



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 1, Episode 6

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Guests: Ned Barnett and Jamie Bollinger

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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, 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 trades people and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation.

[music]

Katherine: Doug, today we have a dynamic duo in studio from the Polaris Career Center here in Ohio.

Doug: Big, big day for us, Katherine.

Katherine: This is so exciting. We're going to be having a conversation all around the journey to and through Polaris, whether you are in high school or later in your career, and you're really trying to understand how do I get into trades? What do I need to do?

Doug: Absolutely. We talked in the past couple episodes with the union path, getting into the union, having them have a structured education. A lot of individuals might feel like, "Oh man, I don't want to join the union, but hey, I still like to have a formal education." Well, guess what? We have that option today for you.

Katherine: It's awesome. Today we have Ned Barnett who is from Polaris, and he is part of the high school guidance counselor. Also, Jamie Bollinger, the Polaris college and career coordinator. Welcome to you both.

Ned Barnett: Thank you very much.

Jamie Bollinger: Thanks.

Katherine: Awesome. Well, let's get right into it. Let's talk a little bit about your overview of your role within the organization and your personal career journey. Ned, can you kick us off?

Ned: Sure. I'll start with my journey. I went to college from the generation where either you went to work or you went to college, My grandfather told me I was going to college. I went to college. Changed my majors three times. Ended up in secondary education. I was a math teacher. Finished up my degree. I was at Defiance College in Ohio. Go, Yellow Jackets.

[laughter]

Katherine: I got you the plug.

Ned: That's right. Then I came back home to Cleveland and actually, I was working in a factory because I graduated at a semester. It wasn't a great time for teachers to be hired. I was working on getting sub jobs and I worked in a factory just to make some money while I was waiting. I ended up getting a long-term subbing job at Polaris and I've been there over 30 years now. Started 11 years as a math teacher and then the rest as a guidance counselor. I have a lot of experience at Polaris.

Katherine: That's pretty cool. All right. Jamie, how about you?

Jamie: I went to Kent State for my undergrad. My dad liked to call like it a made-up major and it was Human Development and Family Studies and I did nonprofit management. I subbed for a little bit. When I graduated, the market wasn't that great, and then ended up working at Make-A-Wish and a couple other places. Went back to school, did a pilot program at Oberlin College that actually closed after two years, but it was a master's in education and new teaching license in one year. You sold your soul, didn't work.

Katherine: Maybe not cool. [laughs]

Jamie: Great. Then I actually was a kindergarten teacher for about six years and moved back from Kansas where I taught migrant students. Came back, couldn't really get into a public school with a master's without much experience, so I just started connecting with people that I knew, ended up at Tri-C for seven years, which was really great. That relationship led me to having a relationship with Polaris. During the COVID time, they were starting to have some conversations. We're seeing that our students are needing this. We love the working relationship we have with you, and they were able to make me an offer and so I left. This is going into year two for me at Polaris.

Katherine: Oh, excellent. That's really cool. We've got the ying and the yang here a little bit, someone who spent most their career at Polaris and someone who's new there. From both your perspectives, tell us why is Polaris such a special place?

Ned: Well, I can tell you that a big part of it is we're not a huge school. Staff's probably, I don't know, 60-ish and we're pretty close. We all come from different backgrounds. I come from the traditional college background. Most of our instructors in the trades come from the trade, and then there's a program through Kent State where they can become a licensed teacher if they have so much experience. It's just an odd group, but we fit together well, and it really is more like a family because we're smaller. We really work well together and I'm able to do a lot of the things I can with the students and the teachers because we have such a good relationship.

Katherine: That's great.

Doug: Nice.

Jamie: I would say that as a new person there, one of the best things in addition to what Ned said was everybody's there for a really specific reason. Everything that we do, the way we're structured, our strategic plan is all focused around doing what's best for students. Sometimes in a general education, let's say for Ned, math class, math is math and you do it from A to Z, and welding's going to be a different approach for the student.

The student might really like to do these welds and somebody else might be able to do that. Our instructor was a welder, so he's able to come at it from, "I totally understand what this company or that industry's going to want. I'm going to teach it relevant to what it is right now." Not saying math's not relevant, Ned, but it's a different approach. The way that we structure everything at Polaris is focused on what our students need best. Then we work really closely with what does our community need, what do our partner school districts need, what does our industry need. How can we be that partner to fill the multiple on and off ramps that students and adults are coming from?

