



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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Guest: Mike Corsillo

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

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Katherine: Welcome to *The Fix*, the podcast made for the trades, where we sit down with inspiring individuals across the trades to discuss their unique take on the industry, including career paths, 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 trades people and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation.

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Katherine: Welcome back, everyone. I am so super excited about our conversation today, and we're going to be talking and diving into, how do we get more young people into the trades?

Doug: Absolutely, Katherine. I'm very excited today to have Mike with us. Plumbing contractor, many successes, many years of experience, so it should be a great conversation.

Katherine: That's right. Today we have Mike Corsillo, owner of NCD Corsillo Plumbing here in Cleveland. Very exciting. Mike is a third generation plumber, originally joined his father and brother at Corsillo Plumbing and Sewer Cleaning, and later opened up his own business where he focuses on new residential construction. Welcome, Mike.

Mike Corsillo: Thanks for having me.

Katherine: Yes, you got it. We're super excited. Thanks so much. We want to dive right in and talk about your career path. If you can let us know what got you into the trades and how did you make that decision as a young man?

Mike: As a young man, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I followed the normal career path of most kids. Went to school, did my homework, did everything else I was supposed to do, but ended up going to four years in college, graduated with an accounting degree, ended up working as an accountant in a small firm. I didn't like that. Decided to go back to school, become a police officer. I was a police officer for five years. During that time, I decided that I didn't like this either. I got married. I was on permanent nights, but during this whole time since I was 10 years old, I'd been working with my father, my brother, my uncles in the plumbing industry on construction sites, cleaning fittings, going out to their truck, getting material for them.

Plumbing's been in my blood. We had no choice at that time. Your dad told you to go to work, that's what you did. That's what I did, and I was happy that he made me do all this and helped me through making this decision, but after becoming a police officer, I ended up working with my brother and father as a plumber for Corsillo Plumber and Sewer Cleaning. They decided that my dad was retiring and I wanted to do strictly new construction, hence NCD, New Construction Division. I started my own company, and we do all new residential construction. We're very good at it, I think, I hope. I want us to be, we are only getting better, but I'm very happy doing it.

One of the biggest things is the topic of today's discussion, is getting young people involved. Like my career path, it was a journey. These young men have to figure out their own journey. It just seems like it's taking them a lot longer to figure it out because they're not exposed to all the different things through our educational system.

Katherine: Yes. Makes sense. What did some of your training look like growing up in school or even post school, and something that maybe people can expect if they were going to go into the trades?

Mike: Well, my father being a plumber, did a lot of other stuff, handy stuff. He knew how to frame, he knew how to do electrical. He was very versed in doing a lot of different things. He didn't pick up the phone to call anyone to do anything around the house. He did it. At an early age, I learned how to use hand tools, power tools and stuff like that. In school, which I love, which I wish they would really bring back is the industrial arts, and make everyone take them. The boys and the girls should be taking these classes. We learned to weld, we learned electrical, we learned plumbing, woodworking, you name it. We got to use power tools.

We got to learn about safety. A lot of these things were not new to me. When I saw them, I wasn't scared. I got guys 25 years old coming to work for me that have never used the power tool in their life and have never really read a ruler in their life.

Katherine: Oh, yes, the ruler. That's always a good test. Yes. For sure. Doug, growing up, did you have a vocational school or any type of industrial arts training within the school?

Doug: Yes. They had a vocational program where you would go to school half a day, and then you would actually go and work the other half of the day. We also had opportunities to meet up with contractors and have conversations with them back in those days to try to raise the interest. It wasn't unusual to see young people, and Mike, I'm not sure if it was during your era, but it wasn't unusual to see young people just show up on a job site and say, "Hey, I want to work." There goes without saying there's something very gratifying. There's a lot of pride in taking something that is nothing and creating something from it, and then watching it work.

The team camaraderie, whether you're dealing with just your plumbing partners, you're there with the tin knockers, the electricians, you're going to learn stuff, you're going to learn from experiences that they've had, share yours, and then together, it becomes one big crew. Then as you move from site to site, Mike, I'm sure you're familiar with this, everything becomes smoother and smoother. You become more efficient, and then Mike gets to keep the profit in his pocket.

[laughter]

Katherine: That's that entrepreneurial part that we'll get to hear in a little bit. I guess both to you Mike and Doug, if you knew what you know now when you were younger, what would you tell yourself? Mike, you took this journey and this path to get where you are today. What's something that maybe you feel like, "Oh gosh, if I'd only known this now, I would've started this earlier?"

Mike: There's many things. I'm fortunate because I have two sons, one's in college, he's a junior, and I have another one that just graduated. He's become mini Mike, we're going to call him, and I've been telling him the things that I thought that I made mistakes on. Then I've had him make up his own mind and what he wants to do, and fortunately for me, he's decided to come work for me. I would've probably took a quicker path into the trades and into being an entrepreneur than my original path of trying to become an accountant and a police officer. Those paths were dictated to me because it was said that you need a four-year degree. I believe you need an education.

