customers. How do you manage expectations and what do you do with your space?

Susan: I make sure that other people in the store, the other people in the crew, know that something might be out of stock for a while so that we can make sure that we are suggesting other items to that customer. I think that's one of the most important things about having product knowledge is so that we can share it and about doing tastings in the store, so that we can try everything and be able to just recommend what we have just tried to our customer.

Tara: That's one of my favorite things about my job is being able to taste all the things.

Susan: I know. I love to.

Tara: I know me too. So it's like, okay, you're going to pay me to come here and eat food. I'm good with that.

Susan: (chuckles) I know. I always think, why didn't I start doing this sooner? I love food. I've always loved food.

Tara: We did a good job. I think we got everything. I'm so grateful for your time and also for your expertise in the store. Your customers are so lucky.

Susan: Well, thank you. And I really appreciate you coming out here.

*[Music ends.]*

Matt: All right. Let's make one more phone call to Charlotte. And this time we want to talk with Natalia.

*[Sound: Dial tone, speed dialing, phone rings, CLICK of being answered]*

Natalia (on telephone): Hello.

Tara: Hi, is this Natalia?

Natalia: This is Natalia. Hello, how are you?

Tara: Excellent. So I am here with my trustee co-host Matt Sloan.

Matt: Hi, Natalia, you and have sort of your own area there, like a special section within the section. A little display stack of your favorites or your recommendations. What does it take for a wine to make it to one of those shelves?

Natalia: To me it's just like fun and approachable. They are mostly off the bean path. There's things that are maybe a little bit under their radar in the sense that someone's not always going to gravitate towards them because they aren't familiar with Portugal Red. And so I want people to be excited about it because it's a phenomenal wine.

Tara: So if you have a customer who comes in, who really wanted that French Rose that suddenly is out of stock because of shipping issues from overseas, what do you do when they come to you looking for an alternative?

*[Acoustic guitar music begins]*

Natalia: I try to get people to try other things. We actually have [inaudible 00:12:09] specifically with the French rose. So she was looking for the [inaudible 00:12:12] which was an organic one that's been out for a while. I recommended the moon lane roses and she was just like super thrilled. So that was a good example.

Matt: Did you come to Trader Joe's with an interest and even passion in wine?

Natalia: I definitely had a passion for wine. Trader Joe's helped spark it too.

Tara: Well, Natalia, we really, really do appreciate it. It's been really to you.

Natalia: Thank you.

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: With the new year comes new stores in New York.

*[Acoustic jazz guitar begins in background]*

Matt: Now we open new stores throughout the year in lots of different places. And we're expecting 2022 to be another busy year for new neighborhoods to get their own Trader Joe's stores.

Tara: The reason that I said new year, new stores, New York is because I recently had the opportunity to visit two of the newest Trader Joe's stores. That just happened to be in New York city.

Matt: Cool.

*[Sound: Traffic]*

*[Ragtime music begins.]*

Tara: Make sure we're recording. Okay. Okay. So I am here at the new 59th Street store in New York city. It's amazing. It's the coolest store I've ever seen. Sorry all other Trader Joe stores, but this store really cool.

Nick: Hi, my name is Nick. I used to work at 540 Union Square, and then I came over here at a Bridge market.

Tara: When we're talking about the Values Guide specifically, are there things that you feel like you're using every day and you're thinking about every day in your work?

*[Positive upbeat music begins.]*

Nick: Absolutely. Especially the WOW customer experience. I think that's one of the reasons customers come to Trader Joe's. Is that if they have a question, they're not expecting us to always know the answer. So sometimes I'll say let's take a walk or let's find out together. And they kind of like it.

Tara: They seem to enjoy figuring things out and the teamwork effort of it. Of this makes perfect sense to me that you are all about the WOW customer experience because you are like sunshine.

Nick: Oh my gosh. Thank you so much. I try.

*[Sound: Grocery bag being opened]*

Tara: So we have another crew member here to talk to us in the 59th Street store and tell us about yourself.

Sammy: My name is Sammy. I am a transfer from another store. So I was excited to open this store. It's gorgeous and everyone's friendly. I just feel like you just have a blast when you are working. It's not just like all work, work, work.

Tara: Do you find that people shopping are friendly too?