Katherine: What are some of the partnerships that you see on the collegiate side that you guys work with?

Jamie: Everything that we do is structured around what the state has developed, basically. We have relevant curriculum that is aligned to what at the Ohio Department of Education says. There are also alignments to Ohio Department of Higher Ed, so every career tech program is aligned to at least an entry-level college class. That's called-- There's multiple names. It's a CTAG, a CTAN, a (CT)2. Every student leaving a career tech program is going to have at least one college credit opportunity with a class. Part of my role and why we created it was there's a lot of opportunities for us to have multiple partnerships with other colleges.

Tri-C is a very natural transition plan for a lot of our students. We've got additional articulation agreements where we've worked with faculty and articulation and transfer at Tri-C specifically saying our medical profession students, this is what they're learning, here's the content, here are the clinical hours, here are their industry

credentials. If this student leaves Polaris and transitions into a nursing program at Tri-C, what are the prior learning credits that they can get? How does that ST&A transfer into this?

Same thing with every other program that we have in our building. We create those pipelines. When you leave our building and your program, you know exactly what it looks like to go to Tri-C, go to LCC, go to CSU, go to Kent. We're working on private schools right now who have really the COVID world, are in need of enrollment just like any other school.

Using our community college partners and using the statewide initiatives that are already put out by Ohio Department of Higher Ed has allowed us to say, "Hey, these are these other public schools that you have transfer agreements with. Why not just have one instead of that student transferring directly with us?" The last two years, we've been working specifically with Baldwin Wallace, and they are a great partner and we're basically using the transfer pathways they already have from LCC and Tri-C to say this alignment's aren't even done. Let's just create something from a one-to-one perspective to create, not duplicate learning for students.

Katherine: That's awesome. So inspiring to hear, and I love the connection for those who feel like, "Oh, I'm just going into a career center," or, "Hey, I want to go to college or maybe get a couple credits, but I also really have this passion to go into a career center that there is a lot of different avenues," and that's the whole key. How do you learn about a lot of those different avenues? Getting into that then, how do we help students seeking a career in the trades and not just even students, but those who maybe are a little bit later after their high school years? Ned, this is tying back into you. Or, I'm sorry, it's not tying. Ned, I'm going to mess this up. I'm sorry.

[laughter]

Ned: That's okay. No. It's okay. Listen, I've been there a long time. I know a lot of stuff.

[laughter]

Jamie: We intermix so much too, so we'll jump in on each other.

Katherine: I know. We'll get this. Ned, let's talk about the high school. How do you guys start the conversation? Where are your partnerships with the schools, the parents, the students?

Ned: We have excellent relationships with all of the schools we work with. There are six districts, and we start connecting with the kids in 8th grade. We have a whole enrollment department because we are a school of choice. Therefore, the students choose to come to us. For our livelihood, we need him to be there. That's why it's so important we have a whole staff that does that enrollment.

We start with 8th grade where they can come in. They do a quick tour. Basically, they tour our building. Our students are out in the hallways with a presentation. Sometimes they get a quick tour of the building, or the- I'm sorry, the lab. We touch every single 8th grader in all the districts that come to us. We also have in the

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summer- it's coming back this year, I believe, essentially, summer camps where some of the programs will do a cosmetology, you'll have something related to that field or criminal justice will do something related to that field for a week or two with the students.

That's just another opportunity to get them in our labs because we really think we do a good job and when you come and see us, we think that we shine. We want to get them in the building. Then same thing, 9th grade, we do an open house specific to 9th graders, where they can come in, see our-- but now they're going to go into the classrooms, they're going to see the teachers, the students. We have students there, we have student ambassadors that are there because, ultimately, the teachers do a great job, but the students are the ones who get the other students to listen and see what it's all about.

Then we continue 10th grade. Right now, we're just in the middle of our marketing for 10th graders because they come to us as 11th graders, where we have a series where they sign up to come see three programs. They come over for the day, they see three programs, we had an open house, and now it's the application process. We're going through that application process where we reach out to those people that have applied.

We have these career tech Thursday visits, today was our first one where, hey, you've seen the show, you've seen our open house, come to a real day at Polaris. This is what it's like for three hours as a junior welder. This is what it's like for three hours in our medical assisting program. We're just trying to touch them all the time. See what we do, come see us. We think that if you see us, you're going to like us, and you're going to want to be here.

