



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 1, Episode 5

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Guests: Rocco Fana Jr.

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

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Katherine: 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, job site stories, overcoming challenges, and everything in between. I'm your host, Katherine, a marketer here at Oatey with my cohost 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.

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Katherine: All right. Welcome to this week's episode of *The Fix*, spotlighting PHCC Northeast Ohio Chapter and the benefits they bring to the trades. Thanks for joining us, Rocco.

Rocco: It's good to be here. Thanks for having me.

Katherine: Yes, Rocco, who is the Northeast Ohio master PHCC chapter executive. Doug, I am sure you would have enjoyed the benefits of PHCC when you were going through the trades.

Doug: I'm going to tell you something, Katherine, on the way in this morning, I'm thinking to myself, I'm listening to the radio, all I hear is acronyms, acronyms, acronyms. I don't even know what most of them mean, but I'm going to tell you something, the PHCC, everybody knows what that means. I mean, they've been delivering excellence since the late 1800s.

Katherine: Awesome.

Doug: They got over 3,000 members. They have an elite training program that's second to none out there. The dos to be part of this organization, for God's sakes, it's a tank of gas nowadays. Very excited about it. Every tradesman out there should know what it is. Every tradesman out there should be seeking to be part of it because it is an elite organization.

Katherine: Awesome. That's great. Well, let's dive in and start the conversation. Rocco, can you please provide us some background on your work experience and why you are a part of PHCC?

Rocco: Sure, and that's a great question, and Doug, thank you for the, the acronym and what it means because I always get that from people. Also just to really specify, not only do I run the Northeast Ohio chapter, I also run the state of Ohio PHCC organization. I've been involved with different associations for about 20 years now, 20 plus, I was thinking back on my career yesterday and started off with the Associated Builders and Contractors, a lot of commercial industrial contractors in that realm.

Moved over to the home builders, and then I happened to be in the right place at the right time when I landed with PHCC, as well as ACCO, another acronym, which is the Air Conditioning Contractors of Ohio. At that time, I actually just got back from living in Texas, believe it or not, I was there for about a year with the Home Builders Organization, and we ended up coming back and it was looking for a job, and my predecessor, Sandy Pogan, who is a great influence on my executive career and other aspects of the organization, she was getting ready to retire, and I had met Sandy a couple of years prior, but at that time, she was not ready to retire. We had a Dayton member that was going to be the national president. She wanted to see that through and make sure everything went according to schedule.

When I got back in 2009, I had a friend of mine that called me out of the blue and said, "You remember that lady that you talked to, she's ready to retire. They're looking for a replacement." I said, "Okay, sure." I just followed through, I had a conversation with her, met her in person. Next thing you know it, I interview with both boards of directors and I got the job and I started off as the assistant executive director. It was great for a year of time just to learn the ins and outs of the association, as well as the memberships in that regard. That's how I landed at PHCC. Now, that's 12 years ago already.

Katherine: Wow.

Rocco: As they say, time flies when you are having fun, and it's been a great journey so far. I absolutely love the membership. I love the passion of the members, and it's taught me a lot about the industries, because one thing I will tell you is I'm not a contractor whatsoever. I do things at home. I'm a handyman, I like woodworking, but I know my limitations, and I know when to call in the professionals when it's dealing with heating and air and plumbing. That's my background.

Katherine: Yes, that's awesome. Could you explain to us a little bit about what is trade association management? For those who don't know, like you said, you're not a contractor, but you're really looking out for your contractors that are part of your association. What is really your role there as a management figure?

Rocco: That's a great question because to this day, there's a lot of people that have no idea what I do. You tell my church, "This is an executive director," I still think my parents don't even understand what it is I do.

Katherine: [laughs] All right, well, your parents, listen to the podcast and going to want to speak.

Rocco: People look at you and they're like, "You can make a living doing that?" I said, yes, actually, I have my own business. I understand all the aspects of running a small business, I have employees, I pay insurance, I pay salaries, all of that. Basically, being the executive director, and one of the voices for the association for the industry for our membership, I run the day to day operations, and running day to day operations, that can mean anything at all, participating in this podcast.

Katherine: True

Rocco: I mentioned it to one of my presidents, I said, "Oh, I should had you do this." He's right back. He's like, "No, that's all you. I'm good." A lot of them aren't keen on speaking to the public and that sort of thing, which is really interesting because of the business that they're in. They're always talking to customers and doing things like that.

