

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript - Episode 56: — 2022 Captains' Meeting

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: On this episode of Inside Trader Joe's, we're taking our listeners somewhere very few people have gone.

Matt: Very few people who don't normally wear Aloha shirts and Trader Joe's name tags anyway.

Tara: Only Trader Joe's crew members and, more specifically, Trader Joe's Captains attend the Annual Captains' Meeting. It's for them.

Matt: It's for them to take in and process and learn. And it's for them to take back. Back to their store, to share with their crew, all the amazing things coming up from the season ahead.

Tara: It's pretty cool.

[Music ends.]

Matt: From L.A. Live in downtown Los Angeles, let's go Inside Trader Joe's.

[Theme music begins and two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Announcer: Good morning Captains and welcome to Trader Joe's 2022 Captains' Meeting.

Tara: Love your announcer voice, Matt.

Matt: (in an announcer voice) Why thank you, Tara.

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

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the marketing product guy. At Trader Joe's a Captain runs the ship. It's kind of like a Trader Joe's Manager if you had to use real world terms, but way cooler and with more interesting snacks.

Tara: We look forward to seeing all these familiar faces and meeting some new faces every year when we get together. And this year, it's the first time we've all been together in a while. It's pretty great.

Matt: We spend a little bit of time on the past, reflecting on our history. What we really look to the future to figure out how are we gonna chart the course moving forward. And we are together to celebrate the amazing work that's been happening in every Trader Joe's store across the country.

Tara: Okay well you left out one thing.

Matt: What's that?

Tara: Well, usually we make some big announcements at the Captains' Meeting.

Matt: You know, that's right. And we did have several really big announcements this year, and there's one in particular that we wanted to share with you right here, right now in this podcast.

Tara: Okay, are we ready?

Matt: On the count of three.

[Drum roll.]

Tara: Ready?

Matt/Tara: 1, 2, 3.

Crowd: Demo is back.

[Small group applause and cheering.]

Tara: Demo is back!

[Light upbeat music in the background.]

Matt: Now I know what you were thinking. That this really isn't a home improvement podcast. And you're wondering, "What's a demo?"

Tara: I think this calls for a Trader Joe's Captains' Meeting jargon alert.

[Jargon alert sounder.]

Matt: Demo. Really what it is, is the ability to share with you something we'd like you to taste, that's it. So we gathered 537 plus Captains from across the country to let them know, it's time to open that bag of chips again.

Tara: It hasn't been possible to offer a lot of product samples in our stores over the past few years, but we are bringing it back with a new approach.

Matt: We want to focus a little more on new products. Things not necessarily on your shopping list but things we're excited to share.

[Transition to Captain conversations. Upbeat music in the background.]

Tara: Hey, mad props to our Director of Construction, Dave, for building us this little sound resistant studio to keep out some of the outside noise. It's like a little booth.

Matt: It's like a hut.

Tara: You know, I really wish we could get all 537 plus Trader Joe's Captains in this sound resistant booth with us.

Matt: I mean, that would be a little bit tight.

Tara: Let's try to talk to as many Captains as possible.

[Door opens, outside noise.]

Tara: Come in, come in, come in.

Matt: Okay, hurry up. Okay, yeah, come in.

Tara: Close the door.

[Doors closes and no more outside noise. Two Captains from Massachusetts.]

Tara: All right.

Jorge: Start over here?

Matt: Yeah, sure.

Tara: And make sure you talk into that.

Jorge: Hi, I'm Jorge from Trader Joe's in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Matt: Fantastic.

Ken: And I am Ken from Store 5-6-0 in Somerville, Massachusetts.

Jorge: Somerville!

Ken: Somerville, whoop, whoop!

Tara: How's the Captains' Meeting going, guys?

Jorge: Overwhelming.

Tara: How are you guys feeling about demo coming back?

Ken: Ready, excited.

Matt: So what is it about doing that again, starting it back up, that has been missed?

Ken: I think the conversations with customers. I think one of the hardest things is we have all these new products, um, that we can talk about with our customers, but we want our customers to try it. Like, I just can't wait to go back. It's gonna be like high fives all around cuz we have been waiting for this moment for a long time. I think for me, what was most symbolic was the Plexiglas at the registers. And I think the moment we removed those Plexiglas is like, it was a moment of like, "Wow, this is what we used to do." You know, the conversations, even the eye contact was different through the Plexiglas. There was just that that barrier was never comfortable.