Katherine: For sure. Then I would imagine, Jamie, then your approach is very different. How do you engage with potential students that are going to come in and how do you market to them and really start to talk to tell about the benefits of Polaris?

Jamie: I mean, there's one of me, so I can't really pop to every single class, but we create these pathways sheets that are saying if you're in this criminal justice program, this is what you're going to learn throughout the whole year. If you're successful in A, B, and C, then you're going to be able to be eligible for this industry credential. For CJ, specifically, you are certified in dispatch. If you want to go and get a dispatch job after you're done with high school, and maybe that's your career path, that's great. This certification will allow you to do that. If you want to be a police officer in the future, then this is an opportunity for you to do classes and do all of that because you can't do police academy until you're 21.

We do these I will call them cell sheets. Here's the potential college credits you're eligible for, here are the potential credentials. We have lots of levels so if one student isn't going to be able to get this because it's a little bit of a higher caliber, then they're still going to be able to get this. We level it so every student's able to come in and achieve that, what's their best level.

We do that for every program. Part of the selling for the families, what's my kid going to get when they are done with this program? There's a lot of different opportunities for students to earn college credit. College Credit Plus is something right now. Some students are taking college classes while they're in high school. If I'm taking college English, I don't have to take a high school English. Sometimes, we had that open house the other night, and had-- What do we have? 1,000 families or people that came in.

Ned: 1,000 people came and our table was slammed the whole time and it's all questions about, "What am I going to get at the end of this?"

Jamie: I'm taking AP, I don't want to do this.

Ned: How does it all work?

Jamie: We just have that specific conversation, but as students, all our students at Polaris, they start to have that conversation. I mostly introduced myself, this is what I can do. Here's where my office is, and I just take turns every month popping into different classes. Hey, Miss B is available if you have any questions. If I know a student's taking CCP or AP, we talk about how is that going to fit into whatever else is going on.

Then, seniors, I have an individual senior meeting with every student. What's your plan? What are you thinking, we start this in August? I think I want to go to school, but I don't know about money. I think I want to continue in my internship that I've been doing in machining but they said they'll pay for me to go back to school, but I got to work. How do I do that all together? We come up with this plan, get some emails going, and just do some regular check-ins. Copy your parents on those emails. Who's your support person, and we triage who really needs a lot of handholding. Some students I meet with, I did early admission, I did 10 applications in September, this is what I'm doing and I'm like, "Awesome."

Katherine: Good. When I imagine, it's so dynamic and all the different opportunities, it's hard. There's not just one custom fit. I think that's the big discussion here too, is that no matter your age, or no matter what you want to go into, just start to have the conversation. 1,000 families? Were you guys shocked with that big of a turnout?

Ned: We were. Well, we never know what to expect, especially coming off of COVID and not being able to do a lot of the activities last year. That's very important to us, obviously, because we are a school of choice. That's like the cherry on top of the sundae, seeing all these people come and enjoying what we're doing and validation of what we do.

Katherine: That's great. Congratulations. That's a pretty cool accomplishment. Especially just like you said, having the conversation, opening up that dialogue, starting to say, "Hey, this is what possibilities could look like." I'm curious about what type of-- I think there's so many options now for students too, that's a really important thing for them to figure out.

Ned: Absolutely. You said it. Certainly, the schools we work with and there's presentations, we talk about opportunities that are out there and those are all great things, but what is most important is that connection you talk about because every situation is different. You're not going to know that until you sit down and talk with that individual and have a conversation and what they're thinking about. They come from all different kinds of experiences. As Jamie said, sometimes she talks to a student and they're ready to go. They don't even need us. That's great.

Sometimes the kids are coming from-- They're going to be the first-generation college student in their family. They just don't know what they don't know. You have to walk them through that and know that it's okay to ask these questions and guess what? It's confusing. I've been doing this over 30 years. It's confusing to me.

[laughter]

Ned: The good thing is I've been around for 30 years and I know who to ask when I'm confused. That's a hard skill for students to have, you know what I mean? That's what we're all learning, but especially when you're 16, 17, and 18 years old.

Katherine: Sure. I'm going to ask a tough question for you guys to answer and I'm going to play the role as the parent. What is the best advice- I want to hear both of your answers for this, that you would give to a parent on how they can best help navigate for their children towards success in the trades and how they can help support them and some helpful tips to those parents?

