

# Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 50: A Trader Joe's Journey from Portland (ME) to Portland (OR)

Tara: Welcome to episode 50 of Inside Trader Joe's.

Matt: Let's rewind about four years. Now, if I remember correctly, you said...

*[Tape rewinding to Tara saying...]*

Tara: It's a new five-part series.

Matt: Yes, that *is* what you said.

Tara: Well, that was our intention. But here we are.

Matt: For the 50th time. Let's go Inside Trader Joe's.

*[Theme music begins and two bells at a 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: You know, Matt, traditionally 50th anniversaries are celebrated with yellow roses.

Matt: And gold.

Tara: A Trader Joe's greeting card would be nice.

Matt: So would a lot of gold.

Tara: We thought we'd spend a little gold from our travel budget to get out and talk to our crew members.

Matt: Afterall, it's the people in our stores, the crew in stores, every day in every neighborhood Trader Joe's, across the country, they're the ones making it all happen.

Tara: Wait, we're going to all 536 stores across the country?

Matt: Metaphorically, symbolically...pack your bags nonetheless. We're flying from Portland to Portland, Oregon to Maine. But first, why are our crew members so great?

*[Theme music ends.]*

Tara: Well, this is a really good question for Jon.

*[Transition to Jon Basalone.]*

Jon: Is this the anniversary episode?

Tara: This is episode 50.

*[Upbeat music begins.]*

Matt: So we're, sort of like, in this weird spot of like, not making it like, (sings short tune) like it's not about being 50, but it's like, "Oh my gosh, we have 50 of these and we thought we'd have five and..."

Tara: Yeah.

Jon: So this isn't the blooper episode or anything like that.

Tara: Not yet. (laughs)

Jon: (laughs) That's why you have me on.

Tara: (chuckles)

Jon: I'm Jon Basalone and I'm a crew member at Trader Joe's.

*[Music stops.]*

Tara: Uh, wait a minute. So we know we're not really big on titles around here, Jon, but yours is actually relevant to this conversation.

Jon: Around here titles are kind of for our parents, you know? So they have something to talk about with their friends. But if you need my title, yes, I'm president of stores for Trader Joe's.

*[Light music begins.]*

Matt: Okay, Jon. So you spend a lot of time in our stores from Portland to Portland, what are you seeing in stores?

Jon: What we're looking for is pretty basic stuff. And it's pretty simple, and we've kind of boiled it down to asking ourselves a couple of questions, which is, "Is this a place where I'd want to shop and is this a place where I'd want to work?" And if the answer's yes, to both of those you kind of feel it and know it. If the answer is no to one of them, you might say, "Well, why do I feel that way and what is causing that and what can we do to help here?" But most of the time, the answer is yes to both. And that's been pretty great.

Tara: From the perspective of a crew member, what is it that makes you answer yes to that question? What does that environment feel like?

Jon: It feels very supportive. Like you can tell how the captains and mates are treating crew members kind of, by the way the crew members are going about their business and how they're interacting with each other. And is there teamwork taking place? How are they being communicated to and with by the people that are there to support them? You might walk into a business somewhere and see a sign on a door that says "Don't slam the door." And if we saw that sign in our store, I'm not sure I'd want to work here if that's how I'm being communicated to.

Matt: I'm remembering like a big, official meeting of captains and I remember something that you shared with the group at this particular gathering. It was a formal announcement that everyone had permission to be nice.

Jon: The goal is to hire nice, kind, empathetic individuals, and then just turn them loose. And so the customer service training is pretty simple. It's, you know, be yourself. We hired you for a reason. We hired you for you. You don't have to become something else or transform yourself into something to work at Trader Joe's. Like you said, man, just be nice.

Tara: Somehow the internet has become a buzz over time...

Matt: More than usual?

Jon: (laughs)

Tara: Yeah. With rumors that Trader Joe's crew members are trained to flirt with customers.

