



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

Keith Williams, Skill Stadium

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.

00:00:45 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

Doug, I have to tell you, we have another really passionate guest who is using technology to connect job seekers and employers together.

00:00:54 [Doug Buchan](#)

Yes, I tell you what, this is a roadmap to success. Plus, Oatey's international and we're bringing a little sprinkle international in here today too. Absolutely. So I love it. I'm very excited about today's guest

And I think we're all going to walk away here a little more enlightened of what career paths are available out there.

00:01:13 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I agree. Well, with that, welcome Keith Williams, who is the founder and CEO of Skill Stadium.

00:01:19 **Keith Williams**

Good morning, Katherine. Good morning, Doug. Thank you for having me on. Looking forward to chatting with you folks.

00:01:24 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Awesome. Well, let's dive right in. Can you tell us a little bit about your background and what led you to Skill Stadium?

00:01:31 **Keith Williams**

Sure. So my background has always been in sales. I started my career in retail sales, then I moved more over to corporate sales, non-retail, like selling computer hardware and software, and then moved more into the technology space of software services. and I decided to start my own business in, I wanna say it was about 2014, 2015. And the reason I wanted to go into my own business was that I, one of the skill sets that I'd always had was I've always been a good salesperson. And one of the things I wanted to help people doing, especially somebody, I'd also been through layoffs in my career, and I'd seen people struggling with finding work, was I wanted to do something that do a business that aligned with that. And so I started, really started Skill Stadium in 2020. And I decided to focus on the skill trades because I knew there was a gap. I knew that we needed more people in the skill trades. I also know that if I'm giving advice and helping people who are trying to get jobs, You should

00:02:52 **Keith Williams**

lead them to places where they can actually get jobs as opposed to say, hey, try this out. This may work And so it was challenging because I didn't have a skill trades background Sure I had worked in a technology space But having a sales background and having a bit of tenacity and just the ability to pick up the phone and call people and be a little curious Really helped me and at the end of the day It's about understanding people. And with the business I'm doing, it serves two parties. It serves the individual who's trying to get a job, trying to create a profile, and it serves the company who's trying to find that individual. And you don't have to work in the industry to understand the importance of that and how to use the technology to connect them. And then at the same time, I did podcasts and I spoke to people, I interviewed people, I did day -in -the -life interviews, and I learned about the industry. And so, you know, fast forward now three years, it's 2023, I've built a lot of relationships,

00:03:55 **Keith Williams**

I understand the process of how to become a plumber, how to become an electrician, because I've talked to the actual people who are doing that.

00:04:04 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah, through this journey of learning, was there anything that really enlightened you about, you know, really coming from a non -trade background to then kind of being in the middle of all of it? You know, were your eyes opened at all about what the opportunity here was and kind of invigorate you even more?

00:04:23 **Keith Williams**

Yes. The first thing that I'd say that surprised me was the salaries, the income. I didn't think, you know, in the past, I never, you know, when you just work in your particular area, you don't really think about other areas that people are working in. If you just, you're not encountering those folks. So you don't know what's going on with them. Sure. And then when I started talking with them and seeing what they were earning, I also was surprised that, you know, they have really good, the really elite people have great customer service skills, sharp, very sharp. So we have a stereotype of people who work in the trades that they're not as smart, you know, and that, that really surprised me, you know, and I don't mean that to be in a negative way that I didn't think that people were, I'm not going to say I

didn't think they were not smart, but I did, I was aware of stereotypes. Yes of those of those industries and those and I found that to be false Yeah, not the case start talking to people.

00:05:26 **Keith Williams**

I found that not to be the case. I also learned, you know the amount of education and continuing education that people have to do and so Yeah, that those are the things I would say that surprised me. Yeah for sure

00:05:38 **Katherine Lehtenin**

we talk about this actually a lot when you know, you ask people about being plumbers or being a plumber and Initially, the first thing is, oh, they play with poop all day, which is just not the case at all. Sure, they will encounter it at one point and some point, but it's so much about mathematics and understanding how things connect to one another and really having a vision to be able to go and fix things, too. I mean, it is not just about that. So breaking stereotypes is a big one we talk about.