Ned: That's a big question. Well, the first thing I would say to the parents is to, number one, be open-minded about what it looks like and what a career looks like. I think I'm from the old school, like I said, my grandpa, said, "You're either going to work or you're going to college." Well, there's a lot of in-betweens now, as we've been talking about. The journey starts in one place and who knows where it ends up?

Just keep your opportunities open. Keep that along the way. As far as what I would tell them as far as tips is number one, go to every single meeting, information session that your school, that the colleges you're interested in offer. When you go, don't just listen, talk to somebody, make a connection there, because you need someone that's going to be your advocate in those situations.

Katherine: Yes. Great advice.

Ned: Like anything in this world, it's a complicated situation. Every school that you can potentially go to is its own little place that has things that are hard to figure out. The best way to figure that out is to get an advocate, get to someone that knows your name and you know their name and you can ask them. At Polaris, I've had all this experience at Polaris. One of the great things I love about working with Jamie is she has all these connections because her job was not only to work with me at Polaris but everybody else like me in the other schools and the other colleges. I say, "Hey, how do we do this?" she knows the person to call at that school. That's fantastic. Again, that's the kind of connections that we need to make and to the parents, that's what I'd say. Make those connections.

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Katherine: Yes. No, that's great. Awesome.

Jamie: I'd say in middle school and when you start to get in high school, there's a lot of electives or choices you can take. If you're taking an intro to engineering class and that's really interesting to you or you absolutely-- it was not jam, then that gives you a little bit of an experience, especially in middle school because I think they're-- My, sister's a middle school teacher. They're like on a rotating wheel. What's that called? They're only doing it for a couple of weeks.

Ned: They have an eight-week session.

Jamie: Yes. That's what it is. Taking some of those classes, all of our partner districts in middle school, they wouldn't know they're really CTE classes. They're introductory classes to different programs that then translate into what we have at Polaris. Encourage your student to take some classes that they might not even know what it is or look at that description when you're doing scheduling and things like that. That just opens your students' eyes. When I'm working with high school students, everything is social media nowadays. I don't TikTok. I don't Snapchat, but everybody's got that. [laughs]

Doug: Oh my God, you are my best friend. [laughs] You know what? I just figured out six months ago that an app isn't my order at the restaurant.

[laughter]

Jamie: I seriously did not even get Facebook until it was maybe 2007. I don't know. When I was a senior in college, it became a thing. I do Facebook and Instagram, but the students will do TikTok, they'll do Snapchat. They do all that stuff. I encourage them, follow schools that you think you're interested in on social media. They're going to show you some stuff. Do you feel like that would be a place where you would fit? Now it's follow some companies that you know are local. Google whatever and try to follow them, because I'm sure you guys have social media presence, because that is the way that they communicate.

Katherine: Yes, and I think the social media presence, we definitely see within the plumbing community, specifically on Instagram, is phenomenal. I think once people view and see this community that's on there, they start to understand like, "Oh, maybe that perception of what I thought was different and maybe there really is an opportunity for me to come be a part of a growing organization, or start my own business, or have the flexibility that I really would like in my life."

Jamie: Or whatever they're doing on that video or whatever they're sharing, "Oh, that's really what that is? I really thought it was this," so it's you don't know what you don't know at that point. So many times we're trying to have that. Did you watch something on YouTube? I'm not sending a student something to read. I'm sending you a five-minute video on what this career looks like.

Katherine: Which the watch?

Jamie: Which the watch, right.

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Katherine: Absolutely. I have to also say, because this is one question we ask a lot on social at least once a year. We in our community are plumbers by trade and they'll say, everyone will say what do people perceive that plumbers do all day? Everyone says, we play with poop. I don't play with poop all day. That's the one they would always come back. I understand and, Doug, you can speak to this, plumbing is so much more than that. It's understanding mathematics, it's understanding how good water, clean water gets into a home and how wastewater leaves a home and how things need to be positioned properly. You make sure that you have the right venting and the right system to support a house.

Doug: Actually, we were trained and taught that we were the protectors of the public health. Without proper sanitation relief and potable water influx into a building, the sanitary conditions can get unstable. You can leave the bacteria, disease, health issues, all kinds of stuff. People need to understand that the importance of your job may not be right in front of you, but in the big picture it's a key component to everything.

Ned: Sure. Like I said, I come from that traditional academic, going to become a teacher background, but the best thing that ever happened to me was coming to the career center because I could take that math knowledge that I had and now I could put it to practice. I could see, "Oh, this is why it's important." I'm not just doing the math problems that the teachers assigned me to do, there's a real-life application.