Jon: Yeah, absolutely not. Maybe people aren't used to seeing people just being genuinely nice to other people. I understand that some flirting does take place, but no one is trained. That is just how they are naturally and that's them being genuine, I suppose. (laughs)

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: There's another idea circulating in electronic places, the interwebs, et cetera, that crew members must acknowledge and appreciate and say that they too, like the vanilla ice cream that's in your shopping cart. I think it's because we actually taste stuff and we're fans and it's something to talk about in common.

Jon: Yeah, they are not told to do that. If the customer buys something that's one of their favorite things, they almost can't help themselves but say, "Oh, I love that too." (chuckles) We don't script on purpose because, if everybody and every time somebody came to the store, you pointed to a product and said, "I like that product," and "Did you find everything okay?" And every customer being talked to like that, it would just become annoying after awhile. So I think it really comes from a genuine place and we don't make them do that.

Tara: It would certainly feel a lot less genuine if suddenly people were following a script.

Jon: It feels like we're heading headlong into a world where there's no human interaction at all, where you just stay home, you work from home, you order online, things get delivered to you or you pick them up. Or if you do go to the store, you don't really have to interact with anyone. You have self checkout, or just throw the stuff in your cart and walk out

because you've already scanned your thumbprint or whatever. We are committed to being completely the opposite of that. A shopping experience where people have that genuine interaction with each other and it feels natural because I mean, that's the world that most of us want to live in, right? Where you can go out and shop in your neighborhood store and say hi to someone you recognize and it kinda makes your day. And so the more retailers that want to go the opposite way, fantastic. We'll do it this way and have fun doing it.

Tara: They're trying to take away all the people and we're just trying to make sure the people are there and can be themselves.

Jon: And we believe in the power of people.

Tara: Okay, really the best way to fully understand all of this, about being inside a Trader Joe's...

Matt: Is to go...

Tara: Inside a Trader Joe's.

Matt: A real Trader Joe's.

Tara: Yeah. So we're going to do that. We're going to hit the road, Jon.

Jon: Well, thanks for having me and have fun out there. Say hi to Captain Cammie in Portland and all the other captains in all the Portlands we have. Sarah, Sepi, Deean, say hi to all of them for me, okay?

Tara: Okay.

*[Bi-plane flying past. Stopping at Trader Joe's in Portland, Maine. Busy store in the background.]*

Tara: (tapping on the mic) Check, check, check, check. We are at our first stop. Trader Joe's in Portland, Maine. We're going to try to talk to as many crew members as we can.

Sophie: Hi, my name is Sophie. Welcome to Portland, Maine, the real Portland. I've been here for five years. I started as a crew member and then I was promoted two years ago, April 1st, 2020.

Tara: You're like, are you fooling with me?

Matt: Wow.

Sophie: I feel really, really lucky and I love this store.

Tara: Why?

Sophie: First of all, I love Mainers. Mainers are so relaxed and they are so kind, but not kind in a way that makes you question whether it's authentic or not, you know? Like they're just like, "Yeah, no, this is great." You know, even on a day like today, where everything is kind of

going crazy, everyone is just like, "Oh, okay. So the registers are down. All right. Well, I'll guess I'll just wait or I guess I'll just bag up my stuff." You know, they're very, just down to earth.

Matt: Is it because we're at the edge of the world?

Sophie: (laughs)

Matt: I mean, I do think that there is a calm acceptance of factual realities here that I haven't experienced in all parts of the country. So it's kind of impressive.

Sophie: Well, I think manners are also really self-sufficient too. I think that there's just this calm that exists, that no matter what happens in the world, like we're going to be good here. And a lot of them live off the land. There's a lot of, you know, farm to table here.

Tara: I almost feel like we're doing a commercial for Maine.

Matt: This moment brought to you by Maine.

Sophie: What are we going to say bad about Maine so that everyone doesn't move here?

Matt: It snows a lot.

Sophie: It's so cold. So, so, so cold.

Tara: (laughs) Cause you don't want everyone moving here, right?

Sophie: And it's really cold outside right now.

Tara: Ah, come on, you're lying. It's a really nice day today, actually. It's 55 degrees...

Sophie: It gets above 50 and Mainers are like, "It's hot. Where are my shorts? Where are my sandals?"