Matt: It's great to not have to have things like that anymore.

Ken: And now I think demo is the next, is kind of that next, like, that shared experience with food. And like in our culture, food is everything.

Jorge: It's kind of the conversation starter.

Ken: It is. It's all around food.

Jorge: You know, you sit at the table and it just really gets the conversation going, especially in communities, such as, you know, Cambridge and Somerville, Massachusetts, it's very diverse. With that being said, a lot of new products, but also new customers, and it is really hard to explain to them what, you know, Crunchy Jalapeño Dip tastes like. What does that taste like? So it's really exciting to have them just actually start a conversation with food.

Ken: And just walking in and smelling it.

Jorge: That is really cool.

Ken: It just feels, feels like home.

[Music ends. Transition.]

Matt: We are rolling.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Anna: Hi, my name's Anna. I'm the Captain of the Pembroke Pines location in Florida.

Ernie: I'm Ernie, Captain of Trader Joe's in Westchester.

Akil: My name's Akil Dove. I'm originally from Brooklyn, New York and I'm the Captain of Store 6-6-0 in Virginia Beach.

Garth: Hi, I'm Garth from the Trader Joe's in McKinney, Texas.

Kate: I'm Kate. I'm the Captain of the Rochester, New York store.

Armando: Hi, my name is Armando and I'm at the Yorba Linda Trader Joe's

Mary: I'm Mary Susskind from Berkeley Store 1-8-6 in California.

Matt (FL): I'm Matt. I'm the Captain in Delray Beach, Florida.

Marie: Hi, I'm Captain Marie Duncan from Store 1-0-9, Alameda, California.

Alicia: Alicia Montoya. I'm the Store Captain of Lakeshore 2-0-3 in Oakland. Super excited.

Mary: So excited.

Tara: What drives the excitement?

Matt (FL): Rolling demo back out. Being in Delray Beach we have a very hands on clientele. They're always asking questions. They always wanna know how to make food. How do I cook this? What do I use this for?

Marie: Promoting the new products. Or some of our, you know, our old faithful's is important because our clientele is getting younger and younger and trendier. And so some of those things that we've always kind of enjoyed, they're just experiencing for the first time. And they're gonna put it all over their social media.

Matt: That actually sounds like the Holy Grail of advertising, which is word of mouth, like actual, genuine word of mouth. Giving something for someone to talk about. They might virtualize it and share it through any number of screens but we're there in real life....I-R-L.

Tara: You used, like, an acronym there.

Matt: I'm so in with the acronym.

Tara: Look at you, Matt, like keeping up with the young people.

Matt: Me and Al Gore working on the interwebs, we are all over this, okay?

Room: (laughs)

Matt: In this moment, if you had to choose something, what would you demo? What would you share right now?

Ernie: I'm gonna go with the Vegan Bulgogi.

Melinda: Yeah.

Armando: My wife is vegan and when I took it home, she decided to make tacos. I was just blown away by the flavor. You would never think it's a meatless item.

Ernie: I'm interested in seeing people who don't normally eat vegan food, try it and realize that, "Hey, this is actually, this is pretty good."

Matt: What have you loved that you've experienced new product-wise today, Akil?

Akil: Oh, wow. The Turkey Tips.

Matt: Is this turkey tips? Like this is like pieces of advice from turkey? Like?

Akil: (laughs) No, actually the product is a Turkey Tip that's supposed to be coming in this holiday season.

Kate: The new spread that's over in cheese.

Matt: Toscano Spread?

Kate: Toscano Spread, yes.

Matt: Good grief that is a really nice product.

Kate: It's a really nice product.

Matt: I didn't think that we needed it until I...

Kate: Til you tried it. Yeah.

Matt: ...tasted it. I'm hoping that we ordered enough of that one.

Garth: Me too (laughs).

Alicia: I saw this Cannoli Dip that's coming soon.

Matt: Yeah, that's the other end of the flavor spectrum. That's like dessert dip, which I didn't know, even like that's a thing, prince, like you can have dessert dip. You can have a whole meal of dips.

Tara: I'm okay I'm okay with that.

Matt: Garth, what's your pick from the show?

Garth: I have to go with the Grand Reserve Pinot Noir.

