

Intro/Outro ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to supply chain. Now the voice of global supply chain supply chain now focuses on the best in the business for our worldwide audience, the people, the technologies, the best practices, and today's critical issues. The challenges and opportunities stay tuned to hear from those making global business happen right here on supply chain now.

Scott Luton ([00:33](#)):

Hey, good morning, Scott Luton and Greg white with you here on supply chain. Now, welcome to today's show Greg, how you doing?

Greg White ([00:40](#)):

I am doing great. I'm really looking forward to this. This is, uh, w we've been trying to get together with this mystery guest. Look at the name for a while now, and I'm a big fan of the company. So I'm really looking forward to that.

Scott Luton ([00:55](#)):

It's give me a special interview that we're talking with a business leader from the largest rural lifestyle retailer in the United States, and we're going to be diving into the incredible supply chain behind it. So stay tuned as we look to increase your supply chain leadership act, you Greg quick programming note to folks enjoy this conversation. Where would you suggest they go and learn more

Greg White ([01:16](#)):

Your house, Scott, wherever they get their podcasts from or YouTube.

Scott Luton ([01:23](#)):

That's right. And be sure to subscribe for free single miss conversations, just like this one. So let's introduce our featured guests here today. He graduated from West point served as a captain in the us army, went on to serve in a variety of roles at places like target and Neiman Marcus. He now leads the end to end supply chain at tractor supply company. Please join me in welcoming the executive vice president and chief supply chain officer at tractor supply. Mr. Colin, Yankee, Colin, how are you doing we? Well, uh, likewise, and this has been really neat. Uh, Greg, as we were talking pre-show we had this teed up ready to go, right? Uh, about a year or so ago. And then of course we all knew in the last March here in the States, at least kind of what put us on our heels and we're still working through it. But as we're going to talk about today, it's been really interesting to see what retailers that get it and the supply chains behind them that can, that can come up with the strategies to meet the ever evolving consumer preferences and build that rapport with their consumers. And then of course, execute on everything behind that so that they can serve consumers where they want to be served today. Right, Greg? Yeah.

Greg White ([02:30](#)):

You know, I think tractor supply is a fantastic example of that. They continue to grow. I mean, I live Northwest of Atlanta and I don't remember how far the nearest tractor supply used to be, but then there was one about 13 miles away and now there's one about five miles away. And I mean, it's great. I love the name too. Colin. The, what is it? We called that largest rural lifestyle retailer back in the day when I was just a simple country boy from Kansas, we called them farm and fleet stores, but it is so

much more than that, right. I mean, it is really a robust retail environment and a great fun place to trot around. It's fun. It's like, it's like Disneyland for plow boys.

Scott Luton ([03:15](#)):

Well, and I'll tell you it's grown left and right. As you use, as you mentioned, Greg, it's resistance is futile for sure. But Colin Dean, before we start talking and dive deeper into tractor supply company, let's get to know you a little better. So you surprised us in the pre-show conversation, uh, with some of those stories, but tell us where you're from and give us a couple of anecdotes from your own.

Colin Yankee ([03:35](#)):

Yeah. Um, I, I surprised you guys, by telling you I'm from Los Angeles area, I say Los Angeles, but I'm actually from Riverside, California, which is for those uninitiated, it's called the inland empire. And while I was growing up out there, there was all agriculture and orange grooves. And now if you visit there, it's all distribution centers. So maybe it was destined to be that I was in supply chain, but, uh, it was just DCF DC when you go out there. And actually one DCI worked in DC that I started up was built on land that as a kid, I used to go out and ride my dirt bike and shoot my, you know, my rifle on and then just, you know, became a DC. So, uh, pretty well. Yeah. And I, you know, I've been all over the country, um, you know, with the military and working in retail, you know, like Greg, you said your, your, your kind of retail, Brad, I was moving all around from, you know, corporate America go wherever they send me to go.

Colin Yankee ([04:27](#)):

But, uh, you know, grew up in California and appreciate the diversity of, you know, the people who were there and, you know, always felt like you were on kind of the front end of something new, right. You know, on the front end of a trend. And, you know, just the, the diversity of the music and the people in the food. And, you know, my last name's Yankee, which is kind of weird in itself, but you know, you grew up until you California, and that's the weirdest thing you're going to see. So you just get to, you know, be able to connect with all kinds of different folks,

Scott Luton ([04:53](#)):

Love that. And it paints such a wonderful picture there. And I got to ask you, especially with when this publishes pitchers and catches catchers will have reported to the major league baseball, are you a sports fanatic at any sport and who's your team?

Colin Yankee ([05:08](#)):

Uh, I'm not a sports fanatic, so you've got to start talking NFL or MLB. I'll just nod and I'll agree with you. But my wife's family, they are huge New York Yankees fans. In fact, when I met her, I walked up her driveway and had a American flag at one point or the Yankees flag on the other pool. And when I showed my future father, while my driver's license, he was, I was, I was in there you go close the deal. Other than that.