00:06:05 **Keith Williams**

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And really being able to deal with people because you're going into people's home at a time when they're not very happy because if somebody's called a plumber - it's not like they're excited, like they're saying, hey, you're coming in to redesign the house or you're coming in to put in a surround sound system or something fun. You're coming to fix something that you're obviously not happy with. What I've seen, I've observed, is good customer service skills. You have to know how to communicate to that person. You're in that person's home. You got to be able to make them feel comfortable because you're now in somebody's home. We live in a day and time where we just don't invite anybody into our home. Yeah. Right. Very true. So how you carry yourself in somebody's home, especially if people have a family, people are very protective of their families, you know, so how you conduct and carry yourself in somebody's home is very important. I'm sure employers who are hiring

00:06:57 **Keith Williams**

are aware of that when they're hiring people to go out in the public.

00:07:02 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Sure. Absolutely. So can you talk to me a little bit about how skill stadiums differ from other job platforms in the skilled trades industry? What sets you guys apart?

00:07:13 **Keith Williams**

Sure, well, what really separates Skill Stadium from other organizations is video. The job seeker can create a 30 second elevator pitch. That is an elevator pitch simply as is who I am, what I do, what makes me good at the job that I do. It's the basic for any interview you want. You know, they also have the ability to create two 60 second videos. I call it like a highlight reel. This is proof that you are competent in what you do, because listen, if somebody just has a resume, I can take a plumber's resume and put my name on it. That doesn't make me a plumber. Wouldn't take somebody a very long time, even though I've talked to people in the industry, I know a little bit about the industry, it would be, they'd be able to find out that I don't know plumbing. Sure. With a few good questions. Sure. However, if you have a video and you're talking and you're demonstrating yourself doing the work, any employer can see that this person is competent. Sure. They at least know plumbing. So that really,

00:08:19 **Keith Williams**

and I've talked to employers who hire, they say that's almost like a first interview for them. They can see you talking about the industry. That has a lot more credibility than a piece of paper. Sure. Because if all we did was hire people based on a piece of paper, then why would we have interviews? We'd take the paper, we'd read it, and we'd say, hey, we have the qualifications, they're hired. It's not how this works. Also, the advantage of having video is that individuals who might not have as much experience can now sell themselves. They can say, hey, listen, I know my resume is not strong. Here's why you might want to consider hiring me. And companies that are really that, or should I say leaders that look at somebody and say, that person has potential, they're hungry, I like how they carry themselves in the video, now they might grab that person and bring them in as opposed to if that person just had a paper resume that just said, hey, apprentice, or very little product experience,

00:09:18 **Keith Williams**

right? Because we hire people, and if I can see you, I can get a feel for you on a video, and let's face it, everybody has a smartphone. Everybody knows how to turn on the phone and record a video. So that's really what makes it different. Also, the job seekers answer questions about their ideal company culture, what distance do they want to work, like how far do they want to commute? That's very relevant in today's market. Yeah, absolutely. You know, we all live in, wherever we live, you know there are parts of areas in your town that might not be close to your job that you know could be problematic for hiring somebody. Sure. Right? Why not just put that up front? Hey, I can work within 10 miles. Well, if you're within 10 miles, that could be a match. If you're not, maybe not. So that's, it's about making the application process at Skill Stadium simple and easy. One page. And I got that feedback from a lot of young people are like, we hate long applications. So why give them long applications?

00:10:17 **Keith Williams**

Put the most relevant information that employer needs and that the job seeker is willing to put on. Sure. Yeah. and then go from there.

00:10:25 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah, and Keith, you know, just for your audience that you deal with, you know, it's sometime important to business owners to wanna bring in people with less experience. And the reason why is we can train them how we want them to be trained. And they're not bringing possible, we'll call them bad habits with them, you know, from other places. So the younger audience, they should always feel confident that, hey, I don't have to be the smartest guy in the room. I just have to be willing to learn.