Tara: So this particular Trader Joe's is a busy place.

Sophie: Yes. I love that. We just have so many interesting people that there's no, like mundane, boring day. Someone always has some sort of topic or, you know, or we have a tasting or, the only thing that is consistent is that everyone is going to make the best of whatever happens that day.

Tara: That says you have a really, really great crew.

Sophie: Amazing crew.

Matt: You need an amazing crew to pull off this much business here.

Sophie: Yeah. We're the only Trader Joe's in the whole state of Maine. So they call, I got a call, "Hey listen so I'm about four hours away. Just want to check on a couple of products before I head down." (laughs) I'm like, "Yes, okay. Let me (pretend checking) make sure that we have that in stock for you before you drive four hours to come here."

Tara: So if someone does that...

Sophie: Yep.

Tara: Will you put those products aside for them?

Sophie: Yeah.

Tara: So that it's not different when they arrive in the store?

Sophie: Yeah. For those people, very much so I want to put something aside.

Matt: That would be testing the chill Mainer attitude...

Sophie: (laughs)

Matt: ...in a way that we don't want to, yeah.

Sophie: Yeah.

Matt: Sophie? You're the one who answered the phone.

Sophie: Yeah, I don't want to feel that wrath.

Matt: Okay, I get it.

Sophie: No, I want them to drive four hours and be pleasantly surprised.

Matt: Because they have four hours back.

Sophie: Yeah. (laughs)

Tara: Yeah, that's the other side of that.

Matt: That is the super other side of that story.

Sophie: Yeah. They could make a lot of phone calls in that four hours.

Matt: I would eat everything on the four-hour drive back. Even the Mandarin Orange Chicken, I would be like, "So it's a little cold. It's great."

Sophie: I'm sure Mainers have some sort of oven in their car, like, you know what I mean? Like they're ready to go.

Matt: Engine block stove top.

Tara: Well, part of the year, you don't need a cooler in the back, right? Cause it's so cold.

Sophie: Exactly.

Tara: So we used to joke, even in Massachusetts, when I was a kid that we had a walk-in freezer in the winter. It was the back porch.

Sophie: Yep.

Tara: Is there anything else that you feel like sharing or talking about or asking or anything?

Sophie: I mean, I could just get on here and be a fangirl of Trader Joe's. I love what we do. I feel really grateful to be here, to work here, to engage with the people of Maine. I love that we just spread good vibes all over the country and we sell great food. If you work for Trader Joe's and you're listening, we should just give ourselves a little pat on the back and be like, "You know what? We did something good today."

Matt: That's good stuff. For sure.

Sophie: Yeah, so.

Tara: Thank you so much.

Sophie: Hey.

*[Music ends. Transition to Kathy.]*

Kathy: So I had to come in here because my son is a podcast coordinator. (laughs)

Tara: So fun.

Matt: What does he do? What does that mean?

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Kathy: I, you know what I said, the same thing to him. I said, "Do you work for a radio station?" He's like, "No, mom, it's a thing. It's a podcast company." And he just absolutely loves it.

Matt: It is a thing.

Tara: It is a thing and it's a fun thing.

Matt: Being a podcast is a thing as it turns out.

Tara: And it's fun to do.

Kathy: How many listeners do you have?

Tara: Well, it's, it's...

Matt: Three!

Kathy: (laughs)

Matt: Not all of them are my parents.

Kathy: (laughs)

*[Quick transition.]*

Tara: Can you just Introduce yourself?

Kathy: Hi, my name is Kathy.

Tara: How long have you worked in this store, Kathy?

Kathy: Two years.

Tara: How long have you worked for Trader Joe's in total?

Kathy: Going on 10 years. I feel like here people are just so much more chill and relaxed and like today, for instance, just because we're the only one in Maine, my first two customers, "Oh, it took me five hours to get here." Are you kidding me? Are you kidding? Second customer, "Oh, it took me four hours to get.." And this is just in conversation, you know, and the guy was like, "Yeah, we still have four feet of snow up where I am." I'm like, "Oh my gosh!"