I don't necessarily think everybody needs a four-year degree. There's many sayings and stuff, but the one that the one guy says in the *One* movie where he's in a bar and it's Oxford or one of those bars and he tells the guy, "You just dropped 110 grand on education. You could have gotten \$10 in late fees." At the library. Everyone can read, that's what you need to do. Everyone can pre-educate themselves. Everyone can learn a trade, you just got to be willing to do it.

Doug: Mike, I don't know about your experiences, but one of the things I used to tell, I've been fortunate enough to train many, many individuals throughout my career. One of the things I used to tell them is, "Hey, college education. I'm not going to beat up on college education. I have three kids that are doing great in that area right now." One of the things in the trades was, I used to tell people, "I'm actually going to pay you to learn. I'm paying you to actually get your education.

The only thing you have to do is show up on time. You have to work hard and be dedicated, and you have to want the results to be the best they can be, and if they

were done at your house." It's given people that, they might be afraid to take test. They might be nervous when they're in big group settings and they have to get up and read an article or something. It gives them an opportunity to be a little independent but have the security of team members around them in the trade. I always felt that that was very comforting to the guys that I brought in.

Mike: I couldn't say it better myself.

Doug: Well, I read your crib notes earlier. That's why I said it that way.

Mike: Very well said. We're paying you to learn a trade, and it's a very rewarding trade. One of the special things I love about new construction, especially residential is, besides getting a floor plan of a print, I have to engineer this job. I'm engineering a job out there in the field, sizing it myself, unlike a commercial job where I'm already getting that stuff. I have to take all this knowledge and put it into a home where you're amazed on what we're actually creating. People don't realize all the stuff that goes into a drain waste and vent system, and sizing of water lines, and sizing of a gas line. It's just not pipes. There's a method to our madness.

Doug: One of the first things you learn in the plumbing is, poop flows downhill.

Katherine: Yes, that's important, for sure. What do you think would you give as the best advice for those who are thinking about entering the trades or just beginning their careers?

Mike: Is, make sure you give it a fair shot. The trades are hard because it's something you haven't learned yet. Like it was already said, we're teaching you. A lot of guys want to come in and get that immediate gratification thinking that they can do more than what they can do or they're frustrated because they haven't went through the learning process. Unlike a lot of other things where you go and do it, you've already been taught that and then you're applying it. You haven't been taught it yet, so you got to learn it. That's why we called it an apprenticeship. You have to go through your apprenticeship, so you got to be a little more patient to do it.

Doug: Well said. The apprenticeship, there's a method to that madness. If you just brought somebody into a journeyman status four years being in the trade, just brought you in, and week two, I'm going to throw you on a big DWV rough in someplace. You're going to be lost. You're going to be embarrassed. You're going to be disappointed, and you're not going to come back.

The thing is, come into the trade, be open minded, allow others to share their experiences with you, and then learn from those experiences so you make less mistakes. At the same time, don't be afraid to make those mistakes because, you know what? I've learned a lot more in my life my mistakes than I have some successes. As long as no one gets injured and everybody goes home the same way they came, any mistake can be corrected in the field.

Katherine: I imagine too, every job is so different, so that's part of it. You have to be able, and when we talk about experience is that, you have to be able to see all those different types of obstacles and challenges to be able to understand how you would go through and address it. It's not like every DWE system is the same and every

system is the same. You really have to understand what's your surroundings. What's the challenge for the day, and then make the decision the best that you can from your learnings over the last couple of years before you hit that journeyman status.

Doug: Absolutely. Mike, I'm not sure if you've done any high rise multifamily homes. Those are cookie cutters. What we mean by that is, every floor you go to, it looks exactly like the floor below you. When you get into custom homes and you get into a lot of commercial applications, you could go do 100 jobs that are going to be basically the same rough in, but each job will have its own hurdles and challenges, and then you store those inside. That makes that next challenge a lot easier because you've already learned how to overcome it.

Mike: Absolutely, absolutely. Every job poses a different challenge. Every house poses a different challenge. Like I tell my guys, we do a lot of smaller production homes. I always explain to them. I say a bathroom group's a bathroom group. Only difference is, you're doing a two bathhouse or two-and-a-half bath house compared to doing a custom house which is 8, 10, 11, 12 bath houses. Don't be intimidated by the work. It all boils down to be the same.

Just take it in sections, and that's part of that experience of knowing that, "Yes, it's a larger project, but yet, if we can reduce that down to make it smaller for them to understand it like, "Oh, yes, that bathroom is a master bathroom. It has two labs. It's got a Whirlpool tub, it's got a master shower and it's got a water closet.' If I do three of those in a house or one I'm still doing it pretty much the same." I try to teach my guys to break stuff down when it gets complicated instead of looking at the big picture and being intimidated all at one time. Just like you said, floor to floor is the same. If it's a 5 story building to a 12 story building, really doesn't matter. I just have more work there, and, of course, like we always say, more profit.

