



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 3, Episode 7

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

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Katherine Lehtinen: Welcome to *The Fix*, the podcast made for the trades, where we sit down with inspiring individuals across the trades to discuss their unique take on the industry, including career paths, jobsite stories, overcoming challenges, and everything in between. I'm your host, Katherine, a marketer here at Oatey, with my co-host and friend, Doug, one of Oatey's resident experts in all things trades. *The Fix* is more than a podcast. It's a community. A community built to support tradespeople and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation. Well, Doug, let's just talk about closing out Season 3, and this is going to be a bang.

Doug Buchan: I know, Katherine. Normally when you're ending something, you say things like, "Well, shut the lights out, the party's over," right? Not here at *The Fix*. Our guest today has so much energy that if he was in the middle of a power outage and walked into a three-bedroom, three-bath house, he could light that place up. I used to have a saying in the field, I would have certain people, they'd be my 496ers.

Doug: 496 is basically made of four different things. 100%, 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Katherine: I love it.

Doug: I think this is appropriate. I'm going to use my first hashtag for this guest today, and it's going to be #496.

Katherine: I love it. Well, welcome Roger Wakefield, American plumber and business owner residing in Dallas, Texas, who is a master plumber with over 40 years of plumbing experience. He is a teacher, trades advocate, podcaster, social media star, and YouTube superstar. Welcome, Roger.

Roger Wakefield: With an introduction like that, it just goes downhill from here.

[laughter]

Katherine: Well, we just want to thank you for taking time to talk with us today on *The Fix*. For those that may or may not know you, would you please give them a little bit about your background and tell us how you got started in the plumbing industry and what's motivated you to build this successful business?

Roger: It's funny, Katherine and Doug, first of all, thank y'all for having me here, but I got started in the trades in 1980. I was managing a restaurant at the age of 16. It was late. I'm going to say it was a Tuesday night, there was no business, and me and my best friend were working. It was really slow and he looked at me and he said, "Are you going to do this forever?" I'm like, "Dude, I am 16 years old. I'm managing a restaurant, man, life is great." He said, "Yes, but if you quit or get fired, who's going to hire you?"

I'd never really thought about it that way, but he also went on to talk about what all he was going to do, and he talked about his father and his older three brothers that were all in plumbing. He talked about how much they loved it, how much they did different things all the time. They made good money, they each had their own place. It was a few weeks later, I either quit or probably got fired, and I reached out to one of his brothers and said, "Man, look, can you help me get a job?" He did.

Now, that was the middle of my junior year. I'd quit high school, went and got a job with him. The last half of my junior year and the summer after it, I worked in plumbing. Well, luckily, I was going out with a girl and she looked at me one day and she said, "I don't think I could ever marry anyone who didn't graduate high school." Hitting the head, I called my principal. I was able to re-enroll in school. I was far enough ahead when I quit that I graduated with my class, but I loved plumbing. Now, after graduating high school, I did a couple of other things, but I always got back into plumbing.

There's something about it. Whether it is just the idea of the camaraderie, being with the other trades, whether it's being able to fix and repair things all the time, or building something new, I think the trades is one of the most prideful professions in the world, and most people don't even realize that.

Katherine: Yes, what a wonderful story. I didn't know that. Thank you for sharing for us. Someone also said to you, "Hey, go finish that high school degree," and you were able to finish with your class too.

Doug: I have to ask the question, Roger, what happened to the girlfriend?

Roger: Well, I'm just going to say Garth Brooks has a song called *Sometimes I Thank God for Unanswered Prayers*.

[laughter]

Katherine: We'll leave it at that.

Roger: We'll leave it at that.

Katherine: Well, can you share then a little bit of your experience with the support and mentorship that you received from others? Did you continue to stay in touch with the gentleman that you worked with and his family going into plumbing? Were they a part of why you continued to stay in the trades?

Roger: Absolutely. His older three brothers, I've actually worked with all of them. I opened my own company about seven years ago. The three older brothers have all three worked for me, that they are still some of the best plumbers I've ever worked with. My friend owns his own company. He started it just a few years later after we talked about it at that time. He got really far ahead of me because of the way he did things. He started his business not long after he got out of high school, and got his license, and did some different things.