Matt: Good grief. Like where are they coming from? The North Pole apparently.

Kathy: Right? I mean, yeah. They definitely come down for their, you know, the eight jars of peanut butter and, you know, a bunch of frozen stuff. And, you know, they definitely come down for a stock-up. But I hear it all day long. You know, two hours, three hours. And they're like, "When's another store coming way up? And we're like, "Hmmm."

Matt: Exactly. That's probably the best answer...

Matt & Tara: Hmmm.

Matt: Yeah.

Tara: (laughs)

Kathy: We just had, one of our guys just became an American citizen last week. I mean, super cool, right?

Matt: Yeah, absolutely.

Tara: That's fantastic. What'd you guys do when that happened?

Kathy: Umm...

Matt: Worked the frozen load...

Tara & Kathy: (laughs)

Matt: ...among other things.



Kathy: Well everybody just clapped and gave him, you know, and I'm sure there's a card somewhere where everybody's going to be signing it. And things like that are acknowledged. Somebody has a baby, somebody, you know, even going to another job, you know, from here. Everybody's always like, "Good for you! You know, we're going to miss you, but good for you!" I love that.

Tara: Do you have a favorite Trader Joe's product?

Kathy: Right now I can't wait for the Halloumi to come in, you know?

Tara: I put it in the air fryer. (laughs) Matt always laughs at me.

Kathy: (laughs)

Tara: Because I put everything in the air fryer.

Matt: Where are my car keys? In the air air fryer.

Kathy: (laughs)

Tara: And do you grill it?

Matt: Grill it first?

Kathy: Yeah.

Matt: Okay.

Kathy: Cast iron pan.

Matt: All right. That seems so Maine. Like grilling Halloumi. Who would've thought...  
Maine?

Kathy: (laughs)

Matt: It feels totally Maine appropriate. Because it's summertime and it stays light until like midnight or something. And you know, you're going to have a salad with some grilled Halloumi.

Kathy: That's right.

Matt: And then go out for a walk afterwards cause it's still light out. That sounds nice.

Tara: Wow, okay. This conversation has devolved, Kathy, and..

Kathy: (laughs)

Matt: As it always does.

Tara: We are so sorry.

*[Music overtakes conversation, providing transition to the next.]*

Anna Maria: My name is Anna Maria.

Tara: How long have you worked at this store in Portland, Maine?

Anna Maria: I opened the store, so I've been here 11 years.

Tara: Wow, good for you. Congratulations!

Anna Maria: Thanks!

Tara: What brought you to Trader Joe's in the first place?

Anna Maria: Shopped at Trader Joe's all the time. I did some catering, small catering, everything was from Trader Joe's. (chuckles) I cheated, I didn't even tell people some of the products. They thought I made them.

Tara: I think that happens a lot.

Matt: Secret between us.

Tara: What makes Trader Joe's different?

Anna Maria: We get in there and find out about the customer. Like we want to have conversations, we can have fun. We can turn anyone's bad day into a good scenario. Like my favorite thing is talking to a customer that might be upset, unhappy, and be able to turn it around. Like we have that opportunity.

Matt: So in 11 years, and counting, have things changed? Have things stayed the same?

Anna Maria: Well, the store is still fantastic. I think I'm surprised when someone comes in and they say, "Oh, I didn't know you guys were here." And I would say, "Really? I'm so glad you came in." I have so many long time customers that I know their name, I remember they were pregnant, their kids are now 7, 8, 9. So for me, it's just like, it is really like family. Like I know all these people, they know my name, I know their name, I know where they live.

Tara: You say that rather ominously.

Matt: And I'm coming to cater a little event.

Tara: Okay, here's a role playing question. If a customer comes to you unhappy that their favorite product has been discontinued, how do you manage that? Because that happens all the time.

Anna Maria: It does happen. My favorite products...I usually say that first, like, "You know, when the Hot and Sweet Mustard was discontinued, I was devastated." And I was.

Matt: It's like you're still sort of carrying a candle for that.