Yes, I'm the glue that holds it all together. I work with two different boards of directors, we meet on a quarterly basis, moving the association in the direction needs to go. Excuse me, I run apprenticeship program that has been continuing to grow since we implemented it two years ago. Again, I work with our lobbyists, we have two in Columbus that I work with, and I'm calling them on a weekly basis, just monitoring different legislation and what's happening.

Then the chapter doesn't take a lot of time, but I have a board of directors that I work with there. We have monthly membership meetings, we actually have one next week, and we'll have a speaker that comes in, members get a continuing education credit for that moving along, because all the licensed contractors need continuing education.

Katherine: Right. In the state of Ohio?

Rocco: Right. Then as I said, there's a convention that's going on. Then there's all kinds of like little side projects, just working with individual suppliers and members and taking care of their needs on a day to day basis. There's not anything that I do the same.

Katherine: No day is the same. Right?

Rocco: Yes. Then I also do all the financials for the association. I'm getting reports ready and things like that. It's just a little bit of everything. You wear different hats at

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different times. It's been a great job. I love that aspect, that there's nothing the same every day.

Katherine: Well, I want to turn a little bit and talk about the introduction into PHCC Ohio and its mission in supporting plumbing, heating, and cooling contractors. If you wouldn't mind, how do individuals get involved? What's kind of the steps to membership?

Rocco: Membership recruiting, as we like to refer to, it's always interesting. It's word of mouth. It's myself as an executive director reaching out to potential contractors. There's numerous lists all over, you can go to the OCILB, the Ohio Construction Industry Licensing Board, they have various lists. We have suppliers that have lists of contractors that they work with. We'll initially try to invite them to a chapter meeting, send letters, send information.

Another way is our associate members, which are a lot of the suppliers and other members of the industry, they will reach out to their contractors, their clients, and invite them to our meetings to talk about membership. That's how we get it done. We'll get calls or emails from somebody, "Hey, I saw your website or heard about you. Can you send me more information about it?" That's the thing, we send them all the information, and what I found out is, I've just asked them, "What are you looking for specifically?"

Katherine: Sure.

Rocco: Because I always tell them, as an executive director, I could talk all day long. My PHCC is great, what we do, other wonderful things. Lately, a lot of what they're looking for is education, and not just of themselves, but of the workforce. They'll have their employees, and I keep mentioning our apprenticeship program, they want to get those employees into the apprenticeship program to give them more training to better them as employees.

Katherine: Okay. That's wonderful. I mean, Doug, how did you learn about PHCC?

Doug: Well, just being a technician. I mean, like I said, it's a world-class organization, you know, and so when you come across something like that, you reach out, you find out information, and you say, "Hey, I want to be part of that."

Katherine: Sure.

Doug: The PHCC is what people want to be part of. The one thing I like about it is, it doesn't discriminate against union or non-union. It doesn't judge you on that, okay. It also doesn't judge you on the size of your company. Okay, they're not out there saying, "Hey, you got to have at least 40 employees for us to solicit you." They don't care if you're a one-man shop. Bottom line is they're there to keep building their reservoir of professional technicians so that they can keep passing on the knowledge-

Katherine: That's great.

Doug: -year after year to make us sustainable as a contractor.

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Katherine: Yes, great point.

Rocco: Yes, absolutely. Thanks, Doug.

Katherine: Talk to me a little bit about the four pillars of your foundation. What are those and just a little bit about them?

Rocco: Okay, so I created that a long time ago. I actually stole it from the home builders when I was working there, but people always ask, "What does the association do," and you can group it into four different pillars, as you said. There's advocacy, which we talked about a little bit. Information, just getting the right information to our members, and that could be code issues, salary issues, different things like that. Education is another big key along with our monthly membership meetings. I mentioned our convention, and that's one of the main focal points of our convention is we bring in different speakers from around the country to offer education and training to our contractors.

Then the fourth one mixes in with offering solutions and then networking to members because a lot of contractors, they want to talk to their peers, and they want to get ideas, they want to talk issues, jobs, that sort of thing. That's always been the great thing. I've been able to sit and listen in on many conversations.

You'll have two contractors, whether it's from the same association, same chapter, or two different chapters, and they're just discussing an employee issue or a job that they just did, and what would you have done different? How did you do this? That's one thing they like to share is information. They understand that, yes, they're competitors, but talking to each other helps them all become better?

