

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

**Guests:** Kate Cinnamo, Toni Bower & Maddy Sorenson

**Run Time:** 24m 18s

**Questions or Feedback:** [thefix@oatey.com](mailto:thefix@oatey.com)

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### Explore the Trades

**Kate Cinnamo, Toni Bower & Maddy Sorenson**

**00:00:06 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, 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.

**00:00:46 Katherine Lehtinen**

All right, Doug, we are honored today to not only have one, not only two, but three amazing

**00:00:55 Doug Buchan**

ladies joining us today. Absolutely. And you know what? Even though spring just started outside, I was thinking about Halloween candy today. What? Yeah, so normally Halloween candy you go out, you collect it as a kid, you're searching through for all the good parts. Yes. I was thinking about these ladies today and I'm thinking to

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

myself, there is no bad parts. It's like the best Halloween candy potluck there is out there, right? You got it. I never know where you're going, but you

**00:01:22 Katherine Lehtinen**

brought it back to a very great place. So welcome to the team from Explore the Trades. We have Maddie, Toni, and Kate. Hi, thank you guys for having us. You bet. I wanna have each of you give an opportunity to speak and I'd like to know if you can all take us through kind of your journey to Explore the Trades and what ignited your passion for advocating for careers in plumbing, HVAC, and electrical.

**00:01:49 Kate Cinnamo**

Well, I will start. My name is Kate Cinnamo and I'm the Executive Director of Explore the Trades. And I have been in this role for seven years And I think like so many people who find themselves in the industry, my path was the exact same way. I had had a long career in senior healthcare and housing and woke up one day and was ready for something new. So I discovered this role on LinkedIn and the rest is history. That is amazing. As they say, I know. So I was, you know, I take the journey. I, you know, I think of my journey as those people who are also new. What do I want to know about the trades? What have I learned? What am I excited about? I think it's this whole new realization for the value of the industry. So my journey is, I think, very similar to other people's.

**00:02:39 Katherine Lehtinen**

That is awesome. Toni, can you tell us a little bit about your journey?

**00:02:43 Toni Bower**

Yeah, absolutely. Hi, I'm Toni Bauer. I'm the donor engagement specialist. I just joined the team of Explore the Trades last May. And, you know, like Kate said, I found the trades in a really unexpected way. I went to college because you know that was kind of the expectation at the time of course. I found that my opportunities with my degree were pretty limited and kind of on a whim I decided to volunteer doing disaster relief because I wanted

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

to shake things up and you know I it was proposed to me by a friend she just said hey I think you'd really like this you should come volunteer try it out I said And I don't know about that, I mean, I've barely ever used a drill, right? And a lot of the focus of the disaster relief was like home repairs. So it was definitely out of my comfort zone, but I, you know, discovered that I really loved it. You know, I, it really ignited my passion for the trades and yeah, that's what brought me, that's what brought me here. And I'm really excited to, you

**00:03:48 Toni Bower**

know, be a part and really excited and really proud to be a part of Explore the Trades and, you know, promote plumbing, heating, cooling, electrical to the next generation.

**00:03:58 Doug Buchan**

It's awesome. It's awesome. See what power tools will do for you. Oh, I know. Put a power tool in your hand, you start a new career.

**00:04:04 Katherine Lehtinen**

Maddie, can you talk to us a little bit about what brought you to Explore the Trades?

**00:04:09 Maddie Sorenson**

Sure. So I'm Maddie Sorenson. I've been with Explore the Trades, it'll be three years this summer. And it's just been a wonderful opportunity. I found the position, you know, kind of similar to Kate and Toni, you know, or just through kind of traditional means. But it's just been a wonderful experience, not only learning about the specifics of each trade, plumbing, HVAC and electrical, but one thing that we really strive to do is just give information and opportunities to educators and especially students. And for me, I really love that because I remember being 16, 17 and just really not knowing what the future was gonna hold and just kind of, like Toni said, kind of choosing that college path because that's what was presented to me. But I just, I love the opportunity that we get to show students and young kids and career changers, you know, that there are other

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

opportunities and just, you know, hopefully kind of giving them a chance to say, okay, there, I have other paths available to

**00:05:06 Maddie Sorenson**

me and I can and I can do what I want and do what I love.

