



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 3, Episode 6

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Guests: Paige Knowles

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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 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. Wow, Doug, our guest today has such an amazing mission and is not only doing the work but leading by example.

Doug: Absolutely. I agree 100%. I'm going to give you a few words here to absorb, Katherine, are you ready?

Katherine: Yes, I'm ready.

Doug: Roses are red.

Katherine: Yes.

Doug: Violets are blue.

Katherine: Okay.

Doug: What book should you read to your kids before bed after listening to this podcast today? You'll know there are two.

Katherine: Oh, look at that. I'm telling you, that's quite impressive.

Doug: I'm very excited about the young lady joining us today.

Katherine: Oh, well, welcome Paige Knowles who is a 20-year-old skilled trades advocate, public speaker, and children's book author.

Paige: Hi. Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here, and I love that little poem right there.

Katherine: Isn't it great? We'll get that autographed and sent over to you. Doug always comes up with such great ways to introduce our guests. Well, we're really excited to have you on *The Fix* today and would love if you could tell our listeners a little bit about your background and your journey to becoming a plumbing student.

Paige: Yes, so back in middle school, my parents started buying rental properties, and I would help them do small jobs around the house, but working with my hands and seeing them having to hire people to come out and do pretty simple jobs if you know what you're doing. It was really interesting.

I went to tech school and I explored HVAC, plumbing, and electrical, and nobody in my family was a plumber, but it just seemed really interesting to me. I followed Sue. I went there for four years, graduated high school. Now, I'm going to college for construction management. I've just been really interested in basically all of construction, not just specifically plumbing, but that's where I have most of the knowledge so far.

Katherine: That is such a great adventure. How about your parents? Were they really supportive through this journey?

Paige: They were. I was very lucky to have supportive parents. A lot of my friends actually were interested in going to tech school, but their parents said that it was a bad idea and basically discouraged them going. Although I was met with a little bit of hesitation from my parents, they were very supportive once I explained why I wanted to learn a skilled trade.

Katherine: Sure. Then, now, you can look at your friends and be like, "Look what I'm doing now," right? All these amazing things and the journey that it's bringing you on, which we're going to get to more of that, it's quite remarkable.

Paige: Yes.

Katherine: What have been some of the biggest challenges you have faced in your apprenticeship so far, and how have you overcome them?

Paige: Honestly, the biggest challenge I would say is just finding people who accept me because as a woman who doesn't have a lot of strength in everything, I feel like there is a lot of hesitation, but I luckily have been surrounded by very supportive people, and there hasn't been many issues at all in my journey so far.

Katherine: Yes, that's wonderful. I think advocating for that and being able to tell people your experience will also help others who want to come into the trades, that there is an open welcome environment, and that sometimes there can be some challenges, but you can also get in and make an impact and difference.

Paige: Definitely. I think asking questions really helped everybody get more comfortable with me.

Katherine: Sure.

Paige: Because I showed that I had some knowledge and I was proving myself and trying to learn, and that really opened them up to helping me learn.

Katherine: Yes, absolutely. How have you used your platform as an influencer to inspire and encourage that next generation of young girls to pursue their careers in the trades?

Paige: I think I've taken a different approach than most people who are construction influencers, because most of them are old people who are working every day or really hard on their bodies, and they're just showing the dirty work. I'm trying to almost glorify it a little bit and make it appealing to children.

Katherine: Sure.

Paige: I wrote to kids' books and I'm trying to make it seem more fun and show them the clean sides of it, and then we can get into the nitty-gritty a little later, but trying to make it more fun and engaging for all ages rather than just people who already understand it.

Katherine: Sure. We've talked about that, that sometimes it's that perception that you're playing with poop all day, right?

Doug: Yes.

Katherine: That's not the case. There's a lot of mathematics and there's a lot of thinking and there's a lot of things that go into it. I love that approach.

Doug: Yes, old school construction, plumbing, the other trades, it was like controlling a bunch of bulls in a China shop. It's like there was one leader and you were conducting the orchestra, right?

Katherine: Nice.

Doug: Now, with new technology and everything, I feel that the trades are more welcoming to the ladies of the industry who want to get into this. Paige, my question, I read some of the bio and stuff, and I'm curious, could you expand for us on the construction camp?

Paige: Yes, so actually, I started in construction camp as a camper back in 2017. I was a camper for I think four years. I learned a lot of skills throughout that time that I was able to actually teach the camp the next couple of years. Now, we're expanding even more to teach camps in different places rather than just Louis Lehigh Valley, which is where it originated, but it's basically a free week-long camp for girls ages, I think, 12 to 18. They learn basically everything they can about the construction industry.

They build an L-shaped wall and they put plumbing HVAC, electrical, they drywall it, spackle it, they learn how to design different things, and then we go on field trips to show them what it is like in the real world. It's a really fun week-long camp and everybody wishes that it could go longer, but we just don't have the time to be able to do that.

Doug: Sure. What type of support do you have for these camps? Are these other skilled tradespersons that come and assist? Are these instructors from colleges? Who helps you assist with these?

Paige: That's a really good question. A lot of it is volunteer-based, so anyone we can get. We have a lot of industry professionals. We also have teachers, people from Skills USA and other organizations like that. We're all one big family and we all have different connections and we're always pulling other people in from a bunch of different places to help out, and especially women, to try and show the girls that there are women out there doing it and that they can do it too.

Doug: Well, I think it's fantastic that you have that support, and I'm sure before our podcast ends today, Katherine has some pull also. I think she'll be able to have OATEY help out a little bit.

Katherine: Yes. Paige, we love the fact that you are, as I said, walking the walk and would love to be able to donate product to the efforts. We also have several master plumbers on staff who can help with curriculum and can help with any type of insight that is needed. We'd love to be able to continue to support build camp. Please count on OATEY for that.