Katherine: Oh, absolutely.

Rocco: They want their competition to be just as good as they are, if not a little bit better. Those are the four main things that we do, and a lot of people with the information and advocacy, I will tell them, "Well, I can get that information anywhere." I said, "Yes, but specific information to our industry and to our trades, our members hear it first." We're able to give that information to them, whether it's a code issue or something that's going to affect their business with legislation coming out of state or coming from our national association.

Because both of us have teams of people that work on that and monitor it 24/7. A lot of that, which I tell contractors is, the industry that's given you this livelihood and created great things for you, isn't it time that you gave back? Because a lot of them, they do want to give back, and that's how they want to get involved.

One of the big things we always run into is the cost. I think that you said-- to me, the cost, it's a business expense, so I've switched it around and told them, "Well, if you can't afford this as a business expense, then you really need us because we offer management training and different ways to run your business and talk to other contractors about how they can afford that membership." With PHCC, it's not cheap. It runs over \$1,000, but it's three memberships in one. You're a member of your local

chapter, the state, and then the national. Each one of those levels offers different benefits-

Katherine: Oh, great.

Rocco: -and whatever you want. I always tell members, it's an insurance policy. Just like everything else in your life, when you need it, it's always there. You can call me. I know who to get ahold of because this is where I'll start pounding and get on my soapbox. They work with different CPAs and attorneys and other consultants, and I said, "We're the most important part of that. We're fighting for your livelihood in your industry on a daily basis. We should be first on that list." Then they look at you and say, "Yes, I guess you're right about that."

That's one of the things to try to convey that to a contractor. A lot of them know that they need to join. They just drag their feet for one reason or another. As Doug said, a lot of them are one-man shops, and they just, "I don't have the time to do that." It's like, you got to make the time. I understand that and everybody's busy. Anymore, I don't ever listen to that excuse I'm busy because I say "Oh, so all these other PHCC members are just sitting on their hands." Hey, what can I do next for the association? When's the next meeting? What's the next thing I can get involved with? I said, "Everybody is busy. It's just how you manage your time and where you want to get involved with that."

Katherine: Yes, organization. I can see where it can be tough at times with what's happening, especially during the last couple of years with really highlighting the plumbing industry being essential and how much they were working and then now the labor shortage that's happening. It makes a lot of sense. Let's talk a little bit about apprenticeship programs. You talked about that a little bit. What does that look like, your apprenticeship program?

Rocco: For us, it's been really exciting. I was telling Doug that earlier. Our apprenticeship program is through our national association. It's all online, which is great in today's day and age. Three years ago, when I was working with the state, there's a State of Ohio Apprenticeship Council, so you have to get your standards approved through them. They've dealt with online schools but nothing probably as significant as PHCC.

I told Doug, he gave me his background story of him being a retired contractor and coming back to Oatey to give back and help out. I said, that's where usually these instructors come from for the apprenticeship programs. You look for retired contractors and they teach the classes at the brick and mortar school. I just dreaded having to go out there and look for those contractors, for those instructors.

Well, when PHCC nationals started promoting their online training, I said, "Oh my goodness, this is it. This is going to be our program." We had had one in Northeast Ohio for, I don't know, 10 or 12 years, and then I fizzled out. Then the interest just wasn't there from people wanting to go to the apprenticeship school.

We introduced this across the state of Ohio. I said except for Cincinnati, they have a great school of their own so we don't compete with them. If we get inquiries from that

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area, we just direct them to the Cincinnati chapter. It's been fantastic once we implemented it. I get numerous calls, emails, on weekly basis. We currently have 44 apprentices in the program. 9 are HVAC, and then the other 34, my math's right or not, are plumbing apprentices.

It's a regular four-year program. We charge tuition each year, they get a textbook. The great thing about it is there's no set time that they can enroll as a brick and mortar school. Usually, it's August through May, their period that they do it. If they call me today, they want to sign up today, they can sign up today. There's no waiting period for that.

The other great thing is so with the instruction, the online instruction, it's 144 hours. When you're sitting in that classroom and you got to drive there every day or whatever the case is for 3 to 4 hours, 144 hours, they don't have to wait a year to finish it. If they finish it in three months, they still get 144 hours. They don't have to take their time for a whole year. Some do. I've had guys start on September 1st, they'll finish on August 31st.