Scott Luton ([05:37](#)):

All right. So let me ask you one more question before we switch gears here. So growing up on the West coast, growing up in that Riverside community, you shared some of your hobbies as a kid. Let's talk about food for a second. What, and now you live in Tennessee. So you're quite a ways away from where

you grew up. What's one dish or food or restaurant, even that you grew up just eating in every week and that you, you miss that today.

Colin Yankee ([06:04](#)):

So my, my dad was a policeman and so he knew all the good, like dive taco stands that were out there. And there was this one in, in, in, uh, in Rubidoux, California. And it was a little rougher of a neighborhood, but, uh, you know, the best Mexican food, best burritos and tacos and lemonade, you got to have area of your life. So I'm always on the hunt for authentic Mexican food, um, wherever I'm at in the country, I can never go wrong.

Scott Luton ([06:34](#)):

Love that. And Greg, we've got a couple of favorites here down in Atlanta. We'll have to, when we get back to breaking bread together, we'll have to do that with Colin, but Greg moving right along, we won't talk about his, some of his previous journey here, right?

Greg White ([06:49](#)):

Yeah. Well, so you've mentioned, I think you mentioned, at least you mentioned pre-show that you're a West point grad. So tell us a little bit about whatever you can tell us about that and a little bit about it, your time, you know, you served in the military, you were a captain in the army first. Why, what, what inspired you to go there? That's a long way. Annapolis is a long haul from Riverside. So tell us a little bit more.

Colin Yankee ([07:12](#)):

Yeah. And I would never go to Annapolis because, you know, it's a second tier school

Greg White ([07:18](#)):

West point West point also a long way. So the way it is, we were talking about Kevin Jackson. So

Colin Yankee ([07:26](#)):

Yeah, no, no, if it's my Navy breath in there. Um, but, uh, no, I, I, uh, my, so my dad had been in the army and so there's a little of that family connection there. Yeah. Um, and I always wanted to serve, and whether it was enlisting or doing ROTC or going to go to an Academy and all my heroes were military officers and I was kind of a history nerd and would, would read history books and loved adventure. And x-ray showed this kind of romanticized vision of the army. And, uh, you know, there was a practical side of it too. Right. You know, there's unlocking opportunity and getting to get leadership experience and education. And so I felt really fortunate to, to be able to go to the military Academy. And like, I sound Scott earlier. I'd never been East of Las Vegas in my life until I showed up at West point.

Colin Yankee ([08:15](#)):

You know, I went from being a top student at a mediocre school to being a mediocre student at a, at a top school. And I think that the thing for me about West point is everybody gets humbled. At some point, you know, you put, take these young people from all across the country, in some cases across the world. And you put them in this really intense environment for academics and physical training and military training and moral medical development. And you're going to find something you're, you're not good at. I'm really, really quick. And for me, it was like, I need to learn how to prioritize, manage time,

compartmentalize information, study all those things. But then there's other people who have never boxed before or comfortable, you know, maybe they grew up in the city were uncomfortable being out in the woods. And so everybody gets humbled at some point. And that intensity of experience really builds lifelong bonds and trust because you have to depend on each other. So there's the saying, there's cooperate and graduate, right. You have to, you have to work together. And then you got in the army and it's a team sport. Right. And so you end up doing the same thing and it really builds those kinds of connections. And so very, very fortunate that I had that opportunity in, in grateful for, for the army and the taxpayer for paying for it.

Greg White ([09:27](#)):

How long did you serve after West point? Got at that time?

Colin Yankee ([09:30](#)):

Yeah, so, uh, I served for five years. Okay. And you know, my military career, I was a cavalry officer. So was in Kentucky, down in Georgia, uh, for some different training in schools then, uh, Fort Lewis, Washington then, uh, September 11th happened, uh, they were looking for volunteers to go to Afghanistan and, um, and, uh, you know, I was kind of cold war army at the time. So I thought this may be my only chance to do what I have been training to do, went to was Pakistan, Afghanistan and came back. And that was the end of my time in the army.

Greg White ([10:05](#)):

First of all, thank you for serving, thank you for doing that. That was brave and bold. And, you know, in my opinion necessary in the moment, and I know so many people in the military, they felt compelled to contribute at that time. In fact, I have a buddy from college who I would have never guessed, would have been compelled to contribute, but he, he joined the reserves and wound up in Afghanistan on purpose. So yeah, I really, I don't, I don't know that you can understate the commitment to your fellow man of putting yourself intentionally putting yourself in harm's way that way. So anyway, I really appreciate it and thank you for it.

Colin Yankee ([10:44](#)):

Yeah. And I think you have, you have a good read on it because, you know, people, I think have this image of the military being very directive and, you know, whatever their image is, but that wasn't my experience. Every, every soldier I ever served with was a volunteer. They volunteered to be there. They volunteered to do the job and, uh, were really self motivated. And so I think people who, who volunteer to go do that, they already have some kind of intrinsic drive, which, uh, you know, as a leader, it makes it nice to be a lead teams like that.

Greg White ([11:11](#)):

When you left the military, I mean, you went on to some other, I would argue elite organizations, target and Neiman Neiman Marcus target with its own. I think rich supply chain traditions, and, you know, obviously continue to make a powerful investment. So tell us a little bit about your work history after the military, but before tractor supply.