Anna Maria: Carrying a little, yeah, I am. I'll usually try to find out why they buy it, what was good about it, and then try to suggest something else. But yeah, if you open something up and let them try it and they think, first of all, "I can't believe you opened that up."

Tara: Right.

Anna Maria: And then second of all, "Wow, you picked something that was fabulous and I love it." Also you list a two and a three and a four.

Matt: That's a pretty deep list though. I mean, it's like, you need four other things to back up.

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: I know you like peanut butter cups, but I'm recommending four others.

Tara: Those aren't going to get discontinued.

Matt: I hope not.

Tara: Don't go there.

Matt: I know.

Tara: Don't go there.

Anna Maria: Never.

Matt: Those are grim grim days, dark thoughts.

Anna Maria: That'd be like, we're not making Mandarin Orange Chicken anymore.

Matt: I mean, things like that happen. Because we didn't introduce something just to discontinue it. I mean, we thought it was a great idea and for any number of reasons, it no longer was that. It wasn't, we weren't able to still offer it, it didn't make sense to continue offering it, so it's gone. So at least letting people know that you hear that and you understand that is so important.

*[Transition music.]*

Matt: All right other than visiting the Trader Joe's in Portland, Maine, what should everyone who visits Portland, Maine do and see?

Anna Maria: Well, you need to have a lobster roll. You need to see Portland Head Light.

Matt: What's that?

Anna Maria: It's one of the most famous lighthouses in the nation.

Matt: It still works? And there are people... there's like a cranky old guy who's there and...

Anna Maria: I haven't seen him.

Matt: I could be that guy.

Tara: (laughs) You could totally be that guy.

Matt: I could totally be that guy.

Tara: (laughs)

Anna Maria: I'm just happy to be a part of this store in this state. I love Portland. I love the people here and I love my job. True story.

*[Music ends. Transition to Leyne.]*

Leyne: Hi, I'm Leyne!

*[Light music begins.]*

Leyne: I write the local wine column in Portland, Maine.

Tara: In a newspaper?

Leyne: Yea, in a newspaper.

Tara: That's awesome.

Leyne: In a real honest to God published newspaper.

Tara: Good job!

Leyne: Yeah.

Matt: Great breadth of experience in the wine business. And now you're working on a version of that, here in Portland, Maine at Trader Joe's.

Leyne: So yeah, I love this store. This is awesome. This is as good as it's allowed to get in quasi-retirement from the wine business. (chuckles) I've been a distributor, I've been an importer, I run a winery, I've run an industry. I've done all of the above. You know, I came here with a resume, and they looked at me and said, "You've got to be kidding me. I said, "No, I just want to step it down a little bit and have a lot of fun. I want to take that suit, put it in the closet and say, bye-bye, I'm going to have fun."

Tara: So you got to retire from the wine business and still work with wine all the time.

Leyne: Oh God yeah. Yeah, that's like a dream come true. The people are extraordinary. The customers are extraordinary. The crew is extraordinary.

Matt: I'm sensing a theme here.

Tara: Right?

Leyne: Yeah.

Matt: For a lot of customers, what we've been hearing is, this is like a real destination, meaning they got to travel.

Leyne: Portland, Maine in the 16 years that I've been here has turned into a major foodie city.

Tara: And that's like proximity to the ocean and all the farm to table.

Leyne: Oh, all that farm to table. So this store fits in beautifully.

Matt: It's pretty cool to make that available to people in such an approachable way.

Leyne: Yeah. And we're approachable. I don't want anybody to be scared. Because wine is scary.

Matt: And why? I mean, like that's a whole separate show, but we got to figure out why and we got to stop doing whatever those things are.

Leyne: Well, what I do with customers is what are you doing? "Well, I'm having dinner." What's for dinner? And then we pair up the dinner with what we have here. "I'm having cioppino." Okay, what's your price point? I just have to know where they're going because you don't know who's going to walk in this store. We're a destination. It may be a sommelier from New York who wants to spend \$55 on a bottle or somebody from Caribou who wants to spend \$2.99. You don't know.

Tara: But we can accommodate both of those and everyone in between.