**00:05:10 Katherine Lehtinen**

So that's awesome. You know, we know that there are a ton of misconceptions out in the marketplace of what it's like to have a blue collar job and a career and how does explore the trades really work to combat those views, Kate?

**00:05:26 Kate Cinnamo**

Yeah, that's a great question. I think if our organization is going to help erase some of that stigma, I think we've realized and I think that the general public is starting to realize that you have to start young. So when Maddie said that a lot of the work we do is focused on students, it really is. A lot of the resources and the tools that we have are focused on that school population. And when I say kindergarten through 12th grade, truly, we're seeing teachers and counselors interact of all different ages with our material. And I think what we've seen over the last generation, trades and shop class have been taken out for the position of everyone has to go to college, which we all realize is sort of the greatest marketing campaign ever created, right? Starting in the 70s. And what we've been able to do at Explore the Trades is if we can position the trades at the starting line, you know, really, really peel back the layers to say, this is why these trades are so important to what we

**00:06:34 Kate Cinnamo**

do every day. You know, if you want to talk to a student, if you want to talk to a fifth grader about why you have hot water, think about all the math and think about the science that it takes to get all of these things to happen. And I think that's one of the things that really, you know, makes me proud of the work that we do is we can

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

share why they're so essential, why they're important. And we would not have the place that we have to live in every day if it weren't for these men and women.

**00:07:03 Katherine Lehtinen**

Absolutely. Very well said.

**00:07:06 Doug Buchan**

You know, diversity, we talk about it all the time. So question for you, ladies, is what ways does Explore the Trades, you know, advocate for the diversity in the trades? and what impact do you think it's having on the whole industry at this time?

**00:07:24 Kate Cinnamo**

Yeah, Doug, that's a great question. So related to diversity, I think the thing that comes first to mind is all of the women's organizations that now exist in all of these trades. So I think that's a great place for women as we're starting to see ourselves in the trades and how we can play a role in that. And, you know, in working with other organizations, one of which comes to mind is called Construct Reach, and they're based out of St. Louis. And a lot of what they do is for students of color. You know, how can we, how can they partner? How can we all partner with companies in those minority populations? How can we make these careers accessible to everybody so that they can see themselves on that successful path?

**00:08:13 Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, so how does explore the trades collab work with collaborating with schools and educators to bring trade career? possibilities directly to those students I

**00:08:25 Maddie Sorenson**

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

Can talk a little bit about that? So in 2021 explore the trades and Ferguson partnered to build our skills lab initiative So this is kind of it's a grant program where schools can apply for funding either to build a new plumbing or HVAC lab or if they have an existing training space, but it needs a couple of updates, perhaps some new equipment. There's funding there as well. We're currently in our third year of the program, just about to get to the place where applications close. They close on March 31st, so just this weekend. And then we're really excited to announce those recipients on a Skilled Trades Day, which is May 1st this year. So very excited to see that initiative grow. We've had, in our first year, we were able to build three labs in our second year. We jumped it up to 11, so we're just really excited to see, yeah, see how many we can build going forward.

**00:09:18 Doug Buchan**

That's fantastic.

**00:09:20 Katherine Lehtinen**

That is awesome. Well, I know that Oateye would love to help, probably give some product to help stock some of those labs. So let's talk when you decide what your next schools are, and we'll make sure that everyone's got to know about some of the Oateye products, because you can't do plumbing without Oateye. That's right.

**00:09:35 Doug Buchan**

Oateye is the Kleenex of the plumbing world. There you go. Right. So let's get Toni involved since we're talking about product donation, right? Toni getting donations. I swear to you that has to be one of the toughest jobs known to known to mankind. Okay. How do you approach it? What are your successes? You know, how do you handle the failures when no one wants to participate?