Colin Yankee ([11:33](#)):

So I think like a lot of people, I didn't intend to get into supply chain at least of my generation. Um, you know, now they're, you know, you're great, great programs balancing. It's a, it's a hot, hot industry

being, but I met a fellow West point graduate who was a general manager of a distribution center out in California. And, um, he gave the opportunity to come tour his facility. And I could just see a high functioning team right away. I mean, I could smell a winter, um, the way people talk to each other and how fast you're moving. I was amazed by the automation and the process. And, you know, it just appealed to me because of team-oriented tangible results. And it was, I felt very fortunate to end up in that environment, that culture making that transition from the military. Cause I think it made, made it so easy.

Colin Yankee ([12:20](#)):

So I started out, um, in a distribution center as a night shift supervisor lead a team. And it was, that was, that was great. I think everybody who gets in supply chain should go be out in the front line at some point manufacturing plant or, or distribution center or a dispatch office if you're in trucking. And then I got promoted, got to open up a campus there in California, had 3 million square feet on the same site and then did a special project down at the port of LA long beach where it really opened my eyes to, you know, this is a career path. And that was kind of, you know, Scott asked me about some Eureka moments that was really movement for me, you know, because that's why I dedicated myself to making this profession. So I chose going to go back to grad school.

Colin Yankee ([13:01](#)):

So I started searching around for programs to do that. And then I got the opportunity to move back to Minneapolis, to be at tortoise headquarters. And I ran a domestic transportation and this would happen to be during the 2008, 2009, kind of economic recession and in retail on a profit loss statement and retail store, payroll and transportation are two of the biggest line items. And so I learned a lot in that experience because the way target approached it, wasn't trying to squeeze one individual line. And they looked at holistically. They said, how do you work together to optimize the whole versus optimizing parts? And sub-optimizing the whole, and that was really influential for me in how to think end to end in the supply chain. And then for the rest of my career target, I went out to the field again, did some assignments, came back, did some supply chain strategy work.

Colin Yankee ([13:50](#)):

And then after about 10 years, a boss of mine who I really respect, he's a chief supply chain officer today at a different retailer had gone to Neiman Marcus and he called me and said, Hey, you got an opportunity out here. What do you think? And you know, I love, love this leader. He's a great dear friend and mentor. Um, so I went down there and it's totally different, right? It's, uh, I from selling tide and toothbrushes to, you know, luxury items, women's Katurah and, and you know, shoes and things like that. And so I ended up in this role because a tracker bonds through such phenomenal growth, the supply chain was under a lot of stress and they were looking at how do you take the next level and really been a dream job for me,

Greg White ([14:32](#)):

That's fascinating. You know, I think there's a couple things Scott that I take away immediately. One is I don't think you can. I don't think you can overstate the value of following a mentor somewhere or the value that, that mentor places on you. If they go somewhere and they ask you to go with them, think that speaks well to both of you, to your, to your working relationship, to that mentors esteem of you and you have they, and, and also it is, you know, it's something I think people need to keep their eye on it. You know, if I think about, uh, guidance for people in industry today in any job, it's hits your wagon to

a rising star, right. And, and establish that value because the truth is, I think we lose, we lose sight of this. To some extent you don't get the job. And I'm not saying you didn't earn it Colin, but you don't necessarily get a job because you deserve it. You get a job because somebody recognizes value in you and that they can get value from that. And who knows that better than people that know you. Yeah. Right. Well said.

Colin Yankee ([15:40](#)):

And I, and I think your supply chain in such a small world and industry know your, your, your brand and your reputation matters. Right. And so it stays with you over time. And so, uh, you know, building that and stay connected, the industry I think is really, really important for, yeah.

Scott Luton ([15:56](#)):

So let, let, let's stay right there for a second. What also observed from your kind of walking us through your career is just how well-rounded all these different roles and the functions that collectively provided you a wonderful background for really doing what you're doing now, where you're leading into end supply chain for a company on the move like tractor supply is. So if you would, for a moment before we talk about Trex, blob, Colin, speak to our listenership, that might still be in school that may be early in their career. What's one thing for folks that really want to break into supply chain and succeed and, and Hey, do what you do, you know, be that chief supply chain officer, which is a cool thing to see more and more of those these days. What's one thing, piece of advice. You'd give those folks,

Colin Yankee ([16:40](#)):

I would say, be continuous learner and your supply chain is so big. I mean, I know retail and I know enough about kind of in, and retail would be dangerous and all of them, but I have experts on my team who do way more than I do about their functional area, but I don't know anything about the healthcare supply chain or pharmaceuticals or industrial manufacturing or writing algorithms within the software for decision-making and for decision sciences. But if you're curious and you love it and you have a passion for it, you know, there's just so much to learn. It's never going to stop, right. Yeah. You know, I could be doing this until I'm retired and, uh, and you know, continue to learn about it. It's just never ending. It's a big universe. So just always be curious. Yeah.