Leyne: That's our goal. You know, I want it to be a perfect food and wine pairing and perfect price point. And I want you to come back and say, "You did it." (laughs)

Tara: Do you have a favorite wine?

Leyne: You bet I do.

Tara: Oh, he's got a notebook.

Leyne: Oh, I got a notebook. The big favorite, ah, this thing, this thing is the big favorite. It's um, the Stag's Leap Cabernet \$24.99. The Muscadet that we have, whew.

Matt: That's a great deal.

Leyne: I love our Bordeaux's. They're fabulous Roudier. All of the Bordeaux's are so well selected...whooo, scary how well selected.

Tara: How long have you worked in the wine business?

Leyne: Forty-five years. (chuckles)

Tara: Forty-five years, wow.

Leyne: Still a goin'!

Matt: Yeah, so I'm thinking that YOU are a part of the destination. You are part of the reason people make the trek.

Leyne: (laughs)

Tara: It sounds like it. What a gift to have you in the store. I mean, thank you so much, really appreciate it. So nice to meet you.

Leyne: (laughs) Thank you.

Matt: Good to talk to you.

Tara: Man, he was fantastic.

*[Transition to Oregon.]*

Tara: It was so much fun in Portland...we thought we'd fly to Portland.

*[Bi-plane flying overhead. Upbeat music begins.]*

Tara: We're starting today at the Trader Joe's on Southeast Cesar Chavez Boulevard in Portland, Oregon.

Matt: This store really looks like its neighborhood. I mean, there's a great mural of Mount Hood as I'm looking out into the parking lot. It's actually raining outside and there are these great puffy clouds inside the store raining pearls.

Tara: Yeah, they're happy little clouds, Matt.

Matt: You know exactly where you are standing in the middle of this store.

*[Transition to Steven.]*

Tara: All right, so let's get going. Why don't you start just by introducing yourself and then we'll start talking.

Steven: My name's Steven. I work for the company, 17 going on 18 years.

Tara: Wow.

Steven: Started in Columbus.

Tara: OK, so you're an Ohio native.

Steven: Mmm-hmm.

Tara: Came to Oregon.

Steven: Yes. I came out on a visit and my brother's in Seattle. Visiting him, I was visiting a college roommate down in Eugene, stopped in Portland to see another college friend who became my wife. (laughs)

Matt: That's a great trip.

Steven: Yeah. (laughs)

Tara: (laughs)

Steven: I'm from Cleveland. A guy comes in with a brown sweatshirt. We start chatting. Turns out, "Oh, from Cleveland? Yeah, me too. Oh, you went to OU? Yeah, I went to OU, too." And then, "Oh, you lived in Tremont (neighborhood in Cleveland). Oh, I'm from Tremont." Uh, you know, and then this guy, Don becomes my friend.

Matt: Separated at birth.

Room: (laughs)

Steven: He and I have gone up to Seattle a couple of times to catch a Cleveland baseball game against the Mariners.

Tara: So you just met him here as he was going through your line...

Steven: Yeah.

Tara: ...and he became your friend.

Steven: Mmm-hmm. I've been here now 11 years in May, that's just maintained a cool vibe and...

Tara: All right.

Matt: What are your thoughts on Portland?

Steven: The people of Portland are really kind. The kind of empathy and caring, sometimes it's a little much (laughs) when you're at the stoplight and no one's going. I think that's a thing...

Matt: I think that was a scripted moment on the show, but it's real.

Steven: Yeah, it's real. There's a lot of people that care. They moved here because they care. They love the land, the earth, trees, and, uh, you get enough of those people together, it's an interesting place.

Tara: All right. Good luck to you.

Steven: Keep up the good work guys. Thanks.

Tara: Thank you.

*[Transition to David.]*

David: My name is David. I like a lot of things about Trader Joe's. I really like the way we do things one hour at a time. You go into a big chain supermarket and the person who's behind the meat counter, that's all they do. Cashier, that's all they do. Here, you change every hour so you learn to do just about everything. I like the whole Trader Joe's vibe. The coolest place to work. One thing I do, another crew member and myself, we have a list up on the bulletin board there about science questions. And if someone has a science question they're

interested about, they write it down and then the two of us kind of research it and then we write a few pages on it and put it back up on the bulletin board.

