

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

The Fix Podcast – Transcription

Guests: Chris Price, Indiana Construction Roundtable Foundation

Run Time: 19 minutes, 3 seconds

Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

00:00:05 **Katherin Lehtinen**

Welcome to The Fix, the podcast made for the trades, where we sit down with inspiring individuals across the trades to discuss their unique take on the industry, including career paths, job site stories, overcoming challenges, and everything in between. I'm your host, Katherine, a marketer here at Oatey with my co-host and friend, Doug, one of Oatey's resident experts in all things trades. The Fix is more than a podcast. It's a community, a community built to support tradespeople and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation.

00:00:00 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Thanks everyone for joining us today. Good afternoon. Today we are doing our first recording live at the WWETT Show in Indianapolis. And I have two special guests with me today. First, my friend and all-star ambassador, AKA the Littlest Plumber, AKA Daniel Brown, AKA Twig.

00:00:20 **Danielle Browne**

Woo! Go Twig! Thank you very much. It's pretty incredible to see you guys, all the ones I met last night and the ones that I'm about to meet. It's my first time at WWETT and my first time co-hosting the podcast. So very much looking forward to that and getting to hear about Chris and his story. And thanks again, you guys. You're quite literally the best.

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:00:47 **Katherine Lehtinen**

So without further ado, our guest today is a local celebrity here in Indy and on all things trades, who is doing some amazing work we want to tell you about today to support the next generation. So, welcome Chris Price, the president of Indiana Construction Roundtable Foundation.

00:01:04 **Chris Price**

Thank you so much. Yeah, really glad to be here.

00:01:07 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah. All right. So, Chris, tell us a little bit about your journey and what has gotten you to this point.

00:01:12 **Chris Price**

Yeah. So, I'm here local from Indianapolis. Kind of grew up in the construction industry. I had a lot of family who always worked in construction. And actually, my path, I started out as a civil engineer, actually kind of working in sales as a manufacturer's rep for a while. But in 2008, I made a shift over to the non-profit side as the executive director for the Indiana Construction Roundtable, which is really a group that was focused on the construction owners, like your major facilities, your major hospitals and universities and things like that, but then they would facilitate dialogue with the whole industry. In 2015, we started our foundation, which was really committed to workforce development and yeah, it's been, I've had a blast ever since making that change.

00:01:59 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, that's awesome. Well, tell us a little bit about the Building Your Future, which seems to kind of be the cornerstone of your initiatives. You know, can you elaborate on it? And you know, what are some of the differences in the lives and students and adults that are seeking a career in the trades?

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:02:14 **Chris Price**

Yeah, so I'll kind of start out. When we started our foundation in 2015, we started working with the state, like state government, and luckily we had governors who supported this workforce development initiative. So we get a lot of funding and a very strong partnership from the state to do what we do. But yeah, we have two brands of programming. There's our K through 12 programs that we run, which are branded Build Your Future. And then we have our adult programs, which are branded BY, standing for Build Yourself. So yeah, under the Build Your Future umbrella, when we began, we have, gosh, for kids in fifth and sixth grade, we have construction clubs that are all over the school. These are after -school clubs where high school CTE students come in and supervise after -school building activities with

00:02:59 **Katherine Lehtinen**

with the younger kids. So great when shop is not happening within the schools you're bringing it back even if it's after hours at least you're making sure

00:03:06 **Chris Price**

it's happening in the schools. I wish it was more robust you know it's a six -week program and it definitely you know lights that fire and in some kids and generates the interest but but yeah so we do that all around the state in 22 two different school districts. We help high school students get jobs in the industry. So help facilitate those employer connections and coordinate like internships and work -based learning for high schoolers where they can actually leave the classroom and work during the week and get credit for doing that.

00:03:36 **Katherine Lehtinen**

How many students a year do you impact?

00:03:39 **Chris Price**

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

Oh man, so in the K through 12 space, last year it was 70 ,000.

00:03:43 Katherine Lehtinen

Wow, 70 ,000 have exposure?