Scott Luton ([17:22](#)):

And we're going to have supply chain. We're already seeing supply chains go into orbit, right. The effing up the international space station and beyond. So it'd be amazing to see where the Heights and the extent of the supply chain profession in the decades to come. So, all right, well, let's, let's come back down to earth a little bit here. Let's talk about tractor supply company here. So we were talking pre-show it really? And look, I don't have a tractor supply tattoo or anything, but it's really, you know, an RF folks were talking about what you are doing at tractor supply company. We've talked about it and, and, and live streams of thing. Because again, it's, you've got companies that are really able to execute in this environment and you got folks that are really struggling and you all seem to be in that latter category or the former category. So first off for the three people that may be listening to this show right now, what, uh, that may not be familiar with tractor supply company. What does the company do in a nutshell?

Colin Yankee ([18:20](#)):

Sure. We are a national retailer in the United States. We serve rural country, suburban country customers who live a kind of do it yourself out here, lifestyle. You're not necessarily large farmers, but, uh, you know, people who may own one acre to 50 acres. And, uh, we sell them everything that they need to live that lifestyle for their, uh, you know, to work out on the land, uh, whether it's work-wear and footwear or for animal food and feed or pharmaceuticals and supplies for their domestic pets. And also they have a couple of goats and chickens in their backyards and like that truck tool and hardware parts. So a lot of small business owners and, you know, people who do maintenance on their equipment. So that can be everything from, you know, a diesel transfer tank or a nuts and bolts and ranch, or a make model specific part, uh, for a piece of equipment. And then we have, you know, seasonal items, um, we're very weather driven. So, you know, lawn and garden type things are heating. I mean, if you live up in the North and you, your heating your house with wood pellets or some other kind of fuel, so we sell all those things. You can live that lifestyle there, and we've got 1,933 stores as of today. If you're, if you're interested, uh, you know, TSC on, on NASDAQ, or you can check it out, check us out online

Scott Luton ([19:37](#)):

And just shy of 2000 stores. If I heard that, right. That isn't unbelievable. I mean, I knew there were a lot, but I had no idea. Well let's, and we're going to get to it here in a second, but I'm gonna go ahead and, and mention it because when you hear that number and you hear how quickly y'all rolled out, same day delivery, Collin in the last, I think it was within 2020, I believe I have that, right. Yeah. Yeah. And just how fast you did it to those 2000 stores, it really is remarkable. But before we talk about some of that, some of those wins and accomplishments, let's talk about your role. And again, we'd love to see the, the proliferation of chief supply chain officer, you know, we've seen Greg, what was a big, there was a huge retailer just welcomed their first supply. Well, it's a reframe Depot, right? Is it a home Depot or it was, um, it was one that's based in a mall, but regardless it's a refrain. You hear almost, almost every week, you hear a new chief supply chain officer being added to an executive team. It's a wonderful thing for, for both those organizations and the profession, but what, where do you spend your time? What what's, uh, what's your average, if there is such a thing week in Colin Nicky's life look like. Yeah. Um, so I'm

Colin Yankee ([20:48](#)):

Responsible in supply chain can mean different things in different places. So I'm responsible for, uh, our merchandise planning team, which does all of our sales and margin forecasting and, and the assortment optimization data analytics around what goes in, in the stores. Um, they kind of manage our checkbook of, of the inventory. We can spin our inventory management team or vendor operations team that does all the forecasting with our vendors and, and works with our vendor community, our transportation team, both important domestic, and then our distribution centers. And we have a network of eight DCS across country at, was popping up a couple more in next couple years, some import centers, and then these high-velocity crosstalks cross country. And so I spend a great deal of my time, really focused on synchronizing the actions and priorities across those different teams. And you kind of talk about the elevation of supply chain and that chief supply chain officer role.

Colin Yankee ([21:43](#)):

I look at in retail, you plan, you buy, you move, you sell, right. And that's kind of the, the, the traditional path and the connection to the merchandising team, which are really the general managers that their business areas, the stores teams, which, you know, I serve the stores who serve the customers, and I serve the customer direct new direct that way. It's coordinating all those things. And my whole job is to make decisions about trade-offs between time inventory cost and service, right across that chain. And

then, um, you really, uh, think about the, about the future. So we're in a fortunate position to be investing in the supply chain, um, very heavily, but how do we bring those things to fruition and see the return on those investments?

Scott Luton ([22:30](#)):

So speaking of investments and speaking, we touched on the same day store delivery, and gosh, you pick your acronym these days. BOPUS Boris you name it. I mean the shifting consumer preferences and acronyms go with them. It really is a, it is such a you're big history. I almost said nerve, I'm not calling it nerd. I'll call myself. I'm a big history nerd buff there again. Thank you. It really is such a fascinating time to study retail, but because of this, that these, these shifting consumer preferences and, and seeing how the various retailers meet them, but speak to us about the same day delivery. What, from a supply chain standpoint, the story behind the story, what are some things that had to happen in order to make that commitment to your customers?

Colin Yankee ([23:13](#)):

Yeah. Before I do that, is it BOPUS or bop is cause there's an ongoing debate out there. Know

Greg White ([23:20](#)):

I've got to tell you Colin, we hear BOPUS a lot more, uh I've I've never actually heard it called BOPUS before I'm a booth. This guy said, well, you're the boss, so what are the questions? Hard hitting questions.