**00:10:00 Toni Bower**

Sure. Um, I mean, ultimately it can't hurt to just

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:10:06 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, absolutely.

00:10:08 **Toni Bower**

And, you know, I, I understand that, you know, companies within this industry have certain priorities and it's just, you know, the key is just to develop a relationship. Hey, maybe that's okay if you don't want to donate, but what if there's another creative way that we can partner or how can we connect with, you know, your connections? How can we network? And just to open up the possibilities, I think is even just a great step. If, you know, companies aren't, you know, open to donating, that's okay. But yeah, I mean, it's definitely, it can definitely be a challenge, but I think the key is just building relationships and identifying the fact that, you know, we have the same common goals. And let's just explore the ways that we can work together towards those common goals to serve the industry, right?

00:10:57 **Doug Buchan**

Very good. Just a tip, in the construction world, donuts and coffee go a long way.

00:11:07 **Toni Bower**

I won't forget that.

00:11:09 **Katherine Lehtinen**

We always talk that at the end of the day, if we don't have people in the trades, then we aren't selling OD products. So as a brand and as many brands out there in this space, this is not about brand competition. This is about we need to do what's right for the industry and also for where we go home every night to make sure that we have the resources to be able to keep up with the infrastructure and our houses and our quality of living here in the state. So all of us need to be doing a part when it goes to supporting getting people into the trades and awareness to the trades.

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:11:43 **Kate Cinnamo**

Right. Well, and I think that's a great point, Katherine, and to kind of, yes, and what Toni said, it's, you know, it's really interesting with the people who do donate to Explore the who lend that financial support. Obviously the industry is really important to us, right? And in this ecosystem, everybody's working together. And I think what's interesting is, you know, we do have individuals who make generous gifts to the organization as well. And to me, you know, what we've seen the pattern is, it's really exemplifies the love that they have. Whether they were a trades person themselves, whether a parent was in the trades, whether a grandparent was in the trades, it's really interesting to see that love carry through from generation to generation. And when I was hired seven years ago, my manager said, you will learn to love the trades. And not having a background in it, you think, oh, yeah, that makes sense, you know, I get it. But I think it really does hit you at a certain point to say,

00:12:49 **Kate Cinnamo**

you know, what we're doing is really important. And the men and women who serve in the trades are really important. And so it's like, oh yeah, I get it now. I completely get it.

00:12:58 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, absolutely. Well, and talking about those that donate and corporate sponsors that happen, let's talk about then some of like the initiatives and programs that Explore the Trades have in place to inspire and recruit that next generation of trades people. Can you talk a little bit about that? And then obviously we would love to hear a success story too if you have one to share as well.

00:13:18 **Kate Cinnamo**

Sure, well, you know, Maddie had already mentioned our Skills Lab program, which is really exciting. so we'll be announcing recipients soon. I think one of the best tools that we have right now are what we have, we have poster kits, right? And so if you go online on our website, [explorethetrades.org](http://explorethetrades.org), we've put together a series of



# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

posters that are really marketed towards school, sort of that K through 12 audience. And it's, it's an enlargement of some of our career path handouts so that you can see at a glance plumbing, electrical, HVAC, customer service. So we just included customer service so that people understand the role of dispatch and call center in the trades. And they have been, I would say and Maddie was on the team when we started this, and we kind of thought, Oh, you know, we'll give this a try. You know, we'll, we'll see if it works. And it does, I would say consistently, every single week, there are requests all around in the country of schools who want to hang these in the

**00:14:19** **Kate Cinnamo**

guidance office and the hallways so that people can see, I can be a plumber, and I can be a technician my entire career, but I can also do XYZ. I can do all of these things that would be encompassed in that trade. So I think that's really been a successful outreach tool for us.