Believe it or not, because people always ask, "What's the fastest time an apprentice has completed something?" I had an apprentice from Columbus. He signed up on Friday, he finished it on Saturday, the first year, believe it or not. 24 hours, he completed the course, and I said, "Wow that kid must have a lot of time on his hands so he was pretty motivated." I spoke to his employer. He said, "No, he's a really sharp kid and just really motivated, and that's how he did it." He's like, "I think we sent him home early. He must have jumped on his computer and went through everything," and he passed it and everything. I called him and said, "Well, when are you going to sign him up for year two?" Like, "Well, we're going to hold off a little bit. We want him to do some other next stuff for us."

Katherine: Next weekend.

Rocco: That's how fast you can do it. It just depends how motivated you are as an individual in that.

Katherine: Now does everyone have to be sponsored or with an employer, or can they come into the program unemployed?

Rocco: That's a great question. The simple answer is yes. We encourage them to be working with a PHCC contractor. It's a member. We offer it as a member benefit that your employer should be a member of the association. We have picked up new members just for that reason alone. They want to be part of the apprenticeship program.

I know Cincinnati does very well, but if we have a situation where it's somebody just looking to get into the plumbing trade or thinking about it, we can sponsor them and work with them to find somebody to be employed by. What I usually do with that is I'll give them a list, wherever area they are. If they're in Cleveland, it'll be the Northeast Ohio chapter or Akron or Akron-Canton chapter. I send them a list. I said, "You got to do a little work on your own." They'll knock on some doors, make some phone calls, but I said, it'll be well worth it if you can find somebody to find a job with.

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Katherine: I would imagine any one of your chapter people right now would be willing to take that knock on the door, that phone call right now if someone said, "Hey, I want to get into the trades, will you help sponsor me?"

Rocco: Absolutely.

Doug: I think that's great. Katherine, I hope I'm not going to steal one of your bullet points here.

Katherine: Do it.

Doug: Rocco, you had mentioned that tuition's involved. A lot of times, that scares people. Are there scholarship programs that you offer for this, or does the employee kick in and help pay for this program for these folks?

Rocco: Excuse me. I think our tuition is pretty affordable. It's actually 1,475 per year per student. Right now, a majority of the contractors, the members have picked up those costs-

Doug: Very good.

Rocco: -which is great. Some of them have behind-the-scenes agreements. The apprentice has to stay there for X amount of time. They can't leave because a lot of situations, I run into it. We'll get an apprenticeship into the program, couple of months late, they leave. The employer's like, "Can I replace this apprentice?" Sometimes we've been able to make an adjustment and have somebody else take their spot, but other times, we're like, "No, we can't do that." I said, "Maybe you have to go back to the apprentice to get reimbursed for that cost," but they usually don't do that.

That's a great benefit of working for a contractor. They are going to pick up your education as you go along through the training. You mentioned scholarships. We do have scholarships available. It's interesting because in the last, I don't know, five to six years, we always promote our scholarship application process, have not had anybody apply for it. We have money that we can't give away.

Katherine: Wait, say that again. They have money.

Rocco: We have money that we can't give away.

Katherine: They can't give away.

Rocco: Exactly.

Katherine: Anyone out there who is interested.

Doug: Yes. I got to get this message out there.

Katherine: Let's go talk to Roco and he'll help.

Rocco: We have a scholarship program in place. Our national organization has a scholarship in place. They do a great job with it. We've, over the years, because I've had members ask that, "Can we use that money to apprenticeship training," and I said, "Yes, I don't think there's anything prohibiting us from doing that." It's just a matter of somebody submitting. None have, but it's there, it's available for anybody that wants to use it for apprenticeship or for other schooling construction-related industry.

Katherine: That's awesome. Well, I want to switch the discussion a little bit. I want to talk about your visibility and experience looking into the industry and all the benefits that you sit there and see that the trades have to offer, job security and location flexibility. Can you talk a little bit about what that looks like and why going into the trades or staying in the trades really can provide that type of security and flexibility?

Rocco: Excuse me. A great question. Every day talking to the various contractors, the bottom line, they cannot find enough good help. They do interviews constantly, a lot of no-shows. Over the last couple of years, we learn, and one of my members said it the best. He's like, "Not only did we find out that we're pandemic-proof, but we're also recession-proof, and they're not going to be shipping our jobs overseas, nothing bad is going to happen." They're great industries to be involved with. Once you get into a contractor, if you work with them, the benefits are unbelievable just from different conversations I've had with contractors. It always makes me laugh saying, "Gosh, I wish somebody would've introduced me to the trades."