Me, I was always working for other people, which to me is great because I've had a broad knowledge in the trades. I started out as a laborer on a jobsite when I got into plumbing. I have now done service and new construction, I've done residential and commercial, industrial. I started out non-union, got in the union for almost 25 years, got back out when I started my own company, decided I wanted it to be union, so signed up again and then got out again. When people talk to me about anything in plumbing, I feel like I've got the experience that I can give them knowledgeable advice.

Katherine: Sure, yes, that makes a lot of sense, and what a vast variety for you to be able to share with everyone too, and maybe the ups and downs and some of those challenges that you've had or good paths that you've taken that you think, "Hey, this is a great thing I want to share." Let's talk a little bit about the misconceptions. What do you believe some of the common misconceptions are about the trades, and why is it so important that we address it? I know you talked about that a little bit in the beginning, but I also know that you're working on talking a little bit about blue-collar jobs on your platform. Let's talk a little bit there and how we can figure something out that we can be talking about it together.

Roger: Well, I think the big thing is-- I was doing a podcast interview one day, and Dov Baron, who does this big podcast, he asked me, he says, "What biases do people have against tradespeople?" Then thinking about the question, because I'm one of these people, you made a comment, hey, you probably know what we're going to talk about. I don't ever study anybody's podcast. I don't want to know the questions I'm going to be asked. I'm like, "Look, you ask me a question, I'm going to give you the answer and that's what you get."

Katherine: Sure.

Roger: My thought was, "The biases, the bigger biases are the ones that we have." As tradespeople, we're told we're stupid. We're told, "If you never go to college, you're never going to amount to anything." I think a lot of us take that internally and we live that throughout our life. The big thing is, to be honest, we get a better education than most people going to college because we learn for four or five years exactly how to do the job we're going to be doing. I don't think that we're taught as much about professionalism. I don't think that we're taught communication skills, leadership, management. There's a lot of different areas that you can go into, and

that's what I'm trying to teach people getting in the trades is, "Look, first of all, you're not as stupid as everybody tells you they think you are."

Katherine: Sure.

Roger: I used to have a deal on my Facebook, my banner on my Facebook page. I used to have one up there that said underestimate me, this is going to be fun, because I know how to play it very well. If you've ever heard me speak, I start off saying, "Look, I'm Roger Wakefield. I'm just a plumber." That puts everybody a leg up on me and I love it, because I'm like, "We're at a great starting point here." I think that every person in the trades should learn communication. We're taught how to read, we're taught how to write. We're not taught how to listen.

As a service provider, the most important thing we can do is walk into someone's house and listen to what they're telling us without already jumping ahead, without thinking, "Yes, I know the problems over here. I know what it is. Go ahead and tell me your story." Slow down and listen. I was taught through **silent[unintelligible 00:09:30]** sales training, listen to repeat. Katherine, what I heard you tell me is you wanted me to tell you what I think about the problems are with the trades and why sometimes we think the way we do.

That's the way we're raised. We are told from a young age, if you don't go to college, you'll never amount to anything. I know more millionaires in the trades than I know that aren't in the trades. You can say, "Well, Roger, it's because you're in the trades," but yes, I know a lot of people though. It's funny.

Doug: Roger, I have a question for you. You obviously have many proven successes and stuff. You're on many different platforms. You reach out to God only knows how many. I don't even think we can count that high this quickly, right? My question to you is, what are you most passionate about that you want your listeners to get from you when you speak on something? Pretend you're EF Hutton right now, and everybody is ready to listen.

Roger: Doug, I love it being put that way because my thought is, I want everybody who hears me to understand, number one, there's an opportunity in the trades that most people don't see. Number two is that to get into the trades and become the best professional you can be, you make more money. It's not just about getting in the trades, it's not just about joining top together, it's about explaining to the customer why you did it the way you did it, why that is the best way to do it, and why they did the right thing by hiring you to do it.

If you learn that communication, that professionalism, the understanding of, "Look, yes, we're just plumbers, but we're solving problems for you that number one, you need solved, number two, we protect the health of the nation each and every day, and we're going to do our job better than most professionals do their job." I think as tradespeople, if we can take on that persona of, "Look, I really am one of the best professionals that there ever was," it doesn't matter whether you're a doctor, or a lawyer, whatever it is, I think we have an opportunity to be more professional in our daily lives each and every day.

I think that sets us apart from every other person that we work with on jobsites, that we work with in our companies. Whatever it is, I want tradespeople to understand, "Look, you've got something here to be proud of. If you act like the professional that you should be, if you're not out ripping people off every day, if you're not outlying to customers to try to sell them stuff they don't need, take pride in it, and explain to people why you do what you do, and own it."