Mary: Well, the Cinnamon Roll Joe-Joe's was pretty impressive.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: That is a great cookie, like, I mean, especially like you can frame it up as holiday or it's kind of like a Snickerdoodle Joe-Joe.

Mary: Oh, it's excellent, the crunch, it's creamy.

Matt: Yes.

Tara: It's got that little sugary...

Mary: It melted in my mouth.

Nicole: The Truffle Dip.

Tara: Oh, okay.

Nicole: Yeah, I love anything truffle.

Tara: Okay, this is where you and I part ways.

Nicole: That's okay.

Tara: But we can still be friends.

Nicole: Yeah, there's just more for me.

Tara: (laughs) Anybody else?

Marie: The Maple Oat Milk is a staple in my house.

Matt: Does anyone ever leave the container, effectively empty, still in the fridge? That's the thing I'm working through in my house. Of course, it's like, why put it back? It's empty.

Armando: Well, because my son's 16 and he puts everything back empty.

Matt: Yeah.

Armando: Toothpaste, milk.

Matt: Everything.

Armando: Everything.

Matt: You're so excited for those Cheddar Rockets then it's like, it's an empty box, please.

Tara: You guys are awesome. Thanks for stopping by.

Group: Thank you. Thanks so much.

Tara: I love the Captains' Meeting.

[Music ends. Transition to growth conversation and light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: As of this Captains' Meeting, we have 537 stores, and at this meeting we announced a plan to build even more stores.

Matt: A Trader Joe's store isn't just a building. Now, those have to be carefully located, planned, and constructed of course. But what makes a Trader Joe's a Trader Joe's is really the people and the products inside the building. So every Captain at this meeting is being challenged to mentor and grow more Captains and more Mates for those future stores.

Tara: Hey, speaking of which, there are 57 new Captains attending this meeting for the first time because they've been promoted to Captain in the past year.

Matt: Congratulations. And let's go develop some more Captains.

[Transition to Jay from Elk Grove, California.]

Jay: I am Captain Jay Jones from Elk Grove.

Tara: Elk Grove, where?

Jay: California.

Tara: Elk Grove, California. Where's that?

Jay: Just south of SAC.

Tara: Okay, South of Sacramento.

Jay: Yes.

Tara: So you've been to a bunch of Captains' Meetings.

Jay: I have. What a wonderful time to be a Captain. This is definitely the most exciting time.

[Upbeat music in background.]

Tara: Yeah. We're gonna open a whole lot of new stores. We're gonna be a much bigger company by 2030 than we are now. That opens up a ton of opportunities for the folks in your store and in all of our stores to advance. Every Captain in this room needs to develop two new Captains over the next eight years.

Jay: Yes.

Tara: That's doable.

Jay: Absolutely, yeah absolutely.

Tara: We can do that.

Jay: We have an obligation to provide talent for our company to grow at a controlled rate. You know, I've been able to promote, help a Captain get promoted.

Tara: Awesome.

Jay: Which is probably the highlight of my career personally. A lot of people did a lot of amazing things for me to be where I am. Paying it forward is definitely one of the things that I think about every single day.

[Transition music. Transition to new conversation.]

Michelle: I'm Michelle from Trader Joe's Surprise, Arizona.

Tara: Surprise!

Michelle: Surprise!

Tara: How is it being here?

Michelle: It's amazing. From the moment I walked into the hotel I could tell exactly who were Trader Joe's people.

Matt: What was the leading indicator?

Michelle: Just the camaraderie and the friendliness and the niceness. After yesterday, we're all filtering into the elevators and there's like this giant line. And a Captain brought this man up who was just like a regular hotel guest. And he was like, we're not gonna make him wait all the way back there. So he got in and he was like, "You Trader Joe's people, you guys are just so nice."

Matt: And you all went into his room and...

Michelle: (laughs)

Matt: ...hung out.

Tara: Watched Netflix.

Michelle: Gave him a foot massage.

Matt: Yeah, whoa.

Michelle: Whoa. Took a turn.

Tara: We just took a turn.

Michelle: Yeah. (laughs)

Tara: Took a very strange turn.

[Transition to Golden Potsticker Awards.]

Matt: Okay, let's go up on stage with Jon Basalone. I think everyone's gonna get a kick out of this.

[Music ends.]

Jon: It's time for the Golden Potsticker Awards. Now to describe the Golden Potsticker I'm going to first tell you what it isn't. Okay, it is not a Store of the Year Award. Okay. It's not about sales volume. It's not a Captain of the Year Award. I'm sorry.