00:03:46 Danielle Browne

I read 40 ,000, so you're killing it.

00:03:49 Chris Price

Yeah, because we have like a group of volunteers who go out to the schools and we have career fairs every, you know, every week there's multiple career fairs that we're coordinating and we have like booths, you know, like this that are branded with our programs. We have in 13 locations around the state and so we're constantly out there, constantly meeting with people and really engaging the industry and leading that effort and telling their story, you know.

00:04:15 Danielle Browne

That's incredible. I know for myself if I was to be a child that age and be you know kind of given this idea of what my future could have been other than you know I'm sure a lot of us grew up being told that we could do this this or this not really being told you can get in the trades you know and make a fantastic career out of it you're you're actively filling in the gaps that we're now seeing in in the workforce and the loss of people in the trades, your next generation of kids are going to be filling those gaps. It's incredible.

00:04:53 Chris Price

Yeah, I mean, it's so important. I mean, you touched on it earlier with the reduction in, you know, we don't have shop class anymore. Right. And limited number of students who are in CTE programs. So there's got to be something to turn that light on for kids. Like I had, I mean, my dad was, you know, really hands on. We had a

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

wood shop in our garage. So I mean, I was using every kind of saw and sander when I was in fourth grade, and I had that exposure. So it was always something that I knew I kind of gravitated towards. So I went towards shop classes in high school and did that. But I was also on the college path and became a civil engineer, so I wouldn't have had that opportunity otherwise. So everything we can do to just turn that light on for kids, it's so important. But it can't stop there. It's the opportunity then is to go into adults. There's plenty of people experiencing poverty, experiencing homelessness, dealing with criminal backgrounds who are incarcerated, things like that.

00:05:50 **Chris Price**

We've got to help them too. So we have our youth programs and then we have our adult programs where we're really focused on helping people as well just improve their lives.

00:05:58 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Do you have a success story that maybe sticks out in your brain for either adult or even a child that you feel like, wow. And we've talked about this too. We know sometimes our footprint is small. But if we can make an impact on one person, then we feel like we've done our job. And so, do you have one of those that you want to share?

00:06:16 **Chris Price**

I've got a bunch. I was thinking about that before this, you know, and there's, so we usually, in our adult program, we get like 350 students per year through the program, and it's growing, it's going to be bigger next year, but there was a guy who went through our program, his name was Austin, and you know, he was, he dealt with some, a background, He was dealing with poverty, had jobs that were leading nowhere. And he went into our adult training program. Just a really strong leader in the program, great personality. I mean, it seemed like he was going to be successful, but we didn't know what his path looked like. Anyway, he graduated from the program, went into the plumbers union, and he's just been killing it. He's doing great. Now, I'm actually meeting with him today at 4 o'clock and just talking to him about where he's at, you know, with his career. But he's just, he's really doing great. And there's several stories like that that we have, but that's like 90% of why I do it. I

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:07:16 **Chris Price**

just love seeing people. Succeed. Yeah, like, you know, build a better life. And this, you know, our industry is a vessel to do that.

00:07:24 **Danielle Browne**

Yeah, you're opening a door for people that have a lot of doors closed on them. And I think that in itself is going to propel them and to want to prove who they know that they could be, or who you know that they could be, you know? And again, filling in the gaps in our industry, because everybody deserves the best shot in life, everybody deserves a second chance, and the world needs to see their strengths, and the best way to do that, I think, is building communities, which tradespeople literally do.

00:07:59 **Chris Price**

Yeah, absolutely, I totally agree.

00:08:03 **Katherine Lehtinen**

So let's talk a little bit about this really rapid changing job market and also the technology and the training. You know, how do you ensure that your training aligns so that when people do, maybe even in your adult program, step out and they're going to work for someone, they're prepared and they're ready?

00:08:20 **Chris Price**

Yeah, you know, we're at such a neat inflection point right now, I think, with innovation. When you think about AI and quantum computing and everything that's going to be coming down and in the future, as an organization, we really embrace that. One of our core values is innovation. We partner with Transfer Technology on VR headsets and try to incorporate that into our...