Matt: Any particular questions of note of late? I'm really loving this idea.

David: Like, why do we yawn? Why do we itch? One was what was the loudest sound ever recorded? And this answer has a little bit of an asterisk next to it because the loudest sound ever recorded was the volcano Krakatoa. The nearest measuring station for sound was about 400, 500 miles away. So they had to extrapolate how loud the sound was. It was louder than anything ever heard before.

Matt: Louder than Jimi Hendrix at the Isle of Wight Festival?

David: Oh, not even close.

Matt: Not even close. Geez, okay.

Tara: (laughs) Kind of love this because this isn't part of your job.

David: Right.

Matt: Absolutely part of the job.

Tara: But it is, but that's what I'm saying.

David: Absolutely. It's like you're working with these people, you get to know them.

Tara: Well, that's not just good for business, it's good for your soul and not to get too deep into it, it makes you feel better as a human.

David: I mean really seriously? I get paid for this?

Tara: Thank you for giving us a little bit of your time.

David: You're welcome.

*[Transition to Jabrell.]*

Jabrell: All right. Hi, I'm Jabrell.

Tara: You have the best smile on your face.

Jabrell: Thank you!

Tara: Man, you're like brightening up my day.

Jabrell: (laughs)

Matt: How long have you been working at this store?

Jabrell: Uh, since October of last year. Yeah, so I'm like kind of brand new-ish. (laughs)



Matt: Anything that's striking you about products? Any favorites or anything that you're thinking like, "Woah, I don't understand. What is this all about? Why are we doing this?"

Jabrell: It's just so many things sometimes I'm like, "Why is this a combination with that?" Like some of the dips, um, like the Everything...

Matt: I have the same question where it's like, "Could you just sprinkle it?"

Jabrell: Yeah. And...

Matt: On yogurt?

Jabrell: Like the Goddess Dip...like, it's really good, but I'm like, this is an odd combination of things. (laughs)

Tara: And there's people whose entire job it is to come up with that stuff, right?

Jabrell: Yeah. Like the five or six different types of ravioli I'm like, "Wow." My favorite is the one with the pepper.

Matt: The Cacio de Pepe. That's a good one.

Jabrell: Um, yeah, yeah, yeah. And then, uh, the spinach one is really good too. The goat cheese that kind of missed me. I... (laughs)

Matt: I think you're goat or you're not.

Jabrell: Yeah.

Matt: Sometimes I'm not so much.

Tara: Do you have a favorite product?

Jabrell: My favorite right now...so I like to make shrimp fried rice a lot. So we have the Argentinian shrimp and the Japanese fried rice and I like to add the sauteed vegetables. So that's been my favorite. But I'll make salmon on a pita too. Like with those Mediterranean pitas that we have with some of the Green Goddess Sauce and salmon, onions, I like to cook. (laughs)

Tara: Yeah, I guess.

Jabrell: So it's like a lot of different things I've been finding and I'm pescatarian too so...

Matt: So we need to have people get in tune with the frozen trout because the frozen trout is so good and it doesn't sell very well.

Jabrell: Wow.

Matt: I don't know why. People are afraid of trout.

Tara: I'm afraid of trout.

Jabrell: (laughs)

Matt: We have our work cut out for us. Jabrell...

Jabrell: (laughs)

Matt: We've got some work.

Tara: It can be so full flavored that some people, myself included, get a little freaked out by how fishy it is. But I think the trout that is in our freezer is more in line with the full flavored nature of the salmon, as opposed to being like fishy, fishy.

Matt: Yeah. It's interesting because it's really a mild fish.

Tara: The branzino...have you had the branzino? That's my kind of fish. It's mild and flaky and Matt's vouching for the trout.

Jabrell: Yeah.

Tara: Jabrell, really appreciate your time and your energy.

Jabrell: Thank you.