Colin Yankee ([23:33](#)):

Yeah, no. So, so Scott, um, our ability to get to same day delivery at all stores really started several years ago. And we worked on buying online pickup in store out of, out of all our, all of our stores who most of our inventory is forward deployed into, into stores. And we're needs-based. So, you know, our customers are engaging with the stores as those convenient kind of points of distribution. And before we got into, how do we shift from store or fulfill from store? We had a focus on buying and pickup store to get service levels, process, inventory, accuracy, all those things that are really important to make, buy online pickup in store, good customer experience. At the same time, we were marching towards how do we fulfill direct to customer from any one of our DCS? So any one of our DCS, our network and ship directly to a customer using the same pool of inventory that they use for shipping to the store.

Colin Yankee ([24:24](#)):

And once we got to that point, then it became, how do we unlock these different modes of delivery out of the stores? And so we have our own team member delivery. We use third parties. Customers can rent a trailer cause they're, you know, do it yourselfers to get home. And we had this really crazy assortment, right? We have gun safes and air compressors and t-shirts and hats, right? So the, the mode has to be, be able to span all those things. And what that's really created is this really interesting place where our next evolution is gonna be all about refining the decision logic for where we fulfill from and when, and then inventory planning on used to be kind of linear, right? How much you put in the DC and how much you put in store. And now it's what, where are we positioned inventory? And then how's the customer going to engage with that inventory, right.

Greg White ([25:14](#)):

Based on where the demand comes from. Right?



Colin Yankee ([25:17](#)):

Yeah. And so, uh, yeah, I know John wold was on, I think, yesterday on podcasts. And he said, uh, that, you know, in retail, in general, we saw trends that we thought were gonna take two to three years of customer adoption and get compressed into like two or three weeks. Well, we saw that same, but we, we couldn't have faked. Right. You had to be working on all these things over the years in order to catch that acceleration. If you didn't, you were at a deficit, either on technology or process, it just got really clunky. And I think it hurt you.

Greg White ([25:47](#)):

Yeah. I think there's probably plenty of different aspects of global business where you can fight fake the market and fake out customers. But retail strikes me is not one of those. I mean, you are what you can deliver and keep on the shelf or get from e-commerce standpoint on time, on price meeting on that, that customer promise. So there's no hiding there getting around that as a Greg, there is not an, I come from store ops originally in retail. So we were known as frontline workers before. COVID. I mean, you are the face of the company, regardless of how good the GMM, the general merchandise manager or the CFO, chief supply chain officer, or the vice president of store ops or whatever, regardless of how, how well they do those people in the store, they take the bullet and especially in an industry where you have 1900 stores, that's a really, really important customer experience.

Greg White ([26:43](#)):

And the better experience you give to your store ops people, then the better experience your customers are inherently having. Yeah. Because they, it store ops, they hear the good and the bad. And when they hear the good, they are a few Civ store ops people. And when they hear the bad, they're explosive, it's a very high pressure job even before COVID right. So, yeah, it's a critical interface and, and retail has been changing over the years, but I also, you know, I got to kind of take a nod back to Colin's earlier career, having seen what Neiman Marcus did in terms of being prepared for e-com in 2013 and 2014. And of course, having worked in quality, a quality organization, like target as well. And having come from the military preparation strikes me as maybe a core competency for Mr. Yankee college.

Colin Yankee ([27:36](#)):

My, my team would agree with you. Let me say it that way.

Greg White ([27:38](#)):

Yeah. I bet they would.

Colin Yankee ([27:41](#)):

Yeah. You know, I had, I had a professor at Michigan state, he used to say, it's really hard to, it's difficult to execute your way out of planning problems. And, uh, I took that to heart. Right. You got to file that away. And that's been a, um, a motto for how I lead the supply chain.

Greg White ([27:57](#)):

So who was that professor? I'm curious,

Colin Yankee ([28:00](#)):

Dr. David close. Uh, he was, uh, the head of the supply chain program there at Michigan state. Okay. Right.

Scott Luton ([28:07](#)):

Well, who knows, maybe Dr. Close might be listening to this. So tip of the hat to the great work you're doing that's right. And of course, Michigan state, one of the top schools for many things, but including supply chain management. All right. So you've mentioned the team earlier and clearly you've, you all have this as a, as a big team effort, and we appreciate that, but let's talk about some other wins y'all might have beyond same day delivery. We were talking pre-show about an interesting acronym. M O E. So that might be new for many folks here. So let's start there with that. Tell us more about what that is.

Colin Yankee ([28:44](#)):

Yeah. M I O E is merchandising inventory operations execution. It's uh, the retail acronym, alphabet soup for SNL E SNOP. Right. And your traditional consumer packaged goods or manufacturing type environment, and your retail has, has been kind of a lagger in that area. We take a lot of our cues from people in CPG or in manufacturing. Um, you know, we just have your purchasing finished goods with a lot of different national brands or own brands, not a lot, a whole lot of vertical integration, varying lead times, all these different site skew combinations. So it's taken a lot to get the coordination there. And I think my team talk about the planning and preparation over the last four or five years, we've really just been focused on how do we synchronize planning and operations, you know, forget whatever acronym you, you call it, but the financial plan to what you're going to order to, how it's, how it's actually worked in the supply chain, physically for your vendor, for your transportation provider and for the, for the guy like me, when I'm a supervisor 10 o'clock at night on a Sunday receiving on the receiving dock.

