

The following is an excerpt from "Why We Organize," a packet created by the Organizing Committee at the Hadley, MA store--the first in the country to unionize.

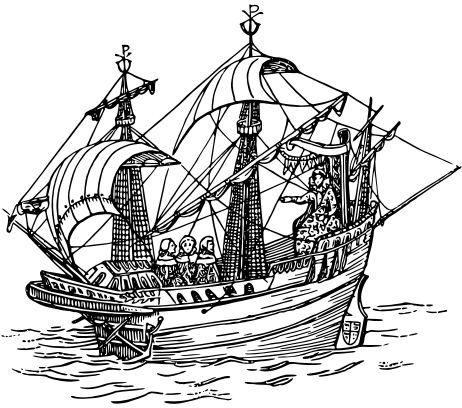
This section of the packet deconstructs the letter that Trader Joe's CEO Dan Bane sent to every crew member and merchant in March 2020.





**why we  
organize**

# Sailing the Unionized Seas



## Or, How Our Union Supports the Trader Joe's Company Values

As a company, Trader Joe's is guided by seven core values, listed in our handbook this way:

1. **Integrity**
2. **We are a product driven company**
3. **At Trader Joe's we create WOW customer experience every day**
4. **No Bureaucracy**
5. **We are a national chain of neighborhood grocery stores**
6. **KAIZEN!**
7. **The store is our Brand**

The full descriptions of each value can be found in the Crew Handbook in Dayforce.

These Values were officially introduced in 2001, but have guided the company for many years before that. They are intended to be the guiding principles for every decision Trader Joe's makes.

According to our Handbook,

“

- We live by these Values
- We make decisions based on these Values,
- We prioritize and focus our behavior based on these Values and
- We evaluate our individual performance based upon these Values.

It is vitally important that everyone in the Company understands and demonstrates these Values.

”

Leading up to our union election, we anticipate hearing from management or corporate that “a union is not in line with Trader Joe’s company values.”

We couldn’t disagree more.

We believe that OUR UNION supports ALL of our company’s values.

Let’s look at each value in depth, and the ways in which forming a union would support that value.

## 1. Integrity

Integrity is Trader Joe’s number one value. Let’s look at how the company defines integrity, right from the Handbook (italics are ours):

“

At Trader Joe’s we demand that all Crew Members behave with unyielding Integrity. The definition of Integrity is simple...it means that you treat others as you would like to be treated.

Our Company is very unusual because of this important and key Value. We are committed to treating all customers, vendors or suppliers and each other with Integrity.

Our focus on Integrity as the first Value is on purpose. *Simply put, those that do not have Integrity can not be part of Trader Joe’s.*

”

Trader Joe’s defines Integrity as the Golden Rule, or treating others as you would like to be treated. (We could argue that the Platinum Rule, or treating others as they would like to be treated, is even better, but we digress).

Integrity—treating others as you would like to be treated—is the absolute core of the company’s values. And yet—

Is it integrity for multiple crew members to lose their health care benefits after taking a medical leave for cancer treatment, and to receive no clear guidance from HR through the process?

Is it integrity when many of us suffer from chronic pain due to work injuries and repetitive strain, despite safer ways to work being readily available, ways which we’ve been suggesting on our company surveys for decades?

Is it integrity to reward the crew who have shown up during a life-threatening global pandemic by slashing their retirement benefits without warning?

Spoiler alert: it's not integrity, and it's wrong. And by the company's own definition of integrity, the people making these decisions do not belong here.

We all know the company has been straying from this most basic value. We've felt it instinctively, and we've experienced it first hand in our bodies and in our bank accounts. By forming a union, we will have the opportunity to join together and negotiate for ourselves, to create new solutions and bring back what has been lost as the company abandons this value.

## **2. We are a product driven Company**

Yes, we are a product driven company. Our products are fun and unique, and many of them are exclusive to Trader Joe's. As the company likes to say, "We are Traders on the Culinary Seas!"

Unfortunately, it's hard to navigate any sea if your crew is continually jumping ship. Turnover is higher than we've ever seen it in our store, in large part due to changes in company culture and the recent slashing of benefits. Many of the remaining crew are feeling disillusioned and undervalued.