00:10:55 **Keith Williams**

Doug, I'm glad you mentioned that. I've come across business owners who are investing in training facilities because one individual I had on my podcast said, I don't like the diva plumbers. He said, because they know they're good. So he goes, I'll bring a young person in who's hungry and willing to

listen and learn. And this particular owner was like, I have a facility and I'm gonna train them. Yeah, that's fantastic. That's somebody who has foresight. They understand that there's a shortage in the market and they're making adjustments. Now other people are like, well, we have the most experienced staff and they've been here 30, 40 years and I'm looking at men who are in their 50s and 60s and there's nothing wrong with that. But I'm assuming in about 10 years, if they're in their 60s, they might be retiring. Sure. I don't know when, but I know at some point they're going to go away. Yeah, the clock is ticking. You may see that as an asset right now, but that could be a liability if you're

00:11:53 **Keith Williams**

not sinking down the road. Whereas, like I said, I've seen other people who get that and understand that we do have to, like Doug was saying, bring up young people who we can train and develop.

00:12:03 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah. And, you know, also as business owners, you know, your audience should also understand a good mix between, you know, veteran and new is great because now you're sharing those experiences that would take them years to get and hopefully be exposed to that type of project where they may never have that happen. And we do that a lot here at Oatey.

00:12:30 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah.

00:12:30 **Keith Williams**

Oh, nice. So you have a lot of younger and older, you'd say, good mix of...

00:12:34 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I mean, look at it right here.

00:12:36 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah. I'll be honest with you. I have boots that are older than some of my teammates. Okay. Let's be honest.

00:12:43 **Keith Williams**

That's all right. That's all right.

00:12:45 **Doug Buchan**

But you know what, they teach me stuff all the time because I'm the true definition of boomer. So I learn stuff from them all the time.

00:12:54 **Keith Williams**

But you have an open mind, which is very important and a willingness to learn. And I'm sure they have a willingness to learn. So it works out pretty well, I would imagine.

00:13:02 **Doug Buchan**

It creates a very, very good balance here at the OD company, yes, yes. I can see that. So Keith, I have a question for you. So with the workforce, you know, the work industry itself just evolving all the time, okay? I mean it's continuous, different needs, you know, product development makes jobs easier in some ways so that technology changes. How do you stay up to date on all of this? That's a good question. I have a

00:13:32 **Keith Williams**

technical team and I kind of lean on them. One of the things I try and do is stay in my lane. One of the things I'm good at is I'm good at doing research, finding out what other companies are doing, listening.

And then I go to my technical team and I say, hey, are these some things we can implement, right? And also the podcast, interviewing other business owners and talking to them. On a podcast, it's not like, it's a very, it's an environment where people feel comfortable talking to you about what's going on in your industry because you're not selling them anything. You're talking about, hey, what's the state of the industry? Also the purpose of the podcast is to expose young people to the trades. So we're trying to help young people get into the trades. That is a benefit. Any business owner who knows the market that we're in where there's a shortage of skilled trade workers is never going to be against that. That's in their best interest. They understand that. They know that. I haven't

00:14:39 **Keith Williams**

had, you know, I've talked to a ton of business owners and all of them acknowledge that there's a challenge in getting people into the trades. This is well known. So when we start talking about the, how do we fix that? And then I would talk about what's going on in your industry, what are the challenges you're facing? That's how I stay up on what's going on because I'm actually talking to them, but not in a sales environment, not selling. Hey, I'm just here to learn. And it's really just a conversation. So there's no, and that, so that's how I keep up because I always feel like the more you know about your customers and prospects, the better equipped you are to serve them.

00:15:19 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah, what a great point. So as we talk about bringing this technology into and really harnessing video and communication through podcasts, where do you think technology can really revolutionize the skilled trades industry?