Colin Yankee ([29:54](#)):

Right. Right. Right. And I think the team aspect of that is we worked really hard on process for the last few years. So how do we get that process down? Don't think technology is a solution for bad process, refine it to a point. And we were able to really use that during the COVID spike in volume. And when we saw three straight quarters of plus 25% comp sales, so that put a lot of strain on the supply chain and the coordination helped everybody work together and not point fingers as much. It helped us communicate better with our vendor base as they were under last drain. And they're dealing with their own transportation or labor kind of availability challenges. And, you know, right now I'm very proud of where the team's at. And we're at the point where I think technology can take us to the next level, you know, a single planning system of record. How do we use that information to coordinate operations and run the kind of real-time scenario modeling about what's going to happen on take a lot of the human knowledge that we've gained the last five, 10 years and kind of coated in and make it part of the organization as we've scaled? You know, we, the process we had was really good for a five to \$10 billion company, but as we moved from 10 billion and beyond, you know, we, we have to really kind of cemented into the process

Scott Luton ([31:14](#)):

And a bigger engine is sounds maybe moving from a V8 to what comes next. It'd be 10 Greg, you're the automotive guy. I just skipped 10 and go straight to 12. There you go. There you go. All right. So let's talk then I saw him social virtual leaders meeting and, you know, just generally speaking, I think small teams, big teams, all points in between trying to find ways of, of staying connected and, and invest in culture. And then also offering learning opportunities and professional development opportunities. And no, I

hate to say team building, but you know, to some degree, that's that, that's what it is. And that's, there's some real value there. Some companies have really figured out how to do that. And it seems like from what I observed on your, the virtual leaders meeting are recently wrapped up some while that was kind of y'all's aim there. So tell us more about what that was and give us your favorite key takeaway from, from that internal session.

Colin Yankee ([32:08](#)):

Yeah. We, um, so traditionally at the beginning of our year, get all the leaders together. You talk about the business plan on top of what's going to happen, do some training and development, best practice sharing across the board. And you know, this year, we're not able to do that. And you, Greg hit on it earlier. It, this is really geared towards our district managers and our store leaders who are engaging with the customer and where everything hits the store eventually. Right. They have to execute it. So all the good ideas from, you know, the people that I work with, ultimately you'll show and, you know, something has to execute that the store, I would say there's a, you've heard COVID fatigue. There's also a little bit like virtual fatigue. You know, people are craving that human interaction. And so, uh, our stores team did a phenomenal job, injecting humor, engagement, figuring out different ways to get people involved in, pull out their, their input in this virtual environment.

Colin Yankee ([33:02](#)):

I think that was really, really good, but my key takeaway really was around the plan. We've got a very, we've captured a lot of market share this last year and we're expecting to hold on to that. And we're calling it stomp the comp, right? So we had a call. We got to go after it. And so what was our plan to do that? And, uh, it really, we, we know that your life's gonna intercede, right? Nobody expected this, you know, a hundred year storm. We would come across the country right now that we could be, if we're talking two weeks from now, two weeks in the future, it could be spring. Right? And so our whole goal was how do we communicate to the frontline team about what our intent is around the major objectives for the year? Because I think Greg said it really well. We're not there to make a decision for the customer. And so if they understand, here's what we're trying to achieve as a company, they can use their intuition, their initiative, their smarts to help solve our customer's problem and support the company objectives. So it was all about communicating our intent and letting our team be successful.

Greg White ([34:04](#)):

Love that. All right. So Greg, I know you're, you're chomping at the bit to respond to some of that. And Greg always says it always, he always nails it. Uh, this is nothing new. So Greg respond to some of what you heard Colin share there. I, I just, I like, I love the commitment and the recognition that, and frankly, the need of interaction and engagement in the store environment, I'm going to, uh, you know, one of the questions that immediately popped to mind was this, it sounds to me like the store still matters at tractor supply. And of course, because of the goods that are purchased there and a lot, I think because of the people that shop there, they, they get engaged. If they're going to get feed or if they're going to get fencing or if they're going to get coveralls or whatever, they go to get it.

Greg White ([34:51](#)):

Right. So, uh, the recognition one that the store is still part of that engagement and, and also to kind of embrace that and get people interested in engaging with the people in the stores. And I got to tell you on social calling, you know, I'm a big advocate for this. I feel like part of your social engagement could be to bring back those little figurines and give them, give them identities on social, right. That, that if

you're, if you're new to tractor supply, you may have never seen that campaign. But that was one of the most fun and brilliant and engaging frankly, um, marketing campaigns where the little figurines are standing by their little figuring truck and talking about feed and seed, whatever.

Colin Yankee (35:38):

So yeah. Noted. I'll take it back. That's

Greg White (35:42):

No charge to the marketing folks.

