



## Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

### Season 3, Episode 4

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**Guests:** Brandon Patterson,

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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. All right, Doug, we went out of state for this next one.

**Doug:** I'm going to tell you something. The team just keeps providing some of the best guests I've ever seen in my life. Everybody out there in the audience VIP, VIP, right?

**Katherine:** [laughs]

**Doug:** This is an EIP today--

**Katherine:** Oh, what's an EIP?

**Doug:** This is an extremely impressive person.

**Katherine:** [laughs]

**Doug:** All right. E. F. Hutton, remember the bank commercials when they speak, everybody listens?

**Katherine:** Yes.

**Doug:** When this gentleman speaks today, let me tell you something, you want to listen to what he has to say.

**Katherine:** I love it.

**Doug:** Extremely excited for this.

**Katherine:** I love it. Well, welcome Brandon Patterson. I don't think we could do a better introduction than that, Doug. Brandon is a part of the workforce development leader for our Home Builders Association of Greater Des Moines, and also co-founder of the Iowa Skilled Trades. Welcome to the show.

**Brandon Patterson:** Thanks for having me.

**Katherine:** You've got it. Well, hey, let's dive right in. Why don't you give our listeners just a little bit of background of how you came up in the trades, and your connection to the trades, and where you are today?

**Brandon:** Yes, so definitely grew up in the trades, so came up is the right word. My family owned and operated a plumbing business for over 30 years, so my father is also a master plumber so grew up in that on job sites and all that stuff. Growing up said I would never have any part of this industry and sure enough, I got back into it. Actually started working for Ferguson when I was in my early 20s, and then got into the custom home building side of things here.

That's when I got really involved with the workforce development and trying to find our future workforce because not only was I hearing it from my family who own their plumbing business but also hearing it from everybody here in the Des Moines and Iowa area just saying, "We can't find people, we can't find people." I was like, "Well, we got to do something. We can't just sit here around a circle and complain about it," so that's when we started Iowa Skilled Trades back in 2017.

**Katherine:** Excellent. Can you tell us though, too, tell us a little bit about what the work that you're doing at the Home Builders Association?

**Brandon:** Yes, so my title is workforce development. A lot of the stuff that I do really is in that K-12 sector, going out and talking to schools, career fairs, all of those types of things, but then we also do an event every year called Build My Future, which is a hands-on career immersion event. Last year we had 5,200 students from over 140 different Iowa schools come in and just basically it's a hands-on career day instead of handing out paper and stuff like that. They're actually welding, or doing masonry, or carpentry, or manufacturing, or whatever. It gives them opportunity which a lot of them might not have now of seeing the career before they would actually be like, "Hey, I want to do that."

Hopefully helps them find the pathway as far as classes and stuff go in their schools to get them to that career. Then from there, that event obviously plugs us in with a bunch of schools. Then we try and help students throughout the year do work-based learning opportunities, do mentorships one-on-one with the business internships, whatever we can provide them with. We do summer camps, so we're all over the

place as far as what we can do for them and we use our local HBAs from around the state to be able to help facilitate through their membership.

**Katherine:** Sure. Absolutely. Tell me a little bit about the work that you're doing in that K-12 space. Outside of the event that you have, what are some of the most impactful ways that you're seeing that's making a difference in kids' lives of giving them the exposure to the trades?

**Brandon:** Yes, it's definitely the hands-on piece. Anything that we can provide like I said, a summer camp earlier where they can actually go and get their hands-on something and do it and see it, I feel is more impactful than somebody like myself speaking to them, talking about the trades, even if it's great information. One of the first things we always get asked is, by the kids, because they have no filter whatsoever, is how much money can I make?

[laughter]

Well, if you can put them into a place where they can actually do these jobs. We go to the plumbers and steamfitters union a lot and we'll be able to get them welding, braising, soldering and trying those things out, but then the apprentices who are actually there can talk to those students and they're a lot closer in age. They're probably on TikTok, following each other.

**Katherine:** [laughs]

**Brandon:** They can go on there and talk one-on-one with that. I would say that's the most impactful is the hands-on piece, but other than that, I would say it's mentorship and awareness about what we can do. I don't think that there's enough awareness about what's going on out there. You could literally have a campaign for everything, but people don't know what they don't know and unfortunately there's a lot of parents that don't know. There's a lot of teachers in schools that don't know, but then the students and their parents don't know how to find each other either. What's an apprenticeship? We get that question all the time and you might get different answers from everybody.

