

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — ICYMI: What do the Bells Mean at Trader Joe's?

[Light upbeat music.]

Tara: You've probably been shopping at your neighborhood Trader Joe's when suddenly you hear bells.

Matt: I hear them everywhere. That tintinnabulation that so musically wells. From the bells, bells, bells.

Tara: No.

Matt: Bells.

Tara: No, no, Matt, I mean these bells.

[Two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Matt: As crew members, we do get asked about those bells.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: We get a lot of questions, and we really love answering them.

Matt: So, let's talk 'bells' on another ICYMI, in case you missed it, Special Episode of *Inside Trader Joe's*.

[Theme music begins with no two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Tara: ICYMI.

Matt: What's up with those bells?

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

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's.

Tara: I recently had the opportunity to visit a brand new Trader Joe's that wasn't even open yet. It's in Middletown, New Jersey, central New Jersey, near the coast...

[Theme music ends. Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: And relatively close to some other Trader Joe's, but it is definitely going to be its own neighborhood store. I was super lucky to get to speak with a bunch of brand new Trader Joe's crew members. They were stocking the shelves for the grand opening of this new store. By the time this episode airs, the store will have opened. I randomly walked around the store with a microphone and asked them some questions. One of those questions was, "What do the bells mean at Trader Joe's?" Keep in mind, they're all new crew members. They're just training. They're just learning all about Trader Joe's.

[Transition to store audio clip. Upbeat music continues.]

Tara: Hey, do you, anybody know, can anybody tell me what the bells mean?

[One bell ding.]

Crew: One bell means you need a, another cashier.

[Two bell dings.]

Crew: Two bells means you need someone to find an item.

[Three bell dings.]

Crew: And three means you need a manager.

[Morse code.]

Matt: (announcer voice) This is a test of the Trader Joe's Bell System. This is only a test.

Tara: Matt, let's back up a little bit. Why do we use bells?

[Music transition.]

Matt: Well, there's this whole maritime aspect, a nautical theme, if you will. If the crew is on a ship, a way to signal and communicate, well, that could be a bell. Once upon a time, because of our frugal nature and we just have been sticking with it for decades, a bell was less expensive than a public address system, and I think that they sound a little more interesting.

Tara: So how did we come up with the whole one, two, three of the bells?

Matt: This is gonna be an apocryphal story, but I think it's just one of those things where, one is the most urgent. Two, what does that mean? Someone figured that out. Three sounds really special and sometimes kind of like ordering off menu. I've even heard tell of a four bell situation, and I think this can vary store by store. At my store, it means all hands on deck at the front, baggers at each register, the lines are building, we want to help get customers out into their day with their groceries. Everybody come on up front. That's what I've seen with the four bell.

Tara: I think it's fascinating that as we grew and became a national chain of neighborhood stores, we kept the bells 'cause it's something that connects us to our past, but also keeps us very much in the present. Like anyone at any cash register can ring that bell and say, "Hey, I need help. I need a specific kind of help." It's an interesting little bit of language that when you're Trader Joe's, it makes perfect sense.

Matt: And it's perfectly representative of tools we like to use. Simple, effective, and open to everyone. That sound of a brass bell, really, that tone cuts through a lot of other sounds and in our stores, there are a lot of sounds.

Tara: When I'm in stores, not our stores, but in other stores sometimes, and there's like an intercom announcement throughout the whole building, you sometimes can't hear it. It's kind of garbled. But when you hear that one bell very clear.

Matt: You hear it. Each crew member knows and can use that. They know how to use it. They know when to use it. I think that we could use these in airports and we could communicate when a given group is ready to board the plane by a certain number of bell rings, it would be way easier to understand.

Tara: Do you think anyone would pay attention?

Matt: That's true.

Tara: (laughs)

[Transition music to closing.]

Tara: That's our Special Episode ICYMI.

Matt: In case you missed it.

Tara: That's what the bells at Trader Joe's mean.