Doug: Absolutely. Nothing wrong with that word.

Katherine: I want to switch gears a little bit and talk about entrepreneurship. Mike, can you tell us, where do you feel or believe that you get your entrepreneurial spirit from?

Mike: Oh, I believe, and I'm going to back up one step because entrepreneurship is great and everyone wants to be an entrepreneur, but since we're stressing new employee type apprenticeship, don't be afraid to be an entrepreneur inside of that business. Bring something to the table, whether you worked there five years and then you can bring something to that business, you'll get paid for it eventually, from that business.

Katherine: Great perspective.

Mike: Not everyone needs to own their own business. I try to stress that to my guys a lot that, don't feel like you need to learn everything you can from me and then leave, we can expand my business, and you can be part of that expansion. Not everyone can own a business, but my drive is, I don't like to lose, I'm very competitive, and I run a thin line on being able to read people very well. I think I got a little of that being a police officer, that helped me out a lot. I was in depositions, I was

in front of judges, attorneys, people that wanted to get answers out of me that I didn't particularly want to give them, or the answer they wanted to hear.

That journey that I had, I was able to take little pieces and parts of it, my accounting background, that education from there, and then the education which I learned from my father that I already got, what between the ages of 10 and 18, I was probably more experienced than a guy 23 to 25 who was learning the trade.

Katherine: Absolutely.

Doug: Well, let me tell you some, I think we are all born to be some technician, because, how many of us has crawled across the floor and dropped something down a heat register? We're on our way to be a tin knocker? How many of us tried to stick something into a receptacle on the wall? There's your electrical? I know I flushed a few GI Joes down the toilet in my day.

[laughter]

Katherine: All right. As we start to talk about entrepreneurship, and I agree with you, Mike, we talk about that too, that even here at Oatey, there're some things that I get to do in the marketing department that makes me feel like an entrepreneur, because I get to make decisions, and I get to drive impact within the business. I have some of that independent thinking that I don't have to always have 100% approval when I have guardrails up that allows me to be able to do some of that stuff.

I think that's really important, and it's a really good message to get out, is that you can do that type of work within businesses and don't feel, because there's some people are like, "I don't want to go out on my own, it's just a little bit too scary." Or, "I think I can go do this out on my own." Then they get out there and they go, "Oh gosh. Really, this was a lot more than I thought." I think giving and being open and transparent about those options is really important.

Doug: Mike, even though you're a third generation plumber, I can pretty much say that being in a position where I own my own company, that first few months you went out on your own, it's a little bit nerve wracking, even though you had all that experience and family behind you. The thing is, if you do want to test the waters and be an entrepreneur, there's nothing wrong with that, because if your skill is good enough that you can test those waters, even if something goes wrong and it's not the success you were looking for, you'll always have the opportunity to go back and work for another elite company someplace, and then build yourself back into the program.

Mike: Totally agree. I always said if my business ever failed, I always have my trade to fall back on, which I thought was great.

Katherine: That's a great perspective, for sure. Because, I remember actually, Mike, being in your office just the other week and talking about the reference to the American Standard Poster, and about how really the trade is looked at delivering clean water to our world, and to our society. With that, what are your hopes and dreams for this trade? Where do you hope that this plumbing trade goes in the future and is viewed in the future?

Mike: I want people, or I should say young men, women, whoever wants to go into the trade, to realize that this is more than just plumbing and flushing toilets and [unintelligible 00:19:12] out toilets and sneaking it out. We're providing something that you use every single day, and is a luxury item. At the end of the day, these new shower systems that we're putting in, the products that we're putting in are just unbelievable compared to what we were using in the past. The machinery, the tools, the equipment has become more high tech. In the future, I want plumbing to be looked at differently than what it was looked like in the past.

My father was always proud of that poster, that we protect the health of the nation. He was very proud of that and everyone was very proud of that. I'm very proud that I can say the same thing plus, that we use all the cutting edge materials, products, products from Oatey like the motor box and stuff like that that have come out, and we're putting this stuff in houses and people are just like, "Wow, that is really, really neat." If I don't put it in someone's house that I quoted it in, they're upset about it. They're like, "Why didn't we get that?" I love that. I love when I put a product in someone's house, they see it, and then I don't use it in another person's house because it's not spec and they're like, "I want that." It's just a motor box. You would think, "Oh, delivering water to a sink, how important could that be?"

These are guys and people that are running multi-million billion-dollar companies that we're doing work in their houses, and they're looking at our manifold systems and certain products that we're using on their plumbing and they're just astonished by it. I want this profession. It is a profession, and that's how I want it to be looked at.