Crowd: (laughter)

Jon: It's an award for being nice. You know, almost all stores are exceptionally nice, but which stores consistently set themselves apart? So that's what this, these awards are, right? If your store wins the Golden Potsticker Award, this is what you get. You are going to get a medal. This is real imitation gold.

Crowd: (laughter)

Jon: When you receive it, you know, they'll be placed over your neck and you'll be very proud and we want you to wear it as you represent your store at cocktail hour and dinner tonight so that everyone can acknowledge that. Don't wear it tomorrow, that's just cocky, okay?

Crowd: (laughter)

Jon: Here we go.

Female: The Golden Potsticker Awards goes to those stores that exhibit strong connections with their customers and neighborhoods. They have the innate ability to create a 'wow' customer experience by treating their customers as honored guests. A quote from one

customer email sums it all up, “Thank you, Trader Joe’s for making our world better, brighter, and certainly tastier.” The first award goes to Store 5-5-9 Staten Island, New York.

Crowd: (applause and cheering)

[Triumphant music begins.]

Female: Captain Joe Gagliardi.

Crowd: (applause and cheering)

Female: Store 5-7-1 Bridgemarket, New York City, Captain Brian Lamothe.

Crowd: (applause and cheering)

Female: Store 5-5-2 Oceanside, New York, Captain Phil Malot.

(Award announcements fade into background behind...)

Matt: We'll post a list of winners in the show notes. The crews at each of these stores should be very proud.

Jon: Well, congratulations, everybody, all the winners. And I want you all to know that you are all nominated for next year.

[Transition.]

Tara: There are two things that keep coming up at this Captains' Meeting. The first one is being nice. Being nice really sets Trader Joe's apart. It's a difference maker. The other one, value.

Matt: At Trader Joe's, we think of value as being expressed through our products, the things we sell. It's an intersection of two lines: quality and price. Great quality at outstanding prices, that's the target we aim to hit every day.

Tara: We're in inflationary times. Things cost more. Everyone's looking for a value. And recently the *LA Times* did an article where they compared about 15 everyday grocery items that people buy with consistency. They compared the prices on those products across a number of grocery stores throughout Southern California. Guess who had the best prices overall, like by a lot?

Matt: Uh, could it be Trader Joe's?

Tara: It absolutely was Trader Joe's, not really a surprise to me.

Matt: And here's one of the reasons, one of the main reasons why our private label, the Trader Joe's label, because of it, we have more control over the costs related to the products

that we sell than a lot of other retailers do. And our vendors, the producers, the manufacturers of those products, they're on really good terms. Trader Joe's pays its bills in full, on time and with tremendous consistency. It turns out that's unusual. Another unusual aspect to our approach, we don't take deductions.

Tara: What the heck does that even mean?

Matt: Well, a lot of other retailers have a schedule of fees and fines, off invoice deductions, where they pay less than the price they originally agreed to. It could be because a delivery was late. It could be because a truck had a 100 cases instead of 120 cases on it. Lots of other retailers take lots of other deductions. We don't do that at all. So the Trader Joe's label doesn't just look good on shelves and in your pantry, it provides real value benefit.

[Light upbeat music begins. Transition to Favorite Products montage.]

Tara: You know, if our listeners could be with us at the Captains' Meeting, there's one question that I think they'd probably ask everyone here.

Matt: What's up with the parking lot?

Tara: No, that's not it. The best question to ask, having tasted or used just about every Trader Joe's product, what's your favorite?

Matt: We should ask a bunch of Captains that, and then edit their answers into a super short, fast paced studio montage.

[Favorite products.]

Rachel: My favorite Trader Joe's product right now at the moment, Brown Sugar Oat Milk Creamer. I can just sit there, and froth it and just sip away and look at the beautiful emerald green landscape of North Carolina.

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

Sarah: God, all of them. Whatever is the new item that I'm so excited to try.

TJ: Rolled Chili Lime Tortilla Chips.

Joe: Taiwanese Pancakes.

Alex: Chocolate Croissants in the frozen section.

Tara: Nice. Nice, nice, nice. Now we recently approved, for a limited run, this is totally top secret, it's probably not gonna make it into the podcast, uh, Chocolate Chocolate Croissants. So it's a chocolate croissant dough.

TJ: Oh.