Sammy: I feel like customers are a lot of talkative more so here. They're just like, everyone's so friendly here. And it's like, that's Trader Joe. When we provide that WOW customer experience, everyone's happy. We are happy. They're happy. Everyone's happy.

*[Sound: Louder checkout noises]*

Melanie: My name's Melanie.

Tara: Matt. We are so lucky right now we have a Trader Joe's an inside Trader Joe's podcast super fan.

Melanie: I cannot get enough of Matt's bad jokes. It is.

Tara: You hear that Matt. Matt's bad jokes, not Tara's bad jokes. Because Tara only tells good jokes.

Melanie: Yeah. I'm a sucker for a really bad pun.

Tara: Tell us about yourself. What your Trader Joe's history is.

Melanie: I started on the West Coast in LA. And now I've in our New York City stores for about six years. The thing that stays the same is that a Trader Joe's is Trader Joe's, is Trader Joe's. I mean the people that we hire, the crew is here to WOW our customers, to do the right thing. And as long as you're hiring the right people, I think it doesn't matter how many customers you're seeing.

Tara: Thank you. And please don't stop listening to inside Trader Joe's also. We appreciate it.

Melanie: Oh, I will not.

*[Sound: Car motor passing]*

Tara: Okay. I took the Williamsburg Bridge and now I am at the beautiful new Trader Joe's store in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. And I'm with crew member Katie who's going to head up the flower section here.

Katie: I'm super excited about it, it's been a super fun time.

Tara: Katie, we've been talking a lot about the Values Guide on this episode.

Katie: Yeah. My point of view is always as the customer. I try to go above and beyond for the customer. And so I think like the customer.

Tara: You can tell. You're taking such great care with those flowers.

Katie: When you walk into every Trader Joe's, the flower section is right there. It's the first section that everybody sees. I want to make sure that I bring good vibes to the store when customers walk into the door.

Tara: Thanks so much for taking the minute to talk to me. I really appreciate it.

Katie: No worries. Yeah. You're welcome. It was great.

*[Jazzy bass rhythm begins, then fades under...]*

Renee: Hi, my name's Renee.

Tara: So this is obviously a brand new store. Where were you before this location?

Renee: So I started at 14th Street Union Square, and then I went to Scarsdale in New York, and then I went to Brooklyn Court Street, and now I'm here.

Tara: I want to go to one specific piece of the Values Guide. And that is that we are a product driven company. What is your favorite Trader Joe's product.

Renee: Just off the top of my head would be the scallion pancakes in Frozen. So amazing. It's like my go-to snack. And our apple blossom in Frozen. And I pair it with our vanilla ice cream, and that's the only vanilla ice cream I eat. It's always in my freezer.

*[Sound: Burst of louder store activity  
Clarinet ragtime music under...]*

Tara: And we are rolling.

Jen: I'm Jen.

Tara: How long have you worked at Trader Joe's?

Jen: It's going to be four years in May.

Tara: We have this thing that we call the Values Guide, right? That we live by on the job all the time.

Jen: Yeah. I would say the number one is integrity. And I think that it's inherent in the people that they hire as well. I feel as though they are people who have integrity on their own.

Tara: What is your favorite Trader Joe's product?

Jen: 72% chocolate chips. And I actually always intend for them to be an ingredient in a baking thing. And I open up the package and keep it in the side door in my refrigerator. And somehow, I don't know by the time I'm ready to bake that thing most of the chocolate chips are gone.

Tara: Huh, yeah. That is a mystery. I don't know that we'll ever solve that one Jen.

*[Sound: Carts rustling at a Trader Joe's store]*

Tara: Okay. All right. We are recording. I'm going to let you introduce yourselves, starting with you.

*[Light jazz music with piano and bass]*

Breanda: I'm Breanda.

Tara: And where were you before you were in this store in Williamsburg?

Breanda: Well, I was working in Court Street, Brooklyn. Woo woo.

Tara: What brought you to this store?

Breanda: I've had a good run with the company. So I was feeling good about teaching some of the values and keeping on with the tradition. And we're just having a good time.

Tara: You are having a good time. I'm going to go over here to another crew member.

Brittany: Hi, I'm Brittany.

Tara: When you are thinking about work and the Values Guide and how that kind of influences you every day. What comes to mind?