Doug: Yes, I agree with you 100%. If you treat someone as if they were your family member, take great care of them, and then also remember, you're a guest in their home, and your home is your private space. When someone comes into there, treat them with that respect that that is their space and you are a guest in there. I'm going to ask if you can share with us maybe a deep thought that you might be having, because you do have so many platforms, you reach out to so many people, is there something in your mind right now that you feel that you would be very passionate about that you want to attempt to do in the future that you're not doing right now?

Roger: Absolutely. First of all, I'm trying to build courses, training, whatever you want to call that. I want to teach people there is an easy way to get in the trades. If you get into the trades with that professional mindset, with the mindset of, "Look, I'm always going to keep learning," I truthfully think that it's an opportunity that most counselors aren't aware of. People ask me all the time, who do you get mad at? I get mad at people's parents. I get mad at counselors. I get mad at principals. I get mad at teachers. It's not because they're lying to people, it's because they don't know the truth.

They don't understand that Johnny, who loves working on his car on the weekend or tears apart his bicycle and puts it together blindfolded, probably isn't going to go to college, but if you guided him into the trades, he could be a superintendent and a multi-millionaire by the time he retires. Teachers don't get that. They don't understand it. Guidance counselors don't get it. That's what I want. I'm working on things-- We specialized in slab leaks and leak detection. I'm wanting to build a training center to teach people how to do slab leaks and leak detection just to generate more revenue for the plumbing companies they already own.

Doug: That's great. Thank you for sharing that.

Katherine: Tell us a little bit about your evolution into influencing and what got you here today. How did this all start that you went from owning a company to being in the union, out of the union, having people work for you? Now you're on LinkedIn, on YouTube, on Instagram. I saw you at a trade show. Talk to us about how that all evolved for you.

Roger: It's really funny because I was running my company and we were struggling. We had lost about \$47,000 in marketing. When I say that, we kept hiring new companies to try to make the phone ring. At one point, I got a phone call from **[unintelligible 00:15:35]** saying, "Look, our phones are not ringing." I decided at that point, I wanted to learn social media. I had reached out to some marketing companies here in the Dallas area. They'd tell me things like, "Look, tomorrow's National Pizza Day. Make a post about it." I'm like, "What's that got to do with plumbing?" I ended up going to a social media marketing conference the end of

February 2018. I walked into the wrong room. There was a sign that [unintelligible]
00:16:06]

[laughter]

Roger: I was headed down. Okay, at the time, I'm 54. I'm here to learn Facebook. That is social media. I'm walking down the corridor and I saw a sign that said, "Get in front of your customers using video," and I go sit on the front row. The guy comes out and talks, and one of the first things he says is, "YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world." I literally-- I shut my notebook and I turn around to get up and walk out, and I noticed the room is full. I turn back around because I'm thinking, "Okay, these people must know something."

[laughter]

Roger: I turned back around and look at him in time to hear him say, "It's owned by Google, the largest search engine in the world." I'm sitting here thinking, "Okay, we pay Google so many thousands of dollars a month to make the phone ring because it's a search engine. YouTube is a search engine that we're not using at all. Why aren't we doing anything there?" Over the next 45 minutes, it would blow your mind as to how much smarter this guy got because I had taken about four pages worth of notes. I could not wait to get home and get started.

It's funny because I had to leave that conference early on a Friday because I had a radio show here in Dallas on Saturday. There's nobody in the seat next to me, so I've got the two tray tables folded down. I've got my iPad, my laptop, my notebook and all the little notepads they give you, and I'm coming up with an implementation plan. Saturday, after the radio show, I came back to the office and worked on it. Got home at about six o'clock that night. Got up and went to church the next day. Came back to the office. Stayed till about five o'clock. Then Monday morning at eight o'clock, plumbing happened.

I come into the office. The plumbers are here. There's a million problems going on and things to do. Once I got all the plumbers out, I called everybody else together and said, "We're going to start doing YouTube and we're going to start it right now," and that's exactly what we did. A month later, we started posting videos. We've posted three a week since then. We've recently just cut down to two a week. For the last year, year and a half, we've done live streams. We were doing on Monday. We've moved into Saturdays. We get a lot of engagement. It is really, really good.

Doug: What a great story.

Katherine: Isn't that amazing?

Doug: Yes.