**Katherine:** Yes. Oh, I bet. Do you feel like there's any schools that are leading the way in your area of really at least providing that opportunity for people who want to learn a little bit more? Students who want to learn more?

**Brandon:** I would say yes. It could be our state or it could be just those areas. I don't know, but it seems like we're very workforce-driven here. We're aware of our situation, so like Iowa is one of those states that doesn't really grow a lot per year as far as new residents go so currently we have like 80,000 open jobs.

**Katherine:** Sure.

**Brandon:** That's everything from retail, hospitality, whatever, but we're not growing that much a year as far as all that stuff goes so that we can't fill those 80,000 jobs already. How are we going to go out there and get the workforce? I think we're aware of how we need to go out and start retaining the people we have, and then how are we going to recruit people in from out of state? It seems like we have some great

schools. We have things here called career academies, and I know they're familiar. They might be a different name in different states or whatever, but we actually helped fund the Skilled Trades Academy within our career academy here local in Des Moines. Then any of the surrounding 20-plus schools can actually send their kids there for certain things.

As long as they check all the boxes at their school, they got to get their general education stuff done, but if they want to go into an advanced carpentry class or metals or something like that, we can provide those experiences for them at the Skilled Trades Academy. There's other ones around the state that might just be skilled trades in a certain area or maybe it's not skilled trades, maybe it's manufacturing. Those are really hot here as well, and then it could be something where it runs as skills-USA type thing where it's culinary, so each one's a little bit different.

**Doug:** I tell you, I watched some of the promotional videos that you have out there. I was so impressed with the fact that you have outdoor experiences along with indoor experiences, there's virtual experiences within there. My question is going to come at the end, but there is no way that an individual cannot attend one of these events and not experience probably five years worth of event worth of challenges and trade experiences within this small timeframe. It was absolutely incredible.

I even saw where you have like a signing day, so these young people are making commitments to their trade paths. That's just phenomenal. My question is, how many of these young folks come back to you and share their successes with you and maybe even want to participate in the trainings?

**Brandon:** Yes, I would say since we're still fairly new at this, it's probably not as many as we want. We hear most of the success stories from the actual trade organizations that they go to or the businesses that they go to, the plumbers and steamfitters have already got over 30 apprentices just from this event alone.

**Katherine:** Wow. That's awesome.

**Brandon:** It's one of those things where we know the success stories are out there. We just started tracking students last year. I say tracking, but it's like through a QR code, and then our businesses and our students can contact each other because they have each other's information, so it's a way to take us out as a middleman and allow them to start that relationship. We know that there's a lot of success stories out there. The signing day thing is awesome, and that's something that we really have been trying to do for a long time. Once Build My Future came around, we knew this was the right place for it. It's gives an opportunity to really bring their parents in and to make it something special where they're like, "Yes, we're signing on to be an apprentice in this HVAC company or whatever, and it's something to be proud of." It's not the governor is part of this. It's a big deal for everybody.

**Doug:** Well, one last thing as far as the event goes, some of the teachers that we saw on the promotional videos, they are so into this. They themselves make their students feel excited about attending these events.

**Brandon:** Yes. They say that their kids are the most excited about this event every year. It's just a lot of fun. We've seen where the teachers actually get down. They're down on their knees and they're putting nails into the sheds that we're building or things like that. You mentioned weather earlier, it was sideways sleeping last year for part of it, and people were still out there doing things, including the teachers. It is a big event and it's good for them to see. This is Iowa, let's be honest. We're going to have some really weird weather sometimes. For them to see what these people do every day is impactful, and having the teachers and the parents be part of it is even better because then they can talk about it for years to come too.

**Katherine:** Well, as we talked, Oatey is excited to be there for the first time this year. We're looking forward to partnering. We actually have some social media ambassadors that we are trying to tap to come because I think it's great for them to connect with them as well as we've got several master plumbers on staff that I think would be great to be at the event to be able to just talk about their path into the trades. I'm looking forward to it. Really excited about the opportunity.