Katherine: How about you, Doug, I've never really asked you this question. If you step back what are your hopes and dreams for the plumbing profession, as Mike said?

Doug: Mike and I are pretty aligned on this. What I'm looking for is, I'm looking for the younger generation to show interest, and then give the opportunity to explore the trades, because without that exploration, the trades, it'll diminish enough to where you're not going to have the necessary tradesmen to complete these new homes, these multifamily dwellings, even city work. Plumbing is not just being an entrepreneur, you can be involved with city government, multifamily, custom, commercial. It's just so widespread that the opportunities are there as long as you're willing to take the chance.

You have to be able to step aside from the instant gratification that most young people look for today because they Googled it. If they immerse themselves into a plumbing project one time from start to finish, they see the evolution of it. Then at the end, they can take a look at it and say, "Wow, look what I just did," then they can do a Snapchat about that, I think.

Katherine: You got it, or maybe a TikTok.

Doug: Oh, TikTok. That's it, yes.

Katherine: You got it. As we continue this conversation a little bit, what is some advice that maybe you can give to the leading brands in this industry that could really

help catapult growing the trades, growing the awareness in the trades, so that we can get more people and more women and men into this profession?

Doug: Mike, I'll go ahead and jump on this one first. Katherine, you mentioned women and men. In the trades, the trades do not discriminate against whether you're a man, you're a woman, you're short, you're tall. I'm a perfect 360-degree sphere, and there's a place for me someplace out there. The thing is, there's an opportunity for no matter what you look like, what you believe in, you're going to be having the same opportunities to be successful. Go ahead and step outside that small comfort zone, because every new journey is a small amount of discomfort. I think that you'll be very satisfied in taking that chance.

Mike: I agree. I think, really too, it boils down to, we talked about this in our office, parents, schools, professionals understanding that the trades are very important. Can no longer be overlooked. We were very fortunate in the past 50 years ago, 25 years ago, I would put an ad in the paper, I would get 30, 40 guys. Now, I might get zero. It's very discerning to see that. I think that as parents, we need to tell our kids that it is okay to go into a trade. You don't need to get a four-year education like your cousin did or the neighbor's kid next door, and you could make a great, great living doing this.

Doug: With that continued experience, Mike, you're going to go from the apprentice to the journeyman. Then you're going to have the opportunity to become a master plumber. To be an entrepreneur in the plumbing world, you will have to take that master plumbing test. By the time you get to that point, even if tests are something that really stress you out, you're going to have so much knowledge inside you that you'll be able to pass that test. Then once you obtain that master plumber's license, you decide what you want to do then in your future.

Katherine: Absolutely. Mike, we talked about that, how it's really this three-pronged approach that we need to be looking at is reaching the student, reaching the teachers, and then reaching the parents to talk about it. I think actually the military has been running a really good ad campaign lately that does a lot of that, whether it's basically a student and a parent. They're talking about the importance of what that child wants to do. I've told this story to Doug but my sister's a great example of that. My parents said you need to go get a four-year degree, and she said, "No, I want to do hair."

They said, "No, you need to go to school." She went to school for four years, came out, went to beautician school and she's doing hair. Some of it is really just normalizing for, sometimes our parents, and sometimes for our teachers, that there is a great opportunity out in those professions and in the trades, and just bringing more of that awareness and knowledge. It could be maybe, I'm going out on a limb here, maybe we have sponsored nights here at Oatey university where we could have guidance counselors that come in so that they get to be a little bit more knowledgeable about it and we get some local plumbers to come in and talk about the trades, and why they made that change, and what that would look like for them just to drive some awareness.

Mike: I agree, absolutely. Doug's a prime example. His history of being a plumber and then ended up working for Oatey, what a great job. Look at all the new stuff he gets to learn now, who had ever thought 25 years ago he'd be hosting a podcast.

Doug: I'm going to be honest with you Mike, it was longer than 25 years ago. **[unintelligible 00:26:38]** absolutely podcast me. Woo Lord. I used to tell everybody around here, social media to me was reading a newspaper, and then when I would run into somebody, we would talk about it. That was your social media. Now I hear about apps, apps. That's what I do when I go to a restaurant. I think that's great, Katherine, if Oatey can continue to be part of the trades experience and help get that exposure out there and that experience, and who knows, Mike might even come in and speak for us someday.

Katherine: I bet. Would you do that with us, Mike?

Mike: Oh, absolutely.

Katherine: That'd be great. Listen, I think this was a fantastic conversation today. Really appreciated Mike, all of your time. It was great to get to know you a little bit further and bring Doug into the conversation. Listen, anyone who has any input or thoughts in regards to how we can continue to support the trades, please reach out to us. We would love to talk about this discussion more and more. That's exactly what *The Fix* is here to do. Thank you so much.

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