I remember with our machine trades class, I started a trigonometry class and they all signed up for it because I was making that connection that they needed that they saw directly from their teacher. All of a sudden, I had all these kids who would not have taken that class if it wasn't for that connection I was able to make with them and that teacher, and it was fantastic and it really opened my eyes.

I always feel like I landed at Polaris for a reason. That wasn't something I was looking for, I wanted to do teaching, I wanted a job, but it was like, "Wow, I'm at this place where I can not only work with kids which is what I want to do, I can see the practical application to the things that I'm teaching them." That really was just one of the reasons I love it, to stay at Polaris and love being there, and I've been there so long.

Jamie: We'll see that sometimes. The student will be like, "Oh, I get As, Bs and Cs at my homeschool, but I got all As here because culinary is just my thing." Everything that goes on in that class, they'll say, "I'm not good at 'math' at my homeschool, but I can do math when I'm in the kitchen and measuring it and doing it that." Sometimes it's just that real-world application that just speaks to them.

Katherine: I agree, that's how I learn. Get my hands on it, get into the middle of it, figure out what works, what doesn't work, clean up my messes, that type of stuff. Let's talk a little bit about funding and getting into the school. Are there scholarships? Is there funding available? Is there a way to connect and get high school credit and college credit? Could one of you speak to that?

Ned: I can a little bit. As far as the school goes, we are a high school, so we have a board of education and we're funded by the State of Ohio, just like any school would

be in the State of Ohio. The only thing that students have to worry about is they come to our school are fees. When I say fees, I'm talking about like material fees. What products are they going to be purchasing or what uniforms are they going to be wearing that are going to be used in that classroom?

Even when it comes to that, we always say, "If the only problem, if the only concern you have in coming to Polaris is the fees that you're going to have to pay, sign up. We'll figure it out." Certainly, there are some programs like our chef training program with a restaurant. That makes a bit of money and so they can afford to buy some of those things and reduce those fees. From that standpoint, money shouldn't be a problem from the high school end of it. Just come to us, we'll figure it out, and those dollar amounts aren't crazy. You know what I mean? It's something from \$30 to \$200, \$300 at the most, I would say.

Jamie: It's a public school like and any other school, they just choose to come to us for that programming. Juniors are with us in the morning and then seniors are with us in the afternoon. The homeschools bus them, or the students can choose to drive themselves to campus. For adult ed, it's like a-- that would be anybody that is aged out of being able to go to high school or maybe a high school graduate that's coming to Polaris and participating in the adult ed programs.

They do have tuition similar to like a community college or like any type of training program, but they're able to use financial aid for that. There's a financial aid representative on staff that can help them do their fast fund, other things like that that they would need and that pays their tuition, or if that's their choice and they're able to do and they want to pay out of pocket, they can.

Katherine: Well, that's a great transition into what a typical day looks like for a student, because I believe you have more flexibility with students so if they do have to pay for their tuition or they're aged out of the high school, they can have the ability to work and go to school at the same time because there's that flexibility. Can you talk a little bit about what does a typical day look like for someone who is post high school?

Jamie: Our programs are offered in a variety of options. Some days we will have, like right now, we have a full-time HVAC program that's running. Students come 8:00 to 4:00 or 4:30, I think. They break for lunch, they do breaks, but they're in the classroom Monday through Friday and that's their programming. There's also, I want to say, an evening portion. Sometimes people are needing to work full-time and then they want to up their skills or train in a new area.

A lot of our programs are offered in the evening. You could work a nine-to-five income for that portion. I know our police academy is an evening academy, so it's a part-time academy. You're not full-time in classes, you're a part-time academy. I think there are 5:00 to 10:00, whatever their schedule is in the evening. I don't know off the top of my head if we have stuff on the weekend. We also have a lot of community classes. Maybe you just want to come and make stroganoff with Fran and you can sign up for that Saturday class.

Katherine: Oh, so cool.

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Jamie: There's community things like that. Our catalogs get mailed out in the communities that we serve specifically with our adult ed. They just have different start times depending on how many weeks their program is and things like that.

Katherine: Oh, that's great. Can you talk a little bit, Ned, from the high school standpoint what a typical day looks like?

