



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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Guests: Honour the Work Canada – Angela Coldwell

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

00:00:06 Katherine Lehtenin

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. Well, Doug, I have to tell you, I am really excited about our conversation and our guest today, because we're gonna learn a little bit more about the work that she is doing up in Canada. And we haven't really focused our efforts yet on the work up in Canada.

00:00:56 Doug Buchan

Absolutely, I went into my closet last night, got the passport, I'm ready to travel, okay? And our guest today, you know, I think some of the most unsung heroes that we have here in all of society are teachers. Today, we're bringing one of the best with us, and I'm very excited to learn about, you know, everything that they offer.

00:01:14 Katherine Lehtenin

That's awesome. Well, welcome Angela Caldwell, the founder of Honor the Work.

00:01:21 Angela Coldwell

Hello, thank you for having me today.

00:01:23 Katherine Lehtenin

It's wonderful to be with you. You've got it. We're super excited to have you here. And, you know, obviously we want our listeners to learn a little bit more about, you know, your personal journey and how you got into teaching and then how you became so interested in promoting the work of the trades.

00:01:40 Angela Coldwell

Yeah, so I'm actually from a small rural town in Alberta, an oil and gas town. So in Western Canada, my parents were both teachers. And my dad was extremely supportive of all of the students in his school going into any pathway that suited them. He was a principal. So I ended up falling into their path, not by not expecting to do so, but just really found a love in teaching science. And so I did that for nine years. I was a high school chemistry and physics teacher. And then I took a pause to raise our kids who are just finishing up grades two and four. And my husband's in the industry and has been in the industry for the last 20 years. So he himself is an engineer, but went from a blueprint reader through a project coordinator, project manager, BD, and now is the president of a national technical builder. And so over the last 20 plus years, we've had a lot of interesting conversations as teacher to industry professional. And I think that probably one of the most important ones was actually

00:02:34 Angela Coldwell

when I was in my early 20s, I was teaching a grade 10 class, a grade 10 science class. And I had this really clever student and he was really into all things like outside. So he loved to dirt bike and so on. And he was not doing exceptionally well in the class and he had so much potential. So I finally said to him one day, I said, Jordan, like, what would you like to do when you're done high school? And he said, Mrs. Cobalt, I'd like to go into the trades. I want to become an electrician. And as a teacher who had gone K to 12 and then to university and then back to the classroom, I honestly wasn't quite sure what to say. And so I said, oh, what about electrical engineering? Because that's what I knew. And long story short, I went home that night to my husband thinking he was going to be like, yeah, I'm a civil engineer, go for it. And he was the opposite. He's like, why did you say that? He said, if I don't understand the blueprints, I go to the people on the tools on site. I take their

00:03:27 Angela Coldwell

advice over every other. So I went back the next day, unfortunately with my teacher interviews, and I apologized to the parents and the student. I said, I was wrong. I'm so sorry. And I said, I thought that the best path was perhaps engineering and I'm wrong. And he said, I support you 100%. And from there onwards, every time I had a student that thought about the trades, I was absolutely rooting for them. So it was a real connection for me to realize, wow, I was really off and I had a real misconception that I had to get corrected and thank heavens I did.

00:03:58 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, you know what I love about that is that you also then tied in the real world experience that you have in your conversation you had at home. And that's a lot of some of the things that we talk about is that it's just exposure. It's just having that conversation of the different things that are out there and how it could possibly fit a child or fit an adult that is trying to just find their way and that there are so many ways. But a lot of times we kind of go right into that path of nope, college is the right way to go when there is just this bigger world if we can just continue to keep opening up the eyes of all of us to say, hey, explore these things and try to figure it out. I think we might even get even more children and adults on the right path of where they wanna go.

00:04:41 Angela Coldwell

Agreed, that there are three equitable paths. It's college, university or apprenticeship. And we just have to remember to keep on reminding people that apprenticeship exists. And it's an ideal model because you're being mentored while you're learning. And so, and you're learning with your hands, which is how so many people learn.

00:04:55 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, and the key word in that sentence was equitable. Right? I mean, the fact that it is, that it is, there is that stigma that sometimes there's that shame or that there's an embarrassment, but that it is an equitable route for anyone to go through. And it's, those are the options on the table, not just one or two options on the table.