**Brandon:** Good. No, it's a lot of fun. I think that you'll want to come back all the time or what we have is people who want to start one in their area after they've seen one work. They're like, "We're doing this in our town."

**Katherine:** That leads great into my next question. Where has this gone so far? If it's just been in Iowa, where else are people taking this that they want to build it into their area?

**Brandon:** I want to be super clear when I say this. We did not start Build My Future. The one that we knew that was before us was in Springfield, Missouri. Charlyce Ruth worked at their home builders association there. Was where we heard it from. In her second year we're like, "We're going to go down and see this to see if it's something that we can even pull off here." We went down there, she had over 2,000 students that day in her second year and we're like, "Yes, we're doing this without a doubt."

Since then she actually has been hired by AGC and I think they did seven across Missouri within a few weeks last year. We do four in Iowa. They have seven down there, but then if you look on buildmyfuture.com I believe it is, she tries to update where she hears how the ones are. We have two non-affiliated Build My Future that are starting this year that we helped get started.

We gave them our information and here's how you do it and that type of stuff, and if they need help, we'll help them, but they're doing their own because they're in rural area, and then we have other ones that might be run by community colleges across the United States, or they might be run by a Chamber of Commerce or something like that. Ours is more of a coalition where we have union, non-union partners. We have the Department of Education is always a partner of this.

The governor's office is always a part of this, so we have a lot of buy-in across the state that these are the type of events that are impactful and they want to continue to see that are successful for the students. They're going all over and like I said, we're not the first one to start it and we don't own it by any means. For us, it's really just about showing them the pathways and the opportunities available to them and we try and connect with them throughout the year after the event, but anything that we

make from this event it's not made to make profit, we roll right back over into the next year or into scholarships and giveaways and things like that that we do at the event.

**Katherine:** Well, I think championing it and laying a foundation, because sometimes that's the hardest part to stand up a new event is really important, and the fact that you're willing to help others who want to also put an event together similar to this, I think is awesome. Kudos to you guys for helping expand it.

**Brandon:** I'm all about sharing information. I do that. I call people from out of state all the time and I ask them, "How do you do what you're doing right now?" Whether it be a trade school or legislation for the skilled trades or whatever, just to try and get information and I try and return the favor and share information anytime I can.

**Katherine:** I think that's-- a lot of what we talk about on here is that from all different walks of life, from all different parts, if it's in the union or the trade school side or apprentices or someone who's been in the seat like Uncle Johnny for what? 40, 50 years, that we all want to see the trades thrive and we want to be able to help provide that story. It's about getting that message out, meeting with our youth, talking with them, letting them see themselves in a future state of that I can do it as well. That's excellent. Can you talk to me a little bit about the co-founding of the Iowa Skills Trades and how that plays into your world?

**Brandon:** Yes. Iowa Skilled Trades really started out of, well, for one, necessity is our workforce development initiative. It's stuff that we are already doing, but we wanted to create a space for it. I said that we had raised money for the Skilled Trades Academy at Central Campus and our regional career academy down there, but at the time we didn't really have a thing. It was just us going around working with private businesses and individuals who were willing to donate, and then we did get some grants too.

At this point, we raised over \$2 million for that school that helps pay for teachers, curriculum, tools, things like that. It's like we're raising this money, we're doing these things, we need a place to keep this, and it allows us to separate the home builders side a little bit too, where this has been the main focus of Iowa Skilled Trades is getting kids into the trades. It doesn't matter where you come from, whether you're a plumber or a home builder or whatever. If you're union, non-union, we always say that it's non-denominational.

We want people from all industries to come in and it's a career thing and we're just trying to show them. Like I said, it's a nonprofit. We're not really out here trying to make money. Technically on the Iowa Skilled Trade side, we're all volunteers.

**Katherine:** Oh, excellent. How many volunteers are on the committee or the group?

**Brandon:** On the actual board, we have five people and two of them are lifelong. One of them owned a roofing supply company and the other one owned a HVAC company for decades. Then the other ones are a little bit younger like myself, but all from the industry. Then on our building future committee, I invite all of our exhibitors technically. From last year's event, I think we had 150 people on that invite, so to whoever wants to come as far as planning those types of event goes, and if it's other events that we do throughout the year, those committees usually change. We do

shed builds and summer camps, like I mentioned. Sometimes it might only be me doing some of those, but it just really depends on what it is.

