



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 2, Episode 4

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Guest: Jeff Patterson

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

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Katherine 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.

[music]

Katherine: Well, welcome back listeners, and thanks for joining us on another really exciting conversation. Doug, our guest today has a really unique background and is way more popular than you and I are for sure.

Doug Buchan: Absolutely. I'm going to tell you what, Amanda, Victoria, and Maddie, they definitely brought the heat today, let me tell you. I had to turn the air on in this room today, it's so hot. This guest today makes me feel like I was five years old. I woke up on a Saturday morning, opened a new box of serum. There were two prizes in it, Katherine. That's how excited I am about this.

Katherine: Well, so am I. Across social media platforms, our guest has over 1.3 million followers or subscribers. That is simply incredible. Welcome, Jeff Patterson from Home Repair Tutor.

Jeff Patterson: Hi, how are you guys doing?

Katherine: Doing great. Glad to have you on *The Fix*, so thanks for joining us.

Jeff: Well, thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

Katherine: You got it. Let's dive in for those who don't know you. Tell us a little bit about your background in general contracting and what made the decision for you to go this route in the trades?

Jeff: Well, my home improvement began 18 years ago when we started buying rental properties in Pittsburgh. I was really having a hard time finding folks who could do the jobs and then also doing them the way that I wanted them to be and so I decided to go ahead and try and learn how to do a lot of this stuff myself. It's been a long journey, but I'm happy I went in that direction. I'm going to be doing more and more projects that are going to be fun over the next few years and I just am really excited to share a lot of that stuff online.

I'm by no means an expert at everything, I really consider myself a student and trying to learn things like Doug and I were talking about today and just sharing what I know and that's about it. I also get a lot of inspiration from the folks, the other people that I follow online too. It's really cool.

Katherine: Over the years, how have you learned this trade and how have you grown learning this trade?

Jeff: Well, many different ways. First and foremost, just doing it. Beginning so long ago in 2004 with our first rental property and then buying our own home and then several properties after that, like most people you learn on the job or you have other contractors come in and help out and you learn from them. It really is a combination. That was before YouTube and all the different social media, but you would learn from different people, and then it's just trial and error. That's how I mostly did it and then just having good friends that I've learned from as well.

Katherine: Yes. Why general contracting? Why not going in to be electrician or plumbing or a roofer? What made that decision for you?

Jeff: Well, in general for me, I like learning a bunch of different things. I like focusing on a multitude of different topics and I consider myself a hybrid, not necessarily a pros, pro, I'm not a DIY, I'm in between. I like trying a bunch of different, I guess subject matter when it comes to home improvement. It just really whatever piques my interest, I try to go in that direction. Plumbing it's really difficult because number one, you got to, first of all, it takes a lot of time to become a master plumber, and having a family that wasn't something that was really in the cards for me to dedicate that much time to it.

Katherine: Sure.

Jeff: I just found that I really like a bunch of different topics and so I think just going this route was nice for me.

Katherine: Yes. How did you take it from doing your own work on your rental properties to, you know what, I want to start telling the story of these projects and I

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want to start helping educate others who maybe are going through a project like this? Tell me a little about how that thought process came about.

Jeff: Oh, so that began in 2012, it was April 2012 and I was doing this project. I was doing a simple project. It was just refinishing a porch. Something like, the actual porch and I thought to myself, well, I'm doing this already. I might as well just go ahead and see if I can make a video and then I'll post that video on YouTube and see what happens.

Katherine: Sure.

Jeff: That was the impetus, that was the-- There wasn't really anything more complicated than that.

Katherine: Yes. It's not like you step back into this big marketing plan of, "What am I going to do?" It's just let's do a video and see how it goes.

Jeff: Yes, exactly. It was like, okay, I'm doing this, let me see how it goes and if I feel that I did a good job, I'll share this online, and then maybe it'll help somebody else. That was really the start of trying to do social media, over 10 years ago.

Katherine: Yes. That's amazing. Then, how have you made the decision from it? Did you get good feedback on that first one? Was it over time? That you made that decision to keep going forward?

Jeff: Yes, that video did pretty good. What I decided to do was just whenever I had a project come up and I thought I had a reasonable amount of knowledge about, I would just make the video and post it-- Because Instagram wasn't around and TikTok wasn't around, so YouTube was-- Making a YouTube video and then a blog post. I just continued to do that and over time things started to grow and I started to get good-- You get bad feedback too.