00:05:15 Angela Coldwell

It's really true. And we've also found, as we've been going through this process of setting up our organization, the research really supports we have to start young. So starting in high school and junior high is too late. And so that's why we're focusing on elementary school because interestingly enough, we have recent research just from the last year that children actually show early signs of school phobia by age five. If they're coming from financially difficult circumstances, trauma starts to appear at age six, that gender biases occur between ages five and seven that last a lifetime. And interestingly, STEM for girls, as well as financial literacy, they start to show a lack of confidence at age eight. That's grade two. And skill trades, it's STEM profession. And then I think probably the most critical piece is coming out of a province, Manitoba, CareerTrack has done research and they've actually found that students in grades five and six are actually the most engaged in career exploration

00:06:07 Angela Coldwell

and so are their parents. And it drops off in junior high, starting in grade seven. So if we're not catching kids in those first six years when they're hands-on learners, they want to learn by doing. They're really asking, what do I want to become? Who do I want to become? They have the books, you know, one of the ones we love, The House That She Built. You know, they're dressing up in pretend clothes, they're watching cartoon characters. When other time in their life will they have all of those positive influences that are shaping potential career paths? And so it's kind of a missed opportunity when we're not looking at our elementary schools.

00:06:37 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, you know, we are big believers of The House That She Built and big supporters and been doing efforts here locally to be able to get that message out. But I even had, I have a young son who is six and I had a conversation with him about the book and he already, he said, well, that's what a boy does. And I'm like, oh gosh, have I missed the mark? Okay, well, let's sit down and start talking, you know, and started to work through it because that's what he sees and that's what we're trying to change is that, listen, everyone has an opportunity here. And so with trying to get more people and women into the trades, then it's a great way for those to see that there's an opportunity for them.

00:07:18 Angela Coldwell

Agreed, and underrepresented groups as well too. So anyone underrepresented, the more that children can see themselves reflected, the better, and you know, we're at a time now that there are so many beautiful children's books on the market. We have about 60 on our website that we found and they're very diverse. They show all different backgrounds. And I think that, you know, for both parents and children to see the fact that there are possibilities there, that they're represented, that it's not just, stereotypically, it's looked very homogenous, but it's changing. And so that way people can see themselves in those roles. And it also opens up, you know, parents too, by reading things like the house that she built. And also, sees with parents, as well as teachers, who, you know, like myself, had a misconception and it's a way to correct it and be able to start to open up those eyes, as well as those conversations at home and in the classroom.

00:08:05 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, well, that kind of leads right next into my next question, which are, what are some of those, we kind of talked about the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding the skilled trades. And then how can we overcome and promote that value or opportunity? You know, what are some of the things that you guys have learned through your work that we can help with that?

00:08:23 Angela Coldwell

I think the biggest barriers that we've seen is lack of information. So people don't know where to go. They don't know somebody in the skilled trades in their community, on their street, in their family. So the biases are there. They think it's cold in the winter and dirty in the summer. And they don't realize the career progression that exists. So if more people realize that it's probably one of the few paths to, you know, an entrepreneurial career because you can, once you graduate within Canada, it's called a red seal or when you're a journey person, when you, once you do that, then you're able to go and start your own business, for example, or the path that can take you. It can take you into a second trade or third trade. It can take you into teaching, business development. It can take you into a safety role. You know, there are just so many, we have, I think, 16 or 17 different roles on our infographic on our website because people just don't know. They also don't realize the financial,

00:09:12 Angela Coldwell

like the financial ability to not only earn while you learn, but the earning potential as well too. We're looking, for example, at a crisis right now in terms of housing. We don't, we really have a high demand for housing. We're going to have a lot of immigration happening in our country as well in the next 70 years. We also have people who want a work-life balance who aren't particularly happy with their job. We have inflation. If people realize that getting into the skilled trades gives you a pride and satisfaction in the job you've done, but also meets a lot of the other things that we know people are struggling with, I think that that would go a long way. And I think one of the number one ways to do it is via storytelling, having people tell their story. And that seems to resonate the very most.

00:09:52 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, I would totally agree with you. And we see that happening even through the work that Pfister is doing through the American Plumber Stories, you know, just showing real life examples of plumbers out there.

00:10:01 Doug Buchan

Yep, absolutely.

00:10:02 Angela Coldwell

And I talked to someone, sorry, I talked to someone from TikTok actually the other day, and she, who is part of the national team for Canada, and she said that the number of DIY and going behind the scenes, how the popularity on their platform is just through the roof. People love it. So being able to show like what a day in the life looks like for what you're doing, it really resonates with people who aren't in the trades as well.

00:10:22 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, for sure.