Katherine: From going into the wrong room to hearing the right story at the right time.

Roger: I think God puts us in the right place for the right reason at the right time.

Katherine: Amen to that. That might lead into some of this. What would you say is your proudest accomplishment in your career so far? It could be maybe there's a couple of them, but if you have one that just immediately sticks out in your mind.

Roger: It's ever-changing. Having the idea to walk into a social media conference, when I walked in and signed up, they looked at me and said, "Okay, you're a plumber. We're going to find some other plumbers for you to hang out with."

[unintelligible 00:19:18] "Mr. Wakefield, there's no plumbers here. Who else would you hang out with?" I'm like, "Electricians, HVAC techs, roofers, contractors." She scrolls down and the girl looks up at me and she says, "Look, there's nobody here like you. I don't know who you're going to hang out with." I just smiled from ear to ear. I'm like, "Don't you worry about me. I'll be fine."

[laughter]

Roger: I think that was big. Doug, you mentioned a while ago, not sure what all we're doing and whatnot. Just recently, we've been monitoring our analytics. We're getting a million views a day right now.

Doug: Wow.

Roger: It's from YouTube and TikTok. We still get several hundred thousand on Facebook and Instagram, but to walk into a conference and have people walk up and say, "Roger I met you through YouTube or TikTok and you changed my life."

Katherine: Awesome.

Roger: To me that is the greatest feeling on earth. I think we should all give back, and I think this is one way that I'm giving back that I can actually see it paying off.

Katherine: That's pretty amazing. This is my ending question for everyone, and it's really, where do you see, and also, where do you believe the trades are going to be in the next 5 to 10 years?

Roger: Katherine, that's a great question because it depends on how well we do our jobs, and I hate to put it back on us, but I truthfully think that if we keep letting high schools tell kids that they're never going to amount to anything, we're hurting our future. There's a million unfilled trades jobs right now in the United States. A million. There's a trillion dollars in student debt in the United States right now, and the government wants to forgive it.

My thought is, look, if it's really that valuable, why are you having to forgive it? Why aren't they paying it back? Because they're not getting the jobs that they are told upfront they'll be able to get. Yet we've got people going to trade school that are getting out, they're paying their debt, they're getting a job, they're raising families, they're buying houses. The people that come into the trades right now are our next entrepreneurs, and that's what I love about my audience. That the main part of my audience is 18 to 34. That's the biggest part of my audience.

This is our future. If I help them, if I coach them, if I teach them right, our future's going to be amazing, and when I say us, if we, as the industry, recruit people into this, we make the world a better place for a lot of people, because when there aren't

enough plumbers, then plumbers aren't protecting the health of the nation. When Texas lets a congressman stand up on the floor and say, "You don't need a license in Texas anymore," we're hurting the people of Texas, we're not hurting the plumbers. When there's not enough tradespeople to do the jobs that need to be done, then Handy Andy gets to come in and tell you he knows how to fix it, and if he creates a cross connection and kills people, it's not good for anybody.

Katherine: This is one that we believe with *The Fix* and manufacturers and those in the trades, we're all responsible to work on this message. We're all responsible regardless of being a competitor or anyone in this space. I'll stand side by side to make sure that we're teaching children, they don't have those biases, that we're meeting with guidance counselors and parents to talk about the benefits of the trades and assessing students to say, "Hey, could be an opportunity for you in the trades." A lot of times they don't even know. It's been great, and also eye-opening to have so many of these conversations this season to talk about the benefits.

There's a lot of great organizations out there doing a lot of great things. It's just, how do we continue to amplify as a larger group to get those messages out? On behalf of Oatey and *The Fix*, we appreciate the work that you're doing in this space. It means a lot to us. We're here to help support you and thank you very much for taking your time today, telling your story and telling us a little bit more about you and the work that you're doing.

Roger: Thank both of you, Katherine, Doug. This has been wonderful. I love getting to speak about the trades, and I think all of our futures depend on it. I love the opportunity I've been given. Thank you so much.

Katherine: Thank you.

Doug: Thank you.

Katherine: Thanks for joining us on this episode of *The Fix*. Be sure to follow us on your favorite podcast platform so you don't miss our next conversation dropping every Wednesday. If you have feedback about the show or a topic you'd like to see covered, send us an email at thefix@oatey.com or give us a shout out on social media. We would love to connect with you. Don't forget, you can get your daily fix by visiting oatey.com, and we'll catch you next time.

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