With high turnover and an increasingly frustrated crew, Trader Joe's won't be able to maintain the same level of engagement with customers around our products. Fantastic product knowledge takes years to build up, and requires motivation to be shared. The value and uniqueness of our products only exists if we, the crew, effectively communicate these things to customers.

Without a committed, engaged, knowledgeable, and experienced crew, there is no one to discuss the nuances of our products with our customers. There's no one to explain why our corn chips are GMO free even though they aren't organic nor labeled GMO free, or share how a butter can be made from cookies.

*Put simply, we cannot be a product driven company without a driven crew.*

Union workers receive better pay and better benefits, which means more retention long term, higher morale and enthusiasm, and therefore a better ability to convey the value of our products to customers.



## **3. At Trader Joe's we create WOW customer experience every day**

The WOW customer experience is both external (signage, merchandising, store cleanliness) and internal. Our Handbook describes the internal customer experience this way:

“

“[It is] the way a customer “feels” about the store experience, or how they feel about themselves while shopping in our stores. Customers ask themselves...

- Do they really care that I am shopping here today?
- Do they really care that I am safe in their store or parking lot?
  - Do they really respect me as a person?
  - Do they really trust me?

In short, the “internal” experiences represent the feelings a customer gets about our delight that they are shopping with us and our care for them as customers and people.”

”

As crew, we are the members of the store with the most direct contact with customers. As such, we are responsible for creating the “WOW customer experience” of this value. It is our job to create an environment where customers can say “yes!” to all of the above questions.

At the same time, can we as crew say yes to the following questions?

- Does Trader Joe’s really care that I am working here today?
- Does Trader Joe’s really care that I am safe in their store or parking lot?
- Does Trader Joe’s really respect me as a person?
- Does Trader Joe’s really trust me?

In order to deliver the WOW customer experience that is so central to our job and our company philosophy, it’s imperative that we as workers feel safe, respected, and cared for so we can do the incredible emotional labor required to elicit these same feelings in our customers.

Additionally, many of us struggle with chronic pain and injury from the physical aspects of our job. It is hard to authentically deliver a WOW customer experience while working in pain. We need safety measures, tools, and ergonomic equipment that will let us function at our best.

Where Trader Joe’s is failing in helping us feel safe, respected, and physically well, we can join together in a union to negotiate directly for what we need.

## **4. No Bureaucracy**

What says “No Bureaucracy” better than crew directly negotiating a contract with management?

Let’s look at the full description of this value, directly from the handbook:

“

At Trader Joe's we simply have no room for bureaucracy. We operate a single, very focused and relatively simple retail format. We are successful in what we do and we have no intention of branching out into other formats or side businesses. We demand that all Crew Members support our stores to assist in the delivery of WOW products and customer experiences to our customers. We have as few layers of management as possible and everyone is evaluated on their contribution to the Company's mission, not to group or departmental matters.

”

This value explains why the company is not branching out into e-commerce, why we work the whole store instead of highly specialized departments, and why we have relatively few layers of management.

What this description doesn't mention is how this value is applied to our experience as crew members when it comes to things like compensation, benefits, disciplinary actions, and performance reviews.

The company claims to have a lack of bureaucracy, but at the crew level we experience plenty of it. It manifests as a lack of transparency and clear answers about vital aspects of our employment. We struggle to navigate complex leave and medical issues, and receive conflicting information from various members of HR. Without warning, we fail to meet expectations for a wage review, even though our performance has been consistent. We see benefits we had planned our lives around slashed with no notice.

While the company might argue that there are few layers of management, and that we can talk with our captain, regional, or HR department at any time, we don't really have "an open door" at Trader Joe's if the people we reach out to cannot supply us with the information we need. If we can't directly access clear, consistent answers to our questions, then this so-called open door just functions as a smokescreen.

The company doesn't really address "no bureaucracy" in terms of our employment, and we would like to extend that value to the crew experience.

By forming a union, we will know exactly what is happening with our benefits, compensation, and reviews because we will have the power to negotiate a contract around these items, and demand better communication and transparency around the issues that are important to us as crew members.

Not only that, but we can negotiate for the right to record all of our communications with HR, either in writing or on our phones. We can ask that there be witnesses or recordings of any disciplinary conversations with management.