00:10:23 Doug Buchan

Yeah. Angela, I have a question. So in Canada, you know, what are the big challenges that you have in the skilled trades? And how are they being addressed to, you know, create the longevity and the interest of everyone so that, you know, they continue to grow with technology and the needs of the, you know, the everyday public?

00:10:47 Angela Coldwell

Like you, we've had a long -term problem of neglecting that need that was being projected that we were gonna have a lack of people. We're fortunate that we have a lot of different organizations working on this. We have a bank, RBC, that put out a report that projected 700 ,000 people would be retiring by 2028 in our industry. And that has really been picked up across nonprofits and politicians. So as a result, there's been a lot of support from our federal governments, from our provincial governments, from municipal governments. We're very fortunate. We're also, we have a Skills Canada. So you have Skills USA. Every province and territory has an affiliate. They have tri -trades kits that they can send to classrooms. They can do free presentations. The skills competitions came back in person this year for the first time post -pandemic. And so that's been really successful in getting people learning about it. And they're busing kids into these events. We live in Ontario now. And so we're

00:11:38 Angela Coldwell

from the West originally, but we're fortunate that we do have our minister of labor, Minister McNaughton, and he's just been a champion across all fronts. So everything from Level Up, which is a career fair for grades, for high school students in junior high, they literally had thousands of kids bused around, bused to these events. They're expanding it from, I believe, five to 11 sites next year. So it'll really increase. And then we also have, you know, he did a washroom blitz because it was addressed that females on site and just general people on site, maybe didn't have suitable washroom facilities. So there was a big blitz done and really trying to address those issues. He created a new organization called Skill Trades Ontario that brought up every, basically all the apprenticeship resources and needs kind of under one umbrella that is administered under his ministry. And so they just recently in May did an event, first time ever where they brought industry individuals, apprentices,

00:12:30 Angela Coldwell

educators together for a conversation to try and identify what are the pain points and what can be done. So I think that just from bottom to top and top to bottom, there's just a lot of work being done. And certainly within the industry too, like I can only speak to, you know, the general contractor that I'm co-leading with, but there's a lot of work being done in terms of trying to include more indigenous to really make sure that DEI is living up to what it's supposed to be in terms of getting people into the trades. Because retention is a huge issue for us as well too. There's lots of free pre-apprenticeship programs across the country and a lot of people don't necessarily know about it. So we created a map, you could search by postal code, but it's trying to get that information out there. And it's also once the people are in the field, then how do you retain them and make sure the environment is suitable for them? So that's kind of an employer issue more so, but in the K to 12 space,

00:13:20 Angela Coldwell

we're looking at really helping in that grade one to six round by getting into classrooms. But there's a lot of other nonprofits that are working to support individuals who are either in high school or junior high. And then once you're out in the workforce to be able to do that liaising between a person who wants an apprenticeship and helping them find an employer. And that every province has their own, but we also now have a national organization called ApprenticesSearch .com that just expanded this year to be national and that's their whole mission. They literally help connect apprentices with employers. So we're fortunate that we have a movement happening here. And we have lots of people on social media that are promoting this as well too from the trades. And so it's really starting, I think, to start to change perceptions, which are decades and decades overdue, needing that stigma and stereotype to be countered.

00:14:06 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, for sure. And it takes a lot. I mean, I just was writing down all these things that I have to go and research later. I mean, it's amazing.

00:14:13 Doug Buchan

I'm gonna be honest with you. I think I need a tutorial to go through everything that she just offered us. I mean, absolutely incredible.

00:14:22 Katherine Lehtenin

There's so many opportunities. And I think in really like what you guys have done in trying to think of all these different levels in which have to have opportunity and options. I love the free map of where there's the map that can be downloaded for pre-apprenticeship into work. I mean, what a great way for someone to have a resource to just go right in and try to figure it out.

00:14:42 Doug Buchan

You know, everything that she just gave to us, I mean, a plethora of information. But one of the things I focused on early was the fact that they cared about the bathroom facilities also. So throughout this whole thing, they're looking at even hygiene issues and stuff. Absolutely amazing. Thank you for sharing that.

00:15:01 Angela Coldwell

Yeah, it's really remarkable. Like kudos to all the people that are working on this because it's really a collaborative effect. And other non -profits are collaborating with others. Like I was talking with non - profits throughout the week and how we can work together. And so there really is a desire to collaborate. Nobody's in this like, I wanna do this all by myself. No, no, no, it's a team effort. It's all hands on deck. And so that's, and if you're looking for resources on our website, we actually spent last year researching all the different organizations by province or territory and put them so that people could find them because there was no hub. And that's the other problem. People don't know where to go. So they want financial supports, but where do they go if they live in one part of the country or the other? So bringing everything to one spot, it simplifies it for people. It gives them one channel. And then from there, then they can reach out to who's in their area and what best

00:15:47 Angela Coldwell

suits their needs.