**Katherine:** Sure, that's great.

**Doug:** Katherine, I know that we're big fans of this. We're going to obviously participate as much as we possibly can. Are there any things that you're lacking that you really need additional support in from Oatey?

**Brandon:** Me personally, no, but for our schools, I would say yes. It's really like what kind of supplies or in-kind donation type things can we do for those schools? We say the same thing to the schools like, what can we give you? There was one I met with today actually at our capital where they're in a location where it's like, "I'm not close to you and they're not close to another local, but what can we help supply you to make your program successful?"

It's really just getting in context. Like at Build My Future, a perfect example would be for you to ask the teachers that you see, how can Oatey help you. If it's providing materials, if it's providing some curriculum type of thing where they can learn something about the trade, I think all of that's great, and if it's even getting on calls like this where you can speak to the classes because my guess is there's more than master plumbers and marketing people at Oatey, but they don't know that.

All they know is what they see in here. If you guys can have a sit-down town hall with them and explain like, "Here's all the different careers we have at Oatey. Here's a program that we have for people just coming out of college or community college or know college. Here's the opportunities." I think all that is great, so the education awareness piece is huge.

**Katherine:** That's a great viewpoint because when we talk about trades on here, we talk all trades, but we are at first a US manufacturer and so we have a lot of trades in the products that we make, but also then we support the trades. We talk about, we've got a lot of programs with our manufacturing footprint across the US. Then we have trainings that we have done here at our university, but also we've done them virtually. Doug has a Ohio accredited CEU course that he teaches here, but we've got the basics of understanding the art of solvent welding, which most plumbers call it glue, right?

**Doug:** Yes. I have to remind them we're not Elmer's.

[laughter]

**Katherine:** All of those things that we definitely can take and put into a more virtual format, but still very dynamic. We have rep agencies that are all over the country that we are able to tap to say, "Hey, we need some additional support. I take that challenge and we look forward to figuring out how we can support further. That was great.

**Doug:** Yes, absolutely.

**Brandon:** That's right.

**Doug:** Absolutely.

**Katherine:** I always wrap things up with this question of still being young in your career and looking and supporting where the trades are going, where do you hope that you see that the work that you do and the trades end up being when you're time to, as Doug says, rounding third heading home, where do you want to see the work that you've done and the impact that it's made?

**Brandon:** Oh, there's a lot of different pieces in there. One of the things that we're working on right now is sustainable funding for the programs. We're actually been working on this legislation for probably three or four years just writing it and working with people, COVID happened, took a break, but leaving and being able to say that these programs are safe because education as far as a state budget thing goes, they're usually tapped out.

How can we build a program basically where almost like a scholarship type thing or whatever, where it just holds, like an endowment, where it holds the money? People can apply and there's always money available to them to start a program, expand a program, that type of thing. That's something that we've been working on and to see that happen, I could be like all right. Now there could be little skilled trades academies that start all over Iowa because we finally got this done and there's funding available for them, for their teachers, curriculum, whatever.

Then obviously we want to see people come into our industry and be successful in our industry. If we can see that things like Build My Future are successful. We know like plumbers and steamfitters, they already have 30 apprentices. To start to prove that we're bringing more people into this industry and they're seeing the value in our message and what we're showing them, I think is important because you don't always know if that works and it takes time. We've been building this funnel since 2017 really.

It's taken time but the teachers are starting to get it. The parents are starting to get it. The students are starting to get it. Our industry is starting to get it because they were marketing wrong to these people too, I feel like. This is one of the ways that we're all working together and I think that in time that it'll be one of those things that are not frowned upon or looked down upon anymore. People will be like so-and-so owns a business, is a master plumber, they're successful, and people will start to look at it again the way that they used to.

**Katherine:** I think that's excellent. Thank you again for your time. It was really our pleasure to have you on. We look forward to seeing you in April, and thanks so much.

**Doug:** Thank you, Brandon.

**Brandon:** Thank you both.

[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](mailto: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](http://oatey.com) and we'll catch you next time.

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**[00:22:36] [END OF AUDIO]**