Colin Yankee (35:44):

Yeah. There'll be like brilliant marketing idea, supply chain guys.

Greg White (35:49):

Right. We've got some supply chain ideas for you.

Colin Yankee (35:52):

Yeah.

Greg White (35:54):

Yeah. I mean, I think, I think that sort of creativity is really necessary. I feel like, as Colin said, so many companies have been stymied by this change by this dramatic seismic societal disruption and to embrace it and to, and to engage it so actively and to try and overcome it, knowing who your consumer is, is really critical because I have to say this, Scott, I am contractually required by me to say this. And in every discussion around supply chain, the supply chain begins and ends with the consumer. Yeah. Right. And I think the recognition that Colin and his team and the general team, it sounds like it tractor supply has, is they're not done when it goes out the door at the store they're done when the customer has had a really sound and, and pleasing experience. And I think that speaks volumes and probably is a good part of the reason for their success.

Greg White (36:56):

Agreed. Agreed. Alright. So much, uh, so much more we could, we could dive into deeper here. It's really a fascinating, I think your perspective, the journey that TSC Trek black company's been on and juxtaposed against this environment that Greg just continues to coin. What'd you call it the seismic side? Societal disruption. I actually stole that from Brad Jacobs at SPO, but I can't go over three syllables column. That's my rule here. Three S's is no, no easy task either. Right. Isn't it? No, it's three. All right. So as we move into the final stretch here, Greg, I know we wanted to pick Collin's brain on a couple of things kind of beyond tractor supply, right? Yeah. Well, it sounds like you, I mean, you and your company have your finger on the pulse of much broader things than just supply chain or even just tractor supply, but I'm fascinated to hear what really has mind share for you now, right now, what has really gets you jazzed up or concerned or excited, or where do you see opportunity at this time?

Colin Yankee (38:01):

Yeah, I think, um, you know, there's the things that are right in your face, right? Like the important disruption or the kind of secular things with the domestic freight market around drivers, shortages, labor

availability, running grid, great facilities and the COVID environment. Um, all those things are like right up in, I think every opera operators face at the same time, you take it up a notch and there's this critique of resilience versus efficiency, right. You know, we're supply chains to lead and lead to a near shoring and everything else from a supply chain perspective. But also how do you build supply chain resilience? And I'm a believer that you can get both, you can have a, have a lean and efficient supply chain and a resilient supply chain. And, um, you know, for, for my team, you know, the, the top of mind thing is, is really our digital roadmap.

Colin Yankee ([38:56](#)):

And how do we use all the wonderful technology that's just been developing and emerging and becoming lower cost of ownership or last couple of years and all the data that's being produced. I mean, we generate so much data, customer transaction data, credit card, data, loyalty, program, data, weather, data. I mean, you have all that stuff plus history. And we're finally at a point now, I think in supply chain where we have the systems and the information to digest all that, all that, and put together and apply to the supply chain for decision-making. And, um, you know, I think there's visibility, right. Which I think hasn't really achieved its promise yet, but there's a lot of work to do. And then there's predictive analytics off that visibility. And then there's AI and ML, artificial intelligence, machine learning. That is real, that just needs those good inputs. Right. And I think we're on the, on like just the first step as a company. And just as an industry of seeing that really drive a law change or the next next decade, I think in 10 years from now, we're just gonna be blown away by, by what we see out of that particular space and digitizing the supply chain.

Greg White ([40:07](#)):

Undoubtedly, I, I think definitely in 10 years, possibly even sooner, I mean, with what you know, with what we see so often calling, you know, not only on supply chain now, but I deal with companies that are, I specifically work with investors who are investing in supply chain tech companies today, and where companies are going with this wealth of data that you just talked about is incredible. I mean, it is, it is truly disruptive. It is a new perspective on how to manage, how to evaluate, how to operate supply chains. So it's very exciting.

Scott Luton ([40:47](#)):

It is an exciting time to be in retail, exciting time to be in supply chain, certainly an exciting time to be in global business. Despite the challenges, you know, as our dear friend, Kevin Bell says you can find opportunity without being opportunistic. And that's what some of the leaders that we've been speaking to are finding. Exactly. All right. Well then the final thing we'll touch on before we make sure folks know that connect with you and tracker spot company, I really admire all of what you do and your company does to support our veterans community. You know, it would be remiss if we didn't, you know, David Medlin rest in peace, connected the two of us several years back, heck of a guy lost some weight way too early fellow veteran, but really admire what y'all do from a real taking action standpoint, no lip service to serve those that have served in uniform. So what's your favorite out of all the things that you do when it comes to, to serve in the veteran community? What's your favorite aspect of that column?

Colin Yankee ([41:42](#)):

Yeah. Scott, I appreciate you mentioned that we, um, we do a lot to give back to the veterans, but just personally, my favorite is when we can help a veteran or a military family member get a job and build their build, the next career, right. Were citizen soldiers. And so are you talking about what we donate or

you're the volunteer service, all those kind of things. But when we can give somebody a great career after they transitioned out of the military in a place that they feel valued and they have that same sense of belonging that they had in the military, they feel part of the culture. That to me is, you know, kind of our ultimate objective, right? How do we, how do we make it happen? It's a win for us as a business because we get some great talent. It's a win for that individual.