00:15:48 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, that's great. And we'll make sure that we, as a follow -up, share that through our network and make sure that we're trying to promote that so that people have an opportunity to go and find that information and hopefully can connect some people too. Thanks. So I wanna talk about now, we've got all these different areas in which people can find resources, they can get connected, they can learn more. But as you step back and through your experience as a teacher, what are those key skills that you feel like and qualities that make a successful trades person? You know, and how would you encourage a young person to kind of either develop those skills or recognize they have those skills within them and that this might be a possibility for them?

00:16:31 Angela Coldwell

So I think that obviously STEM skills are key and I'm gonna expand that to STEAM. So science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics, because you think about a welder who's also a sculptor or you think about a carpenter or a plumber, like you have to have an eye for that as well too. Or a sheet metal worker who wants it to look really nice and not just be functional. So I think that we have to rephrase it as STEAM careers. And I believe that probably the most important skills are people have to be able to troubleshoot because that's a key part of the job. To critically think, to be able to collaborate, to communicate, I think those are probably some of the most important to manage your time and to make sure you have your punctuality and a great attitude. I think that if you have those skills, everything else can be taught. And that's what we hear from industry as well. In fact, we just had a last month Future Skills Center, which is one of our research bodies here in Canada, put out

00:17:20 Angela Coldwell

a report and the number one trait that people have that they then link to jobs that pay well is troubleshooting. And I was talking with an electrical apprentice and she said, that was my first apprenticeship when I got placed. It was working on different homes and figuring out what the problem was. And I think the way we encourage this is we need to bring this into the classroom. So we're lucky that in Ontario, we have a new science curriculum for grades one to eight. And in that, it actually has skilled traits. That's awesome. Yeah, fasteners are in grade one. And so being able to tie

this into the skilled traits is awesome. And so we actually have now made kits for grades one to six. We're piloting them this year in 12 school districts. And there's gonna be one teacher in each school district per grade. So 72 teachers will pilot this and everything is tied to the skilled traits, but also to the curriculum and not just science. They want a multidisciplinary. They want English and history

00:18:10 Angela Coldwell

and math tied in. So turnkey activities with materials already ready to go, like with little hammers, things that kids can actually use, right? Oh, I love that. Yep. Being able to actually have the kids work together in teams to develop these soft skills that are so important. And I think that's how we begin. I think we really just have to expose teachers and children to this. We need to use the curriculum as our vehicle and teachers want multidisciplinary and they want turnkey. So that's what we've made. And then being able to then get corporate funders to be able to help get this into classrooms, because I'm sure like you guys, we also have schools that can't afford to buy resources. So industry can come in and help pay for that to help bridge that workforce to education gap in a really unique way. They also are able to then connect with schools and bring in speakers as well too. And now all of a sudden in the classroom, you're getting people from the field. So it's kind of like, again,

00:19:04 Angela Coldwell

it's that synergy. It's that collaboration. I think that's where it all starts. And then I think that that will end up starting to really change the perceptions amongst children and teachers, but then it trickles home to parents. And then that's when you really, that change, right?

00:19:17 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, especially when a child comes home and says, what would, you know, a parent asks, what was something that you did today? What was your favorite part of the day? And they're explaining how they got to work with their hands or they got to use a hammer or they got to do, that the parent then starts to go, think about it, right? And recognize, oh, there might be something more than just maybe math or just maybe PE, right, Jim?

00:19:36 Doug Buchan

Yep, absolutely. Some of the best times I remember with my kids were, you know, when I'd have my daughters, sons, and we'd be in the garage doing little crafty stuff because they wanted to build something. So yeah, fascinating.

00:19:50 Katherine Lehtenin

I think it's excellent. So, you know, as we round out today, I would love to hear, you know, what advice do you have for listeners who are looking to support and promote the trades in their own communities? One of the things that you talked about that I really liked and, you know, one of the things here at The Fix, it is not about Oatey in the brand and selling anything. This is truly just a community of trying to get the conversation started. And you talked about that, that it's nonprofits and nonprofits working together in brands. But, you know, what additionally would you have to help promote the trades in their own communities? What can people do?