**00:14:37** **Katherine Lehtinen**

That's awesome. Maddie, I would love a set of those posters that we could put up here at our OD University if you'd be willing to share some with us. Yes, definitely. I will for sure send those your way. That's awesome. We'll make sure to follow up with that address for sure. So, can you talk a little bit about how Explore the Trades engages with industry partners then and then sponsors to support the mission and programs? Because we did talk a little bit about the donation side, but how do they engage and how do they support?

**00:15:06** **Toni Bower**

Sure. Yeah, of course, we always have sponsorship opportunities. We're really open to what those look like. know, if you just want to contribute as a general sponsor, that's amazing. If you want to sponsor specifically one of our programs, we welcome that as well. And then as far as engaging with industry partners, I mean, one thing that I think was really great for us to make some connections within the industry is we attended the Hardy Conference this year. So we were able to connect with folks in the HVACR industry, and that was really valuable for us as well, just to develop

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:15:41 **Katherine Lehtinen**

those relationships. Do you partner also with associations like ASA or any of those associations?

00:15:48 **Kate Cinnamo**

At this point, Katherine, we have not. Okay. We have not done that. I would say, you know, one thing sort of jumping off of what Toni said, is that we're all we're all in the same. I don't want to say competition. It's not a competition. Sure. But we're all the same goal of bringing people in. So related to our audience of K through 12 schools, we have a lot of contacts in markets where if a company wanted to do a career fair, if there was a career exploration event, I think there's a lot of opportunity for us to say, hey, we know this pocket of schools in this community. And if you have a location there, what a great way to cross -pollinate. Hey, we have the ears of the teachers, you have the trade side. So how can we do that? How can we sort of bridge that gap between school and industry? And I feel like that's sort of the sweet spot that we have found ourselves in. So that, again, we have the students, somebody else might have the product and equipment. So I think that's really what

00:16:54 **Kate Cinnamo**

it boils down to is as much as we say, students don't know what a plumber does. Well, I bet they do once they get to see what the tools are. What does a water heater do? I mean truly we boil it down and then they can start to see those connections. So outside of the

00:17:12 **Katherine Lehtinen**

poster, what has been, poster sets, what's been some of the best tactics to get the

00:17:17 **Kate Cinnamo**

ear of the teachers? That's a great question. You know, that we go to every year is the American School Counselor Association, which is ASCA. That's the acronym. And what's been really interesting over the past three

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

years is their attitude towards the trades and towards vocational education. The first year we were there, it was kind of like, oh, yeah, okay. We don't talk about that at our school or I don't know how to get started. and so therefore I don't talk about it. And now last year, it's very much starting to turn in that they're welcoming, they're looking for more resources to share. And I think, so I think they're starting to get on board. And then I think you couple that with the movement of CTE, of career and tech ed in the schools. And now we have federal funding. So how can we best use that federal funding to build out workforce development at all of these schools. And I think our team sees what we do and the resources we put out as being very much complimentary to those workforce

**00:18:32** **Kate Cinnamo**

development classes that schools can put together. So I think the more we trend towards CTE, I think organizations like Explore the Trades and any other trades organization, You know, now we're sort of coming to the forefront again, which is really exciting.

**00:18:50** **Katherine Lehtinen**

It is exciting. I actually got a little bit of goosebumps when you said you're starting to see that counselors are talking because that's been one of our initial conversations we've had on the fix is it very much starts in the home and it starts at school. And if the home's not talking and encouraging and allowing at least that open dialogue and school is not bringing that to the table, then there you really don't have that option put in front of you. And starting from that K through 12, you're now giving them opportunities to see components and pieces of what the trades are by STEM days that are becoming more popular, by books that are being put out, by opportunities to go to build my future events and all that type of stuff. And then kids can really start to talk and be honest about, hey, maybe college isn't for me, or maybe college is, and I want to do a little bit of both because I want to have my business degree and I know that that I want to do hands -on plumbing at some point. So

**00:19:43** **Katherine Lehtinen**

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

I think it makes a lot of sense. That's great. And I know that was a loaded question with the ear of the teachers, but I wanted to know the mix. So I'm happy to hear being in the counselors.