Tara: Filled with chocolate. Favorite Trader Joe's product. Ready? Go.

Melinda: Ooh. The licorice.

Matt: Which one?

Melinda: The Red Licorice.

Andrew: Orange Chicken.

Dave: Ooh, Mediterranean Hummus.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: Do you go in for the first scoop and get all the pine nuts before anybody else?

Dave: No, I mix it all up.

Matt: You mix it up?

Tara: Mmmm.

Alicia: Um, right now I can eat the whole bag of the Cheese Crunchies, always. That is just forever my staple.

Tara: Okay.

Marie: Vegan Garlic Sauce.

Tara: Ooh, yum.

Mary: Dark Chocolate Laceys.

Tara: Ooh.

Liz: All the cut cheese: Truffle Cheese, Saint Andre, Caramelized Onion Cheddar. Just all of the whole cheese section.

Ken: Brown Sugar Oat Creamer, love that stuff.

Tara: That's a popular one.

Ken: Mm-hmm.

Matt (FL): Fettuccini Alfredo, frozen.

Matt: Fettuccini Alfredo.

Jeff: Sesame Seed Oil.

Tara: Ooh

Matt: Spicy or regular?

Jeff: Just the regular.

Matt: I love it too. What do you do with it, chef?

Jeff: Mostly it's on salmon. I can't get enough of that.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Captain John from Kettering, Ohio. John, what's your favorite Trader Joe's product?

John: Oh, the Saucy Scallops.

Tara: So good.

Garth: It's the Sparkling White Tea with Pomegranate and previously it was the Sparkling Black Tea with Peach.

Tara: Sparkling teas are your jam.

Garth: They are.

Martina: I guess I'm gonna go with the Candy Cane Ice Cream, yeah.

Tara: Okay. Michelle?

Michelle: The Le Délice de Bourgogne Cheese.

Tara: Nicely done.

Matt: I think it's being discontinued.

Michelle: (gasps)

Matt: I'm just kidding.

Group: (laughs)

[Music ends. Transition to large group having a great time.]

Tara: All right let's go down the line like this and just come like close to the mic, but not on top of the mic.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: This is 'first name' from Trader Joe's in 'city'.

Group: (laughs)

Matt: I know that joke. That's a good one. I like that joke.

Tara: Thank you.

Liz: Hi, my name is Liz Libbrecht from the Trader Joe's in Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

Angelica: Hi, this is Angelica from Brooklyn, New York City.

Renee: Good morning. This is Renee Liebowitz from the Lower East Side.

Tara: Everyone's angling for our jobs today.

Renee: I would love your job.

Matt: Yeah.

Tara: So, alright. What's your, what's your biggest takeaway from the meeting?

Angelica: I'm just ready to have fun again.

Tara: Yeah.

Angelica: After the last two years.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: But do you mean to say that you haven't been having fun? Because you've been doing a lot of stuff, right? And a lot of great stuff.

Angelica: We were having fun, but it was just like...

Liz: Yeah, a wild boat ride.

Angelica: A wild boat ride. Like I kinda wanna get off for a second and then like get back on.

Matt: So, what are some things that you do at your store to have fun?

Angelica: I make people have musical days, so we just sing everything to each other. I feel like everybody has their inner longing to sing and dance. It's just the genre.

Matt: You didn't say they had to particularly good at either.

Angelica: No, no, no, no, no. When it's bad, it's better.

Group: (laughs)

Matt: Okay. Hey, that sounds like a whole new show. That could be your show, "When It's Bad, It's Better."

Angelica: When it's bad, it's better.

Tara: (laughs)

[Music ends. Transition to light music.]

Tara: Whew! Matt, the 2022 Trader Joe's Captains' Meeting is a wrap.

Matt: And there's one more stat from the meeting that I think we should share here on the podcast.

Tara: Ah, I see what you did there. Share.

Matt: Last year, neighborhood Trader Joe's stores shared more than 400 million meals with local neighbors in need, and that's a conservative estimate. We believe good food should not go to waste.

Tara: Four hundred million meals. That number is staggering and really it makes me so proud to be at this meeting and to be part of Trader Joe's.

Matt: And everyone here feels the same.

[Closing music begins.]

Tara: It's been fun to take you behind the scenes at the Annual Captains' Meeting. We have many more podcast adventures planned, so join us by hitting that free subscribe or follow button.

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

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.