When serious issues with HR or management are unclear, our union can provide the help we need in the form of organizers, arbitrators, and lawyers. We will not be left to figure out these things on our own, and we will have power as a union.

## **5. We are a national chain of neighborhood grocery stores**

This Value has two components:

First, as a national chain, the company is committed to growth, and believes that growth will benefit all of us: the customer, who will enjoy lower prices as the company grows, and the crew and suppliers, who will supposedly benefit from a more stable and profitable company.

In addition, each store should feel friendly, unique, and intimate, like a neighborhood grocery store. Each store should have ties to its community, and most management decisions should be made at the store level.

At this time, the company is continuing to grow and open stores, even as they slash crew benefits. As crew, we are not seeing the trickle down effect promised in the first part of this value. At the risk of sounding repetitive—a union will help with that. Instead of hoping and waiting for Trader Joe's to pass down its increased profitability and stability to us, the workers who make it possible, we can demand that they do.

As for the second aspect of this value, there are a number of ways that forming a union can help us create a neighborhood grocery feel. Fair and just compensation and benefits are not only a huge morale and engagement booster, but they also reduce stress in our lives. Again, this helps us as crew provide the emotional labor involved in creating both a "WOW customer experience" and the feeling of a "neighborhood grocery store," as these values go hand in hand.

Part of the WOW customer experience (the feeling that the customer is in "their" Trader Joe's, and the sense that the corporate chain they are shopping in is somehow akin to a locally owned, small grocery shop) is the customer's belief that they are shopping in a store that treats their workers well and compensates them fairly for their labor.

How many times has a customer remarked to us, "You all seem SO happy!" Right now, we are at a turning point where things are changing for the crew, but the customer still believes in that happy, local grocery store experience. That belief is buoyed by years of shopping experience, but if the company continues to change, those customer experiences will change too, and eventually the facade of the neighborhood grocery store will fade away and Trader Joe's will be like any other grocery store.



Our customers want the happiness to be real. They want to see crew that are engaged, well compensated, and treated fairly. A good workplace helps us maintain the “neighborhood grocery store feel.” If the company cannot provide this for us, then we believe our customers will be happy to see us provide it for ourselves through a union.

One more thing: if it is truly part of the company's values to leave the bulk of management to store-level decision making, then we ask that the company leave the decision to unionize to our store as well, in this case in the hands of the crew. We ask for a fair election, without interference or misinformation. Let us vote in peace.

## 6. Kaizen

Kaizen is a Japanese term that means “change for the better” or “continuous improvement”.

From the Handbook on Kaizen:

“We recognize that the best way to support a “Kaizen” environment is to listen to those Crew Members that have daily contact and communication with customers. We are committed to listening to all Crew Members and capitalizing on their good ideas.”

We believe in continuous improvement, not only in our work, but in our workplace.

So here is our good idea:

We create a union in order to create a better work environment for ourselves. We create a union in order to have better compensation and benefits, and to reinstate the crucial benefits that we have recently lost.

Everything that we do together in our union not only benefits us, but our customers too, by helping us to do our jobs better.

A union means continued improvement of our workplace, directed by us, the crew.

A union is kaizen.

## 7. The store is our Brand.

From the Handbook:



At Trader Joe's we recognize that our store is the personification of our Brand. The brand represents far more than a label or packaging...it is the customer's emotional and personal response to our stores. Our brand is a promise between Trader Joe's and each customer that we will diligently act on their behalf to satisfy their dreams related to our products and their experience. The key is consistency. Every store, every day and every Crew Member reflects the Trader Joe's brand. We must earn the customers' delight in our brand every time they shop with us.



We, the crew, are responsible for "the customer's emotional and personal response to our store." We are the ones who "diligently act" to "satisfy their dreams."

The brand is a promise. The key is consistency. We are the people tasked to deliver on this promise day after day, to consistently go above and beyond in our service in order to represent the Trader Joe's brand. As such, we seek to be cared for by the company as we are asked to care for our customers.

In order to do our jobs effectively, we need promises from the company to be kept. We ask for consistency in our treatment, benefits, and compensation. We ask for transparency in the policies and rules that affect our everyday lives.

Where the company has failed us, we can take care of each other. With our union.





**A UNION IS THE  
ULTIMATE  
INVERTED  
PYRA  
MID**