00:15:37 **Keith Williams**

Well, it's doing so already. The first thing I would say where I've seen it really make changes is it's connecting people who are in different geographical locations. It's connecting groups. So I've seen, for example, I've interviewed women in the trades, and we know there's a shortage of women in the trades, not properly represented. And one of the things that some women have told me is they are able to connect with other women to discuss maybe some challenges they might be facing. And that's important because we know that there's a lack of diversity and inclusion in the trades. It's, people

don't always wanna talk about it, it's a sticky subject, but it's a fact. I always like, when you're dealing with the truth and facts, there's no need to get upset or mad. I, you know, I just look and I see, it's like, I can see that both of you are white. There's nothing to debate. I'm black. There's nothing to debate about that. That's just a fact, right? There's no issue with that. But the thing

00:16:34 **Keith Williams**

about it is, yes, there's some challenges for women in the trades and the technology allows these women to communicate with each other. And I guess for more of a sisterhood or a bond and say, okay, here's the challenges I'm going through. even though we might not be working next to each other, because we're on social media and these technologies, we're able to communicate and collaborate. And I think that that is gonna be a game changer because now you have, it's also ability for them to network, get other job opportunities. Yeah, absolutely. It's ability for them to learn. So I really feel like the technology is a game changer. It also allows them, not just women, but anybody who's in the trades to build up their brand and their presence online. So that's where I really think the technology is gonna help folks because like I said, it's so important When companies have to hire somebody that they understand that this person fits in their culture their company You could get a feel for that

00:17:29 **Keith Williams**

if you're looking at them on video sure and do they have the skills to do the job? I think those are the two probably most critical things when you're hiring. So that's I think the technology. Well, yeah, absolutely

00:17:39 **Doug Buchan**

Keith I have a question. So sure, you know from olden days if you who felt you had a problem, you would seek out others who maybe had similar problems or made you feel comfortable within those surroundings, OK? Sure. So now, with the virtual opportunities we have, we basically have virtual support groups. And they're ongoing all the time. Does your skill stadium ever hold support group meetings for folks? and maybe you pick a topic and you say hey we're going to talk about women as electrical contractors

00:18:18 **Keith Williams**

and then people sign on. I haven't really done that because I try and cover those type of topics with the podcast and I try and do day -in -the -life interviews for the purpose of exposing young people to the trades because one of the things I always believe in, I call it a 10 % give back, That is, we need, there's a challenge. We need to close the skills gap. We need to get more young people into the trades, more women, more minorities. Again, I just look at the numbers, right? I can tell you the numbers are there. We can all Google it. Just women make up less than 10 % of the people, people in the trades.

00:19:00 **Katherine Lehtenin**

6%.

00:19:01 **Keith Williams**

6%, there we go. I knew I was, minorities, they said it's like under 30%. Right. You know, there's, those numbers are there. The numbers are what they are. So if we have a shortage of people in the trades, why not target groups that are underrepresented? To me, that's just a solution. You know, that's not a crusade. That's not saying, hey, we're, you know, that's just a solution. I feel it's also, I feel it's the right thing to do because everybody should have an equal opportunity to get into whatever profession they want. It's a free country. If you have the skills, you should be able to get hired and go do the work. And at the end of the day, you know what? But most employers, if they can't find people, they're at a point where they don't care if it's a minority, they don't care if it's a woman. What they care about is, can you do the job and you fit the culture?

00:19:50 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Right.

00:19:50 **Keith Williams**

Yeah, absolutely. At the end of the day. And like I said, if we tap into groups that we haven't, then you're really going to start to close the gap. I also said, tap into people who are underpaid, who are working poor. So people who are in the retail sector. You've got to think outside of the box because right now, like I said, it is a bit of a crisis. I'm sure you're aware of it. You know that, you know, they're saying there's gonna be like a million jobs are available right now in the trades that have not been filled. That's a problem. I'm seeing it on the roads. Like when I've, we have areas in my community where you could see that they're taking forever to fix these roads. Sure. Because they don't have enough people. It's affecting, there's things I'm sure in your community, if you look, that you're like, wow, why are they taking so long to fix that? Or why is it taking so long to get a plumber out here? Like yeah, people don't think about that stuff in and so companies aren't sitting

00:20:44 **Keith Williams**

there I don't want to hire a woman or a minority. No, they're like, I want to hire somebody could go in there and fix that problem Yeah, absolutely

00:20:52 **Katherine Lehtenin**

about finding the people that can you can as you said Doug train and then you can get on the right path and can help you, you know, complete your Projects or support your business and it's important to be able to do that So talk to me a little bit about what are your long -term goals for skill stadium, you know? And where do you see the company going over the next, you know, five years?