Ned: Well, so a typical day for one of our juniors or seniors is so they're with us for three hours for their program. The juniors come in the morning for three hours and the seniors come in the afternoon. Typically, usually probably the first 45 to 60 minutes are what we would call maybe theory, which is the book stuff where you have to sit down and talk about the theory behind what you're going to do.

Then the rest of that time is usually in some sort of lab setting. They're going to get in, get their hands dirty, weld, work with sheet metal, masonry, whatever that is, take the blood pressure, phlebotomy, all that kind of stuff, work with hair. Then they go off to do their academics at their homeschool, whether it's math, English, all that kind of stuff. Now, in the senior year, it's the same thing except depending on the program and depending on the students how they've done and where they are in the program, they have the opportunity to go out to work.

We have a department that works with them to do that, to set up partnerships where the teacher and the the staff at Polaris work with the company to say, "This is what we're expecting and what we want their experience to look like." Then we're going to allow that student to go out and work for X amount of hours during the school day. Typically, that will also extend past the school day as well. Some of those kids-- Also in the summertime as well, I should say, I skipped over that, between the junior and senior year, there's internships that-

Katherine: Oh, great.

Ned: -some of the programs have had and have the opportunity to go and work for like 20 to 30 hours a week in that field to prep them. That gives them, the employer, an opportunity to see the kid at work, and it also gets the kid an idea, "Okay, this is what it's like to work here." It can be different and we're always open and flexible to talk about what the schedule looks like. We want to work with the kids because as we said, every situation is different and there is no typical. We try to have the attitude at Polaris, "Okay, let's sit down and listen and try to figure this out," so if there's something that makes sense, we want that. If there's an opportunity, we want that opportunity for that kid.

Katherine: For that senior year, how do you go about finding those employer connections for your students?

Ned: Well, right now, it's not a problem in that we--

Jamie: I was going to say, we'll take some--

[laughter]

Ned: Employers reach out to us. We also have a job board, just a general job board. People are constantly reaching out to us to talk about opportunities. Then like I said, in that department, we have people that work for those relationships.

Katherine: Sure.

Ned: Those are all different kind of levels too. "Hey, I'm going to come work for you." "Hey, I'm going to come to Polaris and help you." Some of these companies-- Like our welding instructor used to be an educator at Lincoln Electric. He's got a relationship with them. There are just different companies that come and help out.

Part of our advisory boards, each one of our programs has an advisory board where it's made up of community members in that field to- it's an advisory board, to advise us. This is how we should do things. This is what's going on in the industry. Make sure you have this equipment or you have this knowledge, or you have this type of training so that when they come to us, it's going to be appropriate and they're going to be ready to go.

Jamie: Right. To the sense of, they're high school students, right? Some companies don't really understand what that's like to have a 16, 17, 18-year-old adapting to that and having the training and the supervision. People say that all the time, like, "Oh my God, I want somebody." I'm like, "Have you ever worked with a high school student?" or different things like that. I think finding that right fit, what do you have as a need for a company and working together with us.

It's not like its a silo thing, but to Ned's point, we also do a lot of customer service at Polaris. Our restaurant is now open and so is our bakery. What is that? I think Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, people from the community make a reservation and come in. Our culinary students are baking students, run a restaurant and a bakery. They're getting that experience hands-on and so many of them work on their own. Our cosmetology opens up and does customer service as well. There's a lot of opportunities for them to do it outside as well as opportunities that we provide at the career center as part of the program.

Katherine: Some of the conversations that we've had with some of the plumbers who are local here have said that sometimes that's their biggest challenge, is to find people to come in and who really want to do some of the work. Maybe having that connection and whether it's through Polaris, through Oatey, to them to be able to say, "Hey, take a summer and bring on an intern and see how it fits for both of you."

I think that there might be some opportunities where a lot of our plumbers work with. I'm thinking of Chris Sbrocco who works with Perry Schools. He helps their shop department build a house throughout the year. I think that there's maybe a possibility for us to be able to partner on something like that where we can really help maybe ties those connections because we've got a direct dialogue to some really awesome plumbers in the market and could help some students who were interested in really getting hands-on and learning what it's like.

Jamie: I wrote a really good note, like shadow, you don't know what you don't know.

Katherine: Absolutely.

Jamie: Can you come and hang out with somebody, say, "This is my choice. I think this is really interesting"? Then kids that are saying, "No, it's not really my jam." Then they go off and try something else and then signing up for that opportunity.

Katherine: Doug, that's how you started your career, right? You sat and watched.