**00:19:59** [Kate Cinnamo](#)

Fair question for sure.

**00:20:01** [Katherine Lehtinen](#)

Yeah. So what advice would you give, and I love this from all three of you, to someone who is considering a career in the trades,

**00:20:09** [Kate Cinnamo](#)

but still might be hesitant or unsure?" Oh boy. You know what? So this is just personal. So I have two kids, right? I have a 10 -year -old and I have a 12 -year -old. And it's really interesting because obviously I'm talking about work a lot at home. So I think your little ears are starting to pick up on that as well. And I'll try to make this as short as possible. One of the gifts they got this year was the life board game. Everyone, you know, we've all played life. Sure. We open it up. We're reading through the instructions and they have the college path and they have the career path and in the instructions in the game for career. It says you can choose the career path, but you might not or you probably won't make as much money as if you went down the college path. And my kids read it and they just go, well, that's not true, mom. They've been listening. I said, yes, you're listening. And so that, I mean, right away you think of a board game and you think there is black and white. We're

**00:21:13** [Kate Cinnamo](#)

already telling them that this isn't the path. And I think for anyone, regardless of your age, I think there's so much opportunity if you're technically minded and you would wanna be in the field, I think that's great. I think there's also a lot of opportunity that if you love the trade, but maybe you don't wanna be in the field, you know,

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

there's marketing, there's operations, there's accounting, you have all of these pieces who support this industry. And I think there's a lot of success that can be found in all of these areas. And you still get to be in the trade.

**00:21:51 Katherine Lehtinen**

Right, absolutely. Toni or Maddie?

**00:21:53 Toni Bower**

Yeah, just to kind of go off of what Kate said, I think the big thing that I would wanna promote is the opportunities are completely endless. and it's worth giving it a try to try that hands -on you know physical work.

**00:22:10 Doug Buchan**

I

**00:22:10 Toni Bower**

think that maybe younger generations are a little bit hesitant about that but don't knock it till you try it it's incredibly rewarding and it's it's tangible like it's tangibly rewarding and there's a lot of pride that you'll feel you know as a technician but beyond that there's you know so many opportunities to grow within the industry and it's actually quite

**00:22:30 Katherine Lehtinen**

lucrative. Yeah, absolutely. Maddie, the hardest part to go last. Bring it home.

**00:22:37 Maddie Sorenson**

Yes. Well, of course, you know, I would echo, you know, both what Kate and Toni have said. But yeah, for anyone who's looking to get into the industry and,

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:22:46 **Doug Buchan**

you

00:22:46 **Maddie Sorenson**

know, especially either either, you know, that high school age or if you're a career changer, and you just don't know where to start, because as we've as I've learned, and as we've learned, you know, there are there are several different pathways that you can take to get into the trades, you know, you could find an apprenticeship. You could possibly go to trade school as well. But just if you're looking to get started, just know that there are so many different opportunities. As Toni and Kate said, once you get into a business, you can work in marketing, as a technician, CSR, so many different areas, which that's definitely something that I have learned since starting this role. But yeah, in starting a career in the trades, there are multiple different pathways. You

00:23:29 **Doug Buchan**

You

00:23:29 **Maddie Sorenson**

don't just have to go that four -year college path. So just do some internet research. Do some Googling. And see if there's a home service company in your area that has an apprenticeship program, or if they're looking for a parts runner. And just start there. And if you love it, you can go a million miles. It's fantastic.

00:23:48 **Katherine Lehtinen**

That's wonderful. Well, thank you so much, all three of you, for spending time with us today. It was great to hear a little bit more about Explore the Trades. Oatey is now, which I'm proud to say, a sponsor of Explore the Trades, and we look forward to helping you with whenever you make that announcement on May 1st, some of those additional shops, being able to put some Oatey product in there. So thank you all for your time. Thank you.

# THE FIX

## A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:24:12 [Kate Cinnamo](#)

Thanks so much. We loved it. Appreciate it.