Brittany: We treat humans like humans and that's it. Every day I come in, I have a good time with the customers. We talk, we exchange recipes, TV information, whatever it is. We talk, we have a good time. And the WOW customer experience is my core, and it is the heart of Trader Joe's. It just makes me really happy to know that people can leave happy, and they can brighten my day as well.

Tara: I feel like a stalker, I've been watching you. But I've been watching you this morning. You've been welcoming customers at the top of the escalator at this brand new store. And like, you're having a party up there. It's fantastic.

Brittany: What defines a party? Good food, good music, good people, dancing. You can do all of them at Trader Joe's. You know... Like, okay. Yeah. Let's have a party.

*[Music ends.]*

Matt: Who better to top off this episode about our crew than our customers. Here's Tara talking with some of them, kind of like a podcast focus group.

*[Up tempo music begins]*

Craig: Hi, my name is Craig and I live in this neighborhood. And this market is the most amazing thing to happen to our neighborhood in such a long time.

Tara: Thank you, Craig. And how about you?

Stephanie: Hi, I'm Stephanie. I know the culture of Trader Joe's from the many other locations in the city. Trader Joe's attracts some of the best personalities. They are always friendly. Every single person, every single crew member I've ever talked to, especially in the checkout line is always, "How are you? How's it going?"

Craig: Of course, when you're dealing with new stores just opened, you have to find out where everything is and stuff. And I asked one of the team members where I could locate something, and she was incredibly helpful. And not only told me where I could find it in this store, but gave me a good rule of thumb on where to look for it in all Trader Joe stores.

Tara: What was that product? And what is the rule of thumb? Because I don't know of this thing.

Craig: It was Joe-Joe cookies. And she's basically saying that if I look at the freezer section, I can usually find that Joe-Joe's above it. And I'm okay with admitting that it was Joe-Joe cookies, and I don't care with my cardiologist just says, I will eat them because they are good.

Stephanie: They never comment on your purchases. They never make you feel bad for that extra bar of candy or that extra tub of ice cream. They never make you feel anything, but just welcome.

*[Sound: Items being bagged at a store]*

Joy: Hi, I'm joy. And I adore Trader Joe's from New York to New Jersey to Connecticut. I've been to probably 20 of them. All you have to do is think to yourself, hmm I don't see. And someone comes and says, "May I help you? I see you're looking for something."

Tara: Yeah. When you and I were walking through the store a few minutes ago, we were looking for a specific product. And when we asked a crew member, he didn't just tell us where to find it. What did he do?

Joy: He leads us there. He says, "Follow me and I'll show you exactly where it is." And then unfortunately, it wasn't there much to his surprise to which he then offered me an alternate on the shelf that was there. It wasn't exactly what I was looking for, but he was so kind and so readily available to make sure that I was a happy customer.

Tara: This is a great conversation. I love talking about our crew because they are what makes all of this work. I sit in a room and I record podcasts with Matt. We get to talk about what they do and watching them do it is just kind of extraordinary.

Joy: Thank you, Tara. It's great to be here. Got to go shop.

*[Sound: Light traffic noise outside]*

Christine: Hi, I'm Christine and I live right across the street in that building over there. And this, this is a game changer for our neighborhood. This grocery store is amazing and I can't believe the enthusiasm of everyone who works in here. In fact, I was in here yesterday with my mom and I left her for a minute, came back, she was talking to a crew member, turns out we're all from the same hometown, Cleveland. And we just had the nicest chat about that. So people are super friendly. People were so helpful, and it is amazing.

*[Music softens.]*

Tara: Norm, can you repeat what you told me just a second ago?

Norm: This goes for all the Trader Joe's that I've ever shopped in from Los Angeles to here in Williamsburg. There is a sense of neighborhood when you walk into a Trader Joe's, you just feel like everybody wants to work for the store. And also are really happy to see the customers come in. They enjoy their jobs. It just feels like you have a vibe the minute you walk in the store that's welcoming and friendly.

*[Sound: Light traffic noise]*

Matt: Well said, we couldn't agree more. And we'd like to join in saluting the almost 55,000 crew members in 530 neighborhood Trader Joe's stores across the country.

*[Closing theme music begins.]*

Tara: We'll have more episodes that take you inside Trader Joe's throughout the year. So please hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It is free and worth every penny.

Tara: Thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.

*[Music ends.]*