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:08:42 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Gameification.

00:08:42 **Chris Price**

Yeah, into our training programs so they have that. We have VR headsets and consoles that are mostly equipment operations, but we have a set of that in our office and we just, every day, ship that to another school so kids can get on and put on the goggles and run equipment and do that. And then we go help them set that up. And our state department of transportation actually helped fund that. So that was how we were able to get that and loan that out. It was really cool.

00:09:10 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, and part of that is meeting people where they're at. And with technology, my kids, they know it better than I do and I feel like I'm pretty tech savvy. But I look at how they're learning today and so making sure that part of that's closing that gap is really important too.

00:09:25 **Chris Price**

Yeah, no absolutely, it'll be interesting to see the future though on tech and innovation. I mean, I just want to remain agile and continue to embrace it. It's so important, we can't get stuck.

00:09:38 **Katherine Lehtinen**

So what does the future look like for your organization?

00:09:41 **Chris Price**

Well, right now we're in the process of expanding. So we actually started a new group called America's Construction Talent Network Action. And so like right now we're expanding into Kentucky, but really looking to expand more, or at least regionally, maybe nationally, but I think, I haven't seen a lot of comprehensive

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

strategies like what we have from cradle to grave on how are you going to, comprehensive workforce strategy for our industry, so we want to expand that.

00:10:13 Katherine Lehtinen

Yeah, I think that's awesome.

00:10:15 Danielle Browne

Yeah, I think if, on the funding part, I think if your vision just continues to blow up for obvious reasons. Maybe, hopefully, other states and provinces, North American -wide, will adopt this and start putting more funding into such a, you know, desperate area of our

00:10:38 Chris Price

industry and our world, right? I think you said the right word. I mean, you know, like, here in Indiana, I get involved with some economic development efforts in the state too, and, you know, just here in Indiana, you don't think of Indiana as a booming state necessarily, especially if you're from out of state, but we are. And so in the last two years, economic development, we've generated 50 billion in new commitments from businesses to relocate, to build facilities here. So that's a huge number. It was a bigger number than we had in the previous 11 years. So we have a state economy that's growing. We have an aging workforce of average age of 50. And then you got this challenge of your younger people don't have the exposure. They don't have the confidence. You know, we need people on the job sites who are safe and prepared. Otherwise, you got safety issues and, you know, so.

00:11:28 Katherine Lehtinen

So we have a lot of people that are either one trucks, small businesses. How would they connect with an organization like yours to, you know, connect with talent? Because a lot of people will hear, I can't find anyone, or I'm struggling to get the right person. Is there ways that people can connect with your organization to do that?

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:11:46 **Chris Price**

Yeah, so like on the, we have an ambassador network on the K through 12 side. Yeah, I know. So those are volunteer opportunities to go into the schools and to talk to students, participate in career fairs, things like that. We have employer partners who hire high school students. And then on the adult side, it's really employer focused where every week we bring in a new employer to talk to the students. We typically have like three classes going on at a time. So in different locations, each location may have 20 students in there. and every week we try to have a new employer in, talking to the students, talking about what their company does, what their story was, how you got into the industry, and what the opportunities are after you graduate from the program to work for them. Then, on the last day of class, it's more of a congratulations, here's your interviews. And so all those employers, it might be five or six employers who are there to just interview the students and make job offers.

00:12:43 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well we've been seeing more of the signing days for the trades, which I think is great. It's also showing that, I mean, that's such a great accomplishment for so many people that have worked really hard to get that place to be able to sign to say I've got future employment, that's going to happen.

00:12:56 **Chris Price**

I do think that, you know, since 2015 when we kicked off the workforce program, I've seen an improvement to the perception issues around our industry. I don't know if you all are seeing that too, but, you know, slowly I think it's getting a little better and some of that dialogue is improving a little bit, but, you know, yeah, we still have a ways.