Katherine: Sure.

Rocco: When I was in high school, because maybe I would've on a different path in that regard, because if there's a willingness to learn, and I tell a lot of people that I want to get involved, I said, if you just show up on time. I said, you're doing better than almost 90% of the people out there because you hear all these horror stories just about people not showing up, not wanting to work. I said, if you just show up, you're already ahead of the curve with everything going on.

Katherine: There's this interesting statistic that talks about 83% of tradespeople say that they're either somewhat or extremely satisfied in their career. I think that that is such an interesting percentage to think about because it also then tells you that people who really show up do the work and learn really are fulfilled in the role that they do. I think that that's something that career satisfaction is really important. I bet you probably see that in a lot of your members.

Rocco: Absolutely.

Katherine: Do you find that they're really satisfied with their life choice and their career choice?

Rocco: They are, and just what it's brought to them and what it's done for their families and their employees because they look at their employees and what they're helping to create not only within their career but within their home and their family. That's what our organizations are. They are families, and I've met a lot of people over the years and daughters and sons and other employees.

We just had our Christmas party last Friday, and I brought my family with me, and over the years, it's just been all the adults in the room. It just added a little more, a lot of people. They've seen my kids from little ones now, I have two teenagers and a five-year-old, and they couldn't believe how they've grown over the years that we've been involved. I would say that all of them are very satisfied with it and they're looking to pass that on to the next generation.

Unfortunately, a lot of the contractors that have sons or daughters, a lot of them aren't going in to take over the business. We have some that are, which is great, but a lot of them are looking for different avenues to pass that business onto whether it's a key employee or somebody else within the company or just sell it outright to somebody else that'll come along and take it over.

The other great thing with the business owners, because that's who I primarily deal with are the business owners, but we talk about, there are so many other things in the industry that you can do. You don't have to be a plumber per se. There's estimators, there's managers, there's sales reps. There's just a lot of different things that you can get involved with in the industry itself.

The great thing is too, if you want to start working, you could start working. Just like I said, if you have some capability of getting trained and some mechanical ability, they'll train you. They'll spend the money, they'll take the time, and they will train you in-house, whether it's their own training or helping with PHCC, which is really great.

I think that's one of the great things there too, that they're willing to take that responsibility on. If you're out of work, if you want to switch careers, which a lot of people do, but I think once you're locked in, there's just so many opportunities and the benefits are great. At least from the contractors I talk to, just the salary and health insurance and retirement benefits, and then other things, getting a vehicle to take home and different things like that. Then you hear how some will complain about it and you scratch your head and say, "Why? How could they complain?" I guess it's just human nature and the way things work.

I was reading over some of this information, I was rifling through papers yesterday and today and it's interesting because it said by 2022, so this is next year already, I probably had this piece of paper for maybe the last five years, but the US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the industry will need approximately 138,000 new workers. There's a demand there. Like I said, if you want to start working, you want to get into the trade, you can start doing that.

Katherine: That's probably before the pandemic was here too.

Rocco: Oh, absolutely.

Katherine: That number is even probably higher than that information, which is absolutely astounding.

Doug: I tell you, I want to add another bonus to being part of the PHCC is young people coming into the trade, some of them, they may just want to work as a technician. They get enough satisfaction of completing something and saying, "Hey,

look at what I just did." Others, they want to be business owners someday. They'll be fantastic technicians, but they don't know anything about accounting. They don't know where to get workers' compensation. They don't know anything about liability insurance. They just know that I can do a really great job. Well, the PHCC is a resource that you can use to gather all the right things that you need to make you a great business owner.

Katherine: Yes. That's a great summary there.

Doug: Perfect.

Katherine: I think Rocco's going to be asking you for your sponsorship here.

Rocco: We're going to go out together and recruit. That's perfect.

Katherine: No, I think it's great. Well, Rocco, I've really enjoyed our conversation today, and I've appreciated all the knowledge that you've shared with us and our listeners. We'll definitely make sure that your information is available for anyone in our region that wants to reach out and learn a little bit more. Thank you so much.

Rocco: Great. Thank you as well.

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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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