Paige: Thank you so much. I definitely will connect with you also.

Katherine: You've got it. Can you tell us a little bit more about any upcoming projects or initiatives you have planned to continuing to promote the trades and encouraging those young people to explore them?

Paige: Yes, so right now, I'm working on my third book. I've been very distracted because school has been a lot lately.

Katherine: Sure.

Paige: I actually am going to graduate this spring semester, so I'll have more time to kind of put into the plumber page skilled trades advocate, spreading the word. I'm doing a lot of public speaking engagements in schools, so if anybody listening has connections with schools, hit me up, find my website. I want to speak to your schools.

Katherine: You've got it. That'll be a follow-up intentional right after this.

Paige: Awesome, but also, this skilled documentary by 3M was just released recently, and I think that's going to be pretty big in helping spread the word about the skilled trade. I think that's the biggest thing right now is just trying to have all the people watch that and end the stigma around it.

Katherine: Right. Can you tell us a little bit about that project, how you got involved and what's been happening over the last couple weeks? Because I know you've been really busy.

Paige: Yes, so the 3M skilled documentary, my portion was filmed back in summer last year, 2022, for the Let's Build construction camp. Then it also featured me walking around my previous, my past tech school and all that kind of stuff. It just tells my life story and explains my position in the skilled trade, and then it also features three, four other people that also have different positions in the skilled trade. It just shines a light on the different facets of the skilled trade industry. Yes, it's really cool. I would definitely suggest going and watching it. It's on YouTube if you just look up Skilled 3M, it's really exciting. I went to Sundance for the premiere of that, the Sundance Film Festival.

Katherine: How cool.

Paige: Yes, that was really fun. Vivica Fox was there to host the premiere. It was a lot of fun. Then right after that, I jumped right back into school, but I went to a conference recently to be on a discussion panel, and there's just been a lot of back and forth and trying to promote.

Katherine: Yes. Excellent. Man, I think your schedule is quite filled these days, but what a great way to help tell the story, and really looking forward to helping support 3M in the distribution and getting people to view the skilled trades documentary.

Doug: Paige, at this point in time then, you're telling us that you're going to graduate in the springtime, so you will have a degree in construction management. Is that correct?

Paige: Yes, associates.

Doug: Okay, great. My question to you is, how do you foresee yourself utilizing that to not only take yourself to higher levels of construction but also using that type of title and formal education to bring others along with you and get them excited?

Paige: That's actually a question I've never really been asked before, and I really like that question. I didn't see myself going to college, so the piece of paper isn't as fanfare or special to me. It was just to gain credibility, but through it, I have learned a lot of new skills. Those skills, I will be able to teach more women and people entering the trades. I think that's one really big part of it is the new skills that I have, I'm able to share. I don't know that I really like that question. I'm going to have to think about that a little more.

Doug: Construction management, very huge part of construction. I applaud you for following through on that. My advice is get as much experience as you can so that you can manage multiple projects at one time and then also learn from each one of those to continue to make yourself better.

Paige: Of course, always. Thank you.

Katherine: Paige, what advice do you have for girls who are interested in pursuing a career? What would you say to them? When you have public speaking opportunities, what is your message that you're trying to get across?

Paige: I think the biggest piece of advice that a lot of people need to hear when they're considering getting into the construction industry or just following any career path that might be a little non-traditional is don't let anybody stop you. Especially when you're young, it's your time to explore and try new things out. Just go for it and try to find the support where you can and don't listen to the naysayers. That's what I needed to do, and I'm trying to be that force that is motivating and encouraging. Use your resources, reach out to people, and follow what you're passionate about.

Katherine: What a great message.

Doug: Paige, with every success story, for many people, it all starts with that singular person who's willing to take that chance. You're a leader in this now, and other young ladies who want to get into the trades, they'll be able to tell the Paige story and say, "Hey, mom and dad, I know you want me to go to college and I know you might want me to type on a computer or do something in science, but you know what, the trades fit me. I think mechanically, and I want to do it." They can use you as an example.

Paige: Wow, yes. I love that. It's so true. I never even thought of it that way. I hope I'm inspiring like that.

Doug: I'm inspired just by you for goodness' sake.

[laughter]

Katherine: Paige, this is last question of the future and where things are going. Obviously, you're in the beginning stages of your career, but trying to do a lot of good work to help make sure that the trades are around for a very long time, which we know that we need that as a society. What do you see the trades future being in 5 to 10 years and even beyond and what's your role? What are you continuing to hope that your role is, and how do you see the trade shaping?

Paige: I think that there has been more engagement from not only people within the industry, but slowly, school districts and everything are starting to notice the importance of the skilled trades. I think there will be a push, not as big as any of us would hope, but I think there is slowly becoming more of a push to get people involved. I think that I hopefully will play a huge part in being that push.

I always like to say, I could be one person joining the trade, so getting out there and working with my hands, which I still love to do, and I try to do as much as I can. I try to be that inspiration and that motivational force to encourage thousands of others to get into the trade rather than just one. That's where I hope that my position is and just spreading light about the industry, and hopefully, it will be more populated in 5 to 10 years.

Katherine: You've got it. Listen, just hearing your message and understanding what you've been going through and how you're trying to really be that example, I think

you're going to be extremely successful. We're here to help support you, and looking forward to following your career as you go through for many, many years to come. Thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciated having you on as a guest, and we're looking forward to future partnership to help in your initiatives to help grow the trades as well as females in the trade.

Doug: Absolutely, yes. Thank you for your time.

Paige: Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate the passion and the support.

Katherine: Sounds great.

Doug: We definitely have support.

Katherine: You got it. Thank you.

Paige: 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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