00:13:15 **Danielle Browne**

I think it's going to be forced to a point where if we're losing tradespeople and people stop building our communities, they're going to have to, the world is going to have to recognize the importance of tradespeople

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

and blue-collar workers. And I believe that we are getting to a point where you're seeing either a deficit in respect or, you know, the heights of it. And I believe, you know, we're working on our way to the heights, especially, you know, with programs like, you know, these little kids coming up swinging hammers is going to be huge for the world.

00:13:50 Katherine Lehtinen

And we talk about it from a brand standpoint and a manufacturer's standpoint. This is not something about brand building. This is not something about who can do it better. We need every single booth in here to be joining this force to make sure that people understand the value that's brought and that we need to educate and get more people into the trades and bring that awareness that's going to happen. And so, it's one of those that, you know, as a partner, we need to make sure that we're doing that, so.

00:14:17 Chris Price

And you know, it's like, it's all of the opportunities that exist out there, too. You were talking about those independent contractors, the one-man shops, like, you know, especially with our adult programs, we have a lot of people who may have been entrepreneurs in their background, which may have led to them being incarcerated, so we've got a lot of entrepreneurial-minded people, and a lot of people who want to be entrepreneurs, they want to be those independent contractors. What I see a lot of is a lot of people who say they want to flip houses and that kind of thing. That's always popular. You might see that on TV, so that's what you want to do. But I do think there's a huge interest and opportunity for those independent contractors to tell their story, to talk about what it's like to be in kind of a one-man shop because there's a huge appetite and that's the dream for a lot of people. On the manufacturing side, being a manufacturing rep, going into construction sales like what I

00:15:09 Chris Price

did, That's a pretty good opportunity as well. So, you know, just not painting yourself into a corner is only promoting apprenticeship, you know, like I think it can be more broad than that.

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:15:20 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, and I think the work that all the influencers and people who have social handles and showing the work that they're doing and showing what really plumbing is on a level in which a lot of young kids are looking at, just like the gamification point I was talking to, is going to start resonating. And the more people that do that, that they understand what it really means, I think that it also brings awareness to that too.

00:15:42 **Chris Price**

Oh yeah, I've met so many cool influencers here today. I know. Just amazing, obviously Twig being one of them. There's at least three out there.

00:15:48 **Katherine Lehtinen**

There's a couple cool ones.

00:15:51 **Chris Price**

I guess I got to get, I'm not on Instagram currently, so I got to get on Instagram now.

00:15:55 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Oh yeah, you have to get on now. I'm on Facebook and LinkedIn, that's about it.

00:15:59 **Chris Price**

So yeah, I got to get on there now just so I can keep up. I'll add you, you've got one follower.

00:16:05 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, as we kind of close out, but I would love to hear what do you want for your hopes and dreams, for the work that you're doing as you look into the future?

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:16:17 **Chris Price**

Yeah. That's a big question. Yeah, it is. I mean, I hope that we're able to continue to scale, continue to help people build a better life. I mean, that's what I really care about. So just seeing more success. I love what I do. I mean, it's like 80 % of who I am, I feel like, is the work that we do. It's just such a big part of my life. So I just want to keep doing it and keep, hopefully, scaling that so we can help more people.

00:16:45 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, I applaud you for that. And I love the initiative that you guys are working on. And obviously, with OD, we will love to support in some of the work that you're doing. So we'll definitely follow up to make sure that some of that happens. Oh, thank you. I'm sure from your perspective, to have someone like a champion like Chris invested in the trades and help improving the trades, it's just, can't...

00:17:06 **Danielle Browne**

To see your passion, and it's very clear that you do love what you do. And I'm sure that when you actually get to see the product unveiled before your eyes and these kids light up and people change their lives, I'm sure that that feeling, you probably can't describe yourself. So for me to sit down and talk to you, it's been an absolute honor.

00:17:28 **Chris Price**

Yeah, no, likewise.

00:17:30 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, it definitely charges the battery up. Yeah. Well, thank you Chris. We appreciate everyone. Please make sure give a round of applause for Chris and my co-host twig And Katherine All right, thanks everyone

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

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