Colin Yankee ([42:24](#)):

And it's a win for, or I think our country, right? Cause it helps people see the military as a development experience and then transition that into corporate America. And so I, I benefited because a veteran helped, helped me make that transition date, Midland, who you mentioned, who was a good friend of mine. And I worked on this team, he had that same successful transition. And I think businesses that can do that well, there's the altruistic side of it. And then there's the opportunistic or, you know, beneficial side of it. And I think that's just the thing that I'd be proud of.

Scott Luton ([42:53](#)):

Well, I appreciate you sharing. We love, love all of that. And we look forward to reconnecting with you as, as we continue to figure out how we can effectively support the veteran community on top of, you know, what's been doing and that's constantly evolving too, right? And you find them different ways, uh, based on old, some longstanding needs and challenges, especially related to transition. And then of course, how some of those have had nuanced tweaks related to the pandemic and other things, but I admire what you do. And we look forward to touching base on with you on some of that support down the road a bit, let's make sure folks know how to connect. I mean, to almost 2000 stores continue to grow left and right. Touching on what you shared earlier in the interview. You want to work in teams that get it that are on the move that are exciting. And there's a buzz. There's a hum. You know, who knows it might be someone listening to this that is going to check you out and send them their resume. How can folks, you know, compare notes with you and connect with tractor supply?

Colin Yankee ([43:51](#)):

Yeah. You can always reach out to me on LinkedIn. And so you can find me there calling Yogi for tracks, finding, attract spot.com and you cruise through the site there, learn a lot about the company and in career opportunities, your social media platform of choice, it'd be at tractor supply. So whether that's LinkedIn or Facebook or Instagram or Twitter, it's all, all the same handle. You'd find them there.

Scott Luton ([44:11](#)):

Love that. Really appreciate that. We've been talking with Colin Yankee, the executive vice president, chief supply chain officer at tractor supply company. Greg, I feel like we could always say this. Maybe it may be a broken record, but it feels like we're just scratching the surface. There's so much more that Colin can share. We just, just make it a six hour interview. How about, does that sound good on here?

Greg White ([44:33](#)):

As long as we do it an hour at a time, probably take it with Collins calendar would probably take us about six months as you're ready to go call. I'll bring some snacks and sometimes try and figures. Yeah, that's right. Well, you know, what I think is so interesting is we continue to see people who have, as I say, backed into supply chain, right? There are so few of us who grew up saying, I can't wait to get into supply chain instead of being a rockstar, race, car driver or whatever, astronaut or whatever, you know, you grew up wanting to be. And I think, you know, one of the things calling you said earlier that is so

powerful is, is essentially that supply chain is so diverse just because, you know, retail supply chain doesn't mean you necessarily know manufacturing, supply chain or distribution supply chain.

Greg White ([45:21](#)):

And you certainly, it's certainly different than as you said, healthcare supply chain. So supply chain in and of itself is so complex and so diverse. And it depends on the industry and the segment and the tier of supply chain that you operate in. I think that's really, really important for us to recognize because one of the things we have continued to see and Scott, you, and I see this periodically is that projection that if it works for Procter and gamble or pick, pick a manufacturer, it'll work for you. As Colin said earlier, we can certainly learn from manufacturers, but we have to adapt it. And particularly in retail, where you have hands on the consumer, as we talked about also, you have to recognize that it is a distinctly different supply chain dynamic than the manufacturer who doesn't or hasn't in the past. And doesn't as frequently touch the consumer.

Greg White ([46:12](#)):

They will more often now with direct to consumer, but still it's yet a different experience. And I think that's a really important recognition for people to have. And as soon as we have more practitioners who recognize that the difference between manufacturing, supply chain, brand supply chain versus retail supply chain, the more effective we'll be. And finally, Colin's charged to be curious, be a, I forget the actual word that you used. Did you say constant learner was what I took away from it, but I think his word was much, much bigger and more intellectual than the one on pig, but that's a critical part of any career. And certainly in supply chain for all the reasons we just talked about, it's a critical part of your success. Is it

Scott Luton ([46:57](#)):

Stop the cop? That's what you gotta do, right? Right. Yeah. There you go. But love this interview, Colin, I really appreciate your down to earth approach. We love that here. It's such a breath of fresh air where you get the real story and not just, uh, the, the good stuff that you know, you get you you're, you're open and honest and transparent. And I love that. So big, thanks to you, Greg. Pleasure to knock out this interview with you here today, to our community and our audience. Hopefully you enjoyed this conversation as much as we have. We're chomping at the bit to go deeper, but Hey, we'll have Colin back soon. Hey, be sure if you liked this conversation, check us out@supplychainnow.com Scott, on behalf of Scott Luton and on behalf of Greg white and our supply chain. Now this is Scott Luton. That's right. Signing off for now. Challenging you do good. Give forward, be the changes needed. And on that note, we'll see you next time here on supply chain now. Thanks everybody.

Intro/Outro ([47:52](#)):

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