00:20:24 Angela Coldwell

I think look for the opportunities where you can connect with youth. And in particular, let's start younger youth. So I'm talking boys and girls clubs, girl guides, library programs, you know, ask your library, can we come in and read the house that she built and do a little activity? And, you know, like it can be as simple as like wooden hammers and carpenter nails, like, you know, having, you know, like right here, we just have some furniture nails, like just being able to do simple things like that. Asking the classroom teacher, could I come in and present and show what the work looks like? And I think bringing in the innovation is key as well, because there are also studies out there. And we also know from our own kids too, that kids really like to see how tech is tied in. So if they realize, you know, everything from Spot the Dog, for example, to Hilti Exoskeleton, if you can start to bring in things like that, 3D printed computers, talking about how, you know, there's like digital

00:21:13 Angela Coldwell

twins and, you know, how, what you're doing with Minecraft, there's a spot for you in the construction world because we need to be able to 3D model, it helps troubleshoot, it allows us to be able to use BIM more effectively. Like if we start to bring in the things that kids are already very interested in, I think that's a real selling point. So everything from asking your classroom teacher, looking to groups that are in your community, as well as just bringing in the innovation. And also kids love the equipment. They like to try on stuff. So if you can bring in your tool belt and your hard hat and your boots, and you can let them try it out, for example, if you can liaise with the school and say, hey, I would be able to do a safe activity, you know, maybe with piping, like something that's safe, you know, just something that they can do that would be safe, could be monitored by that teacher. It doesn't have to be anything that has any kind of power tool, things that are pre-cut, ready

00:22:01 Angela Coldwell

to go, but give the kids the exposure. And they'll be so creative. And, you know, if nothing else, just great old, you know, popsicle sticks and spaghetti, those things can demonstrate forces. And those things that kids love tactile, they learn through experience and through doing. So anything we can do to bridge that, and you don't have to be a teacher to do it. Just if you have a passion and you love what your job is, that's what's really gonna come through to the kids. And they're gonna remember that. And they're gonna be like, that person loved their job. And they showed me how I could use my math in a practical way. I didn't know a carpenter used angles or a plumber used Pythagorean theorem. Making those connections so it's real to them is really what kids, and I think the teachers, that's what's really, I think, gonna move the needle on this.

00:22:41 Katherine Lehtenin

Yeah, that's wonderful. I completely and 110 % agree with you. So as we, you know, close out, I wanna make sure that, has there anything that we didn't cover today about the work that Honor, the work is doing in Canada that you wanna bring up or wanna talk about in any way?

00:22:58 Angela Coldwell

No, I think we pretty much got it all. I think maybe the only thing I would say at the very end is that there's a neat book out there if anyone's driving around and looking for a new Audible book. It's not a new book, but it's called Mastery by Robert Greene. And it's about, it's a whole bunch of different stories of people that we're all familiar with. Like for example, Albert Einstein or Marie Curie. And it talks about how they actually found their pathway and how it was often unexpected and the spark often was young. And by young, like four or five years old. And so if anyone's looking for a book as to

maybe why this is so important, but it's also really engaging and to kind of inspire how by planting the seeds young, we can have impact based on people we're all very familiar with. That would just be a recommendation if you're looking for something. Because I think the stories in that, I think the stories that are told in that book are very relevant to us and certainly can be taken and

00:23:54 Angela Coldwell

thought about and thought how can we use that information to continue to try and get the word out about the opportunities that exist in the skilled trades.

00:24:02 Katherine Lehtenin

That's awesome. I definitely, I'm gonna get into that book for sure.

00:24:05 Doug Buchan

Yeah, you know how I love audio books. I will definitely be looking for that one.

00:24:11 Katherine Lehtenin

It's really, it's so interesting. Well, Angela, I wanna thank you so much. I think both Doug and I, I know when Doug gets quiet, he's learned a ton today and I think he's blown away as am I. I think the work that you're doing is so important and I applaud you for stepping in and recognizing and doing just some wonderful things to help the trades. And if there's ever a way that Oatey can help support the work you're doing, if it's donation of product, if it's whatever it is, we've got a whole team up in Canada I know that would love to be right by your side. So please let us know we're here to help and support you.

00:24:42 Doug Buchan

Yeah, your awesome level is a perfect 10 out of 10. Let me tell you, I absolutely love this interview. I mean, fantastic. Thank you for being with us.

00:24:53 Angela Coldwell

Oh, it's a pleasure. Thank you. It's so lovely to meet you and thank you so much for having me. And thank you for the work you're doing. Those amplifying the voices that we will bring about change and hopefully sooner rather than later because we have so many amazing people like yourselves working on it.

00:25:12 Katherine Lehtenin

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