*[Transition to a group conversation at the next store.]*

Tara: Now we are at the Trader Joe's in the part of Portland that's called Hollywood. We got really fortunate here today in this store, we have a whole bunch of crew members who showed up to talk to us.

Finney: Well, I'm Finney. I've been with Trader Joe's for a little over a year.

Tara: At this store the whole time?

Finney: No, I started in Lincoln, Nebraska and I've been at this store since February.

Tara: Okay, great.

Phoebe: I'm Phoebe.

Griffin: I'm Griffin.

Jonathan: My name is Jonathan.

Kelly: I'm Kelly.

Tara: Excellent.

John: I'm John.

Russ: I'm Russ, I've been with the company going on 39 years.

Tara: All right, Matt. Russ has been here even longer than you.

Matt: It's true. It's true.

Tara: All right. Do you have a typical, is there a typical day at Trader Joe's for you?

Russ: No, I just come in and just mentor a lot of people that need mentoring and help where needed. I sing, I dance. I do everything. And these guys they'll tell you that. And you know, I'm blessed. Yeah, I'm happy.

Tara: Anyone can answer. What made you want to work at Trader Joe's?

Griffin: Yeah, I was a Trader Joe's baby and I wanted a discount on those Joe-Joe's.

Tara: What do you mean you were a Trader Joe's baby?

Griffin: In that we would shop here as I was raised on the Joe.

Tara: Yeah.

Kelly: Prior to Trader Joe's, I worked for the airlines for 24 years. When I got here, being valued as an employee and knowing what that looks like, made me feel like, "Okay, I can do better." Not just for myself, but for my crew members and for the store and for our customers.

Tara: How about you, Jonathan?

Jonathan: Actually feel like I'm part of a family here and I feel like I can actually, you know, be myself, which you don't really get that at any other company.

Griffin: When you walk past our registers, you can kind of hear how much originality there is in each approach for each person. Everyone kind of has their own catchphrases and their own ways of interacting with the customers.

Tara: How about you, John?

John: I went to college for psychology, so there was a class we took called biological psychology and taking that class really inspired me to like, learn how to eat healthy and live a healthy lifestyle and stuff like that. I remember the first day I got a tour of the store. It was like, I felt really emotional when I walked through there cause it was like, I could not find high fructose corn syrup or any preservative type stuff. I was like, "Whoa, this is crazy. These people actually care, you know?" Yeah, six years later, I'm like almost 100% on the Trader Joe's diet.

Tara: Do you have any sort of fun customer stories that come to mind?

Finney: Well, when I was leaving Lincoln I had a customer that we had really great conversations but I didn't realize I had impacted them, you know, as much as I had. And when they found out I was leaving, I had her and a few others come up to me, give me hugs and cry and were like, "We don't want to see you go." And that's wonderful that they cared that much about me.

Tara: And that was probably because they felt that you cared about them.

Finney: Right, we had made a connection. And I haven't really had that in any other job.

Tara: All right. I think we need to let you guys get back to work. Anything else you guys want to say to us?

Russ: I love your show. My wife and I have listened to every one so far. We get going and you get that DING DING, you know the whole bell...it's pretty nice.

Kelly: It's nice to put a face with the voices on the podcast.

Tara: Sorry to disappoint you.

John: Yeah.

Kelly: No, not at all.

Matt: Thanks for your time, Jonathan.

Griffin: Thank you, yeah.

Tara: Thank you, all. Really appreciate you.

Matt: Thank you, all.

Griffin: Yeah, thank you.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Thank you.

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: Thank you to everybody in Portland, Maine, and Portland, Oregon.

*[Closing music begins.]*

Matt: And for the next anniversary, maybe we can go to the Trader Joe's in Glendale.

*[Bi-plane flying past.]*

Tara: California?

Matt: Or the Trader Joe's in Glendale.

Tara: Arizona?

Matt: Or even the Trader Joe's in Glendale.

Tara: Wisconsin? Until then we'll keep making more episodes of Inside Trader Joe's. So please hit that free subscribe button.

Matt: It *is* free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.