00:21:12 **Keith Williams**

Great question. Katherine, I see it becoming more of a LinkedIn for the skilled trades, more of a social platform. And the reason for that is that the video, I feel, is a little bit of a nontraditional way of being able to attract employers. I look at this as people creating highlight reels. I also see a side where I want to have a a personal side where people use it as an ability to connect with customers. So almost like residential plumbers and electricians, kind of almost like an Angie's List. And what that would do is that would create a market for people to go service individuals in their communities. So not just to get a corporate job, but now to be able to go and service individuals. So that kind of helps the small entrepreneur type of individual. And I feel like anytime you're doing something that helps people

make money and that solves a serious problem, I think you have a good shot at being successful. Because like I said, there are plumbers right now who are good at what they

00:22:21 **Keith Williams**

do, but they're not good at the marketing piece. They're not good at the selling. They're not good at being able to go find customers. So create a platform that helps them. Also, it helps the customer to see, okay, this person, I can see the work they've done because I've hired, give an example, I hired somebody to fix my deck. You know what I asked them? They were showing me their license. I said, can you show me a picture or video of the work you did before? Sure. That's all most people want to see. So that, you know, having that platform will help to solve that.

00:22:49 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Sure. Now, I'm curious, how do you partner with and do you partner with, let's say, a nonprofit? For example, we have one here in Cleveland called Cleveland Builds, and their whole mission is about getting students or adults into a pre -apprentice program to kind of navigate through what they might be interested in. How would someone maybe going through that program be able to put together a highlight reel through Skill Stadium to find the right employer? Do you do any work like that today?

00:23:19 **Keith Williams**

So here's what I would do. I would invite those individuals and individuals to create a profile on Skill Stadium. What I do do is when I come across nonprofits I invite them to be a guest on my podcast so I can highlight the work that they're doing. So anytime I see somebody who's doing something like I feel gives back to the skilled trades and helps promote the trades, then I'm going to promote them using my podcasts.

00:23:41 **Katherine Lehtenin**

That's excellent. Well, I will make sure to connect you with the organization Cleveland Builds because they're doing some great work here in Cleveland, Ohio, trying to get people into the trades. It's one that you'll want to hear about their story, for sure.

00:23:53 **Keith Williams**

Definitely. I'll take you up on that, Katherine. Thank you.

00:23:56 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Awesome. Well, as you kind of sit back and you look, we're coming up a little bit on our time. I always like to get people's viewpoint on what do you hope that you see for the trades in the

00:24:07 **Keith Williams**

next 5, 10, 15 years? I would hope that people see the trades the same way they see any other profession like a lawyer or a doctor and to not have those stereotypes and that boils down to education and so that's my hope for the trades is that people understand that these are great professions. They pay well. Everybody understands that. We don't have to, there's nothing to sell on that. It is what it is. But that there are, it's a great opportunity. And we shouldn't put stigma on young people who want to pursue that profession. I think so much we put a stigma on people. We have these perceptions, you know, like a woman can't be a welder. That's not true. Women and are very good at hand-eye coordination, attention to detail. And I've learned that by interviewing women welders and I interviewed men welders who confirmed it. So we've got to stop those stereotypes. So I just, I really feel like for the future, we need to see skill trades at the same level as any other profession. It is a profession.

00:25:17 **Keith Williams**

You have to go out and acquire the skills and you have to maintain those skills and it pays well. So yeah, that's my hope for the skilled trades right there with you.

00:25:26 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I think that was a great summary of it.

00:25:27 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And Keith, I just want to let you know, I appreciate you. I appreciate your passion. And I appreciate the fact that you've created this avenue for folks to make it easier to locate those positions that are open and those employers who are, you know, looking for people to fill them. So, you know, thank you for that. Yeah. Thank thank you, Doug. Thank you, Katherine.

00:25:51 **Katherine Lehtenin**

You've got it. Thank you for your time today. It was really great getting to know you a little bit more and understand a little bit more about skill stadium.

00:25:57 **Keith Williams**

My pleasure. Thank you for having me as a guest.

00:26:04 **Katherine Lehtenin**

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