Doug: Yes. I actually watched an HVAC guy replace a furnace and I was fascinated by it. He actually hired me and paid me a few dollars to help him disassemble. From there, I started off and I enjoyed working with my hands and ended up becoming a master plumber. Then the greatest of all, I ended up here at Oatey. Well, I'm the fix. Look at me.

[laughter]

Ned: I think it's important that that relationship you talk about about, about you're connected with someone who's showing you the ropes. Also, the nice thing about when we have these partnerships is as the guidance counselor, part of what I deal with is social-emotional stuff and helping kids deal with the things that we all have to deal with in life. Sometimes employers don't know how to deal with that or aren't ready to deal with that because we're at work, let's just work.

The reality is, with high school kids, so we're there to help with that. I can maybe talk to them in a way or help them figure out, the student figure out, "Okay, I need to be more resilient in this way. I need to do these things." I can provide that for them and help them with that because working with teenagers can be frustrating. Sure. There's a lot of great things, but they can be frustrating.

Katherine: Sure. No, that makes sense. We're going to round it out today talking about giving some messages. I'm really looking at, what could be some key pieces that we could help drive awareness to the youth today about the trades? What can we do as a brand and what can we ask our partners to do as well to really help in this initiative to communicate more about the value of the trades today?

Ned: Well, it is difficult, but it is about getting out there and letting people see what you're about. To me, it's finding ways through social media, through podcasts, through just get the word out there so people are aware of the brand and what you do and how it is different. I think people still have an idea of what the trades are that isn't necessarily accurate.

When you're talking about plumbing and the importance, that's important stuff. It's not just doing a job that needs to be done. There's a real important reason to do this, and that's true for all of these programs. One of the things I love is, I'm a mentor teacher as well, so when I go in to see a new teacher, I go in to observe them, I get wrapped up in the lesson because this is stuff I don't know. I love it.

I come from an engineering family. How things work is interesting to me. I forget to watch how they're teaching and I'm just taking it in because I love it. It's just getting that message out there. That's the hardest part. How do you do that? It is social

media, podcasts, but also open houses, job fairs, all that kind of stuff. You just got to get the message out and going back to making that connection with people.

Katherine: Yes, that's great.

Jamie: I think what you're doing now, you guys reached out to us and just said, "Hey, we're doing this podcast. We want to have this conversation." While we're trying to just come onto the conversation, I'm like, "I can't wait till we're talking about blah blah blah," after we're done. What did I need to know about the company? I'm googling you guys. I've been in workforce for over 10 years and I didn't know all the things I didn't know. I remembered someone for manufacturing works that, like, "Hey, we're doing placement with Oatey," and I'm like, "Who? What?" It's having that conversation, creating the pipeline, us having the positive conversation, "Hey, we work with these individuals at Oatey."

Have a conversation with them. Maybe you've got a couple of students that are just looking to get a good position at a company that has a good culture, that's going to take care of them as an individual. It might seem small to just have a couple of different segues with maybe three school districts is your goal for two years. We have that connector, where somebody's going to call me like, "I've got these three students. Can they just come and take a tour? What opportunities do you guys have open?"

Polaris has a job board that will send-- I think gets jobs out until the last three years of graduates are in our system, and we blast job postings. Getting into different communication boards like that, we'll tag you to let people know who you guys are, where you're at, what you can do for people, it's about that relationship. You can say, "Hey, we're really looking for X, Y, and Z, and call us."

"We don't have anything but let me call this person." That kind of thing. We have that all the time. I think I had my dentist email me last year and I didn't even know I had a new connector, it was mine. She's like, "So and so from this school told me you were so great and I'm looking for this." I'm like, "I think you're my dentist," and then it was like, "Oh, that person remembered that I'm at a different place where her program didn't have dental." Making those connections, and just being a good person that's going to connect you with other people that are looking to do the right thing by others.

Katherine: Well, we've talked about that the purpose of this podcast is to have conversations and I think by having this conversation, we've learned a lot about every one of us today, and some things that we're gonna take away. Not only are we going to have a conversation, but my goal and Doug's goal is to make things actionable out of here. Looking forward to really growing that partnership. I just want to thank both of you, Ned, Jamie, for coming today and joining us on *The Fix* for just an awesome conversation around Career Center at Polaris, and thank you so much.

Ned: Thank you. You're welcome. Thanks for having us.

Jamie: Thanks. Nice to be here.

[music]

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.

[music]

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