Katherine: Yes.

[laughter]

Jeff: Yes. You learn over time. Okay, well, what videos should I focus on? What am I good at? What do I think I can become good at? Then you just go in that direction.

Doug: Well, one of the things Katherine that I was talking to Jeff about when I had the pleasure of meeting him for the first time today was, I watched a few of his videos.

Katherine: Sure.

Doug: When I first came here to Oatey, I told Jeff the story that a lot of folks would come to me and say, "Hey, I saw this on YouTube," and I'd say, "Hey, is that your father who did that? No, not my dad." How about your uncle, brother? No, I don't know that person. That was my whole point is you don't know that person. When you have that social media platform, it depends on your character and your ethics. What message are you going to deliver? The videos that I see that Jeff is putting out there,

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he's doing the research, he's doing the work needed so that he's giving good information to those people that are viewing that and that's what makes social media, such a fantastic tool.

Jeff: Yes. It's powerful. It's-- Like we were talking about, it's important to me at least to try and figure out, okay, well, what is the correct way of doing it? That's why I like having relationships with someone like yourself, Doug, and the other companies, if I don't know the answer, I'm not certain about it, then what is, for example, the code say, and then how does that cross-reference with what the manufacturer wants? I'm not saying that I'm perfect, I'm definitely not perfect, but you're really trying to get to the-- You're trying to distill things down to, okay, well, what is right? What if we generally accepted it as the right way of doing things?

If I did it wrong, I'm open to that feedback and then I'll try to do it better the next time. That's really been important to me and I appreciate that feedback from the folks that I respect online too and it's really, at least the people that I follow, I really respect what they do and I respect their opinions.

Doug: How do you manage the time needed to do these social media posts and your actual work life too? How do you do that, plus the family?

Jeff: Right. Yes. Well, I'm in a fortunate position where my kids are grown up now and going to college or in college, and I couldn't really imagine doing it again when they were younger. You're sacrificing a lot of time with your family and looking back that's what was most difficult because starting this was really-- It was time-consuming because you're doing a lot of this early in the morning like at 4:30, 5 o'clock in the morning, then you're heading out and you're doing whatever you need to do, but it is a really hard thing to balance.

One of the things that I always try to tell folks is you make sure you don't sacrifice too much because before you know it, your kids are older and they're no longer around or they don't want to be around because they're teenagers. The balance part is very, very difficult, but always doing things super early in the morning was a good game plan for me.

Katherine: For you? Yes. That makes sense. As you went and you continued to evolve, now you're offering training courses, so why did you decide to start offering those training courses?

Jeff: The funny thing is, my very first course that I came out with was in 2013, and it was a real general course on basically, master bathroom fixes. How to fix your drain clog, and this and that. That was a real learning experience because it showed me that, hey, even a very basic course, like that could help out somebody.

Katherine: Right.

Jeff: That eventually evolved into bigger things. What I'm excited about now, is just having more knowledge, and being able to understand what people are looking for when it comes to online courses. I think going through COVID, was a good learning experience because it showed me that a lot of people want to learn. There aren't that

many comprehensive learning situation stories. You can go to YouTube, but you're searching for all these different videos, and playlists, and you'll get Doug was saying, you don't know who it is that you're watching. There are a handful of people that I would watch on YouTube for that stuff.

It's like, okay, well I want to build a course where they can go through it from A to Z, even if that's not exactly what it is they're doing. They're going to learn a lot.

Katherine: Yes. It's interesting. We talked about this a little bit, that sometimes it's very hard for us who create content. Because Oatey creates content, your content as part of your work on Home Repair Tutor. How do you then take people's scenarios? Because scenarios are always so different in people's homes and give them the tools in which to adapt to their scenario like, no wall is ever straight, no dimension is ever the same in which you show them. How do you adapt to trying to cover all of those different scenarios that can be in front of someone who's taking a course, or trying to learn something from you?

Jeff: Yes. That's a great question because you're every situation is custom. No two situations are the same. Where it boils down to is if you learn a certain skill set, as long as you have those fundamentals, you're building a foundation of knowledge. Tile is a good example of that. If you understand the fundamentals, and then you get to an intermediate level, then you can build on that skill set, whether it's understanding how tile works, how you cut tile, what are the setting materials? What tools do you need? It's really cool, it's like a video game almost where you're building those skill levels. You can use all that knowledge to gradually get better to a more advanced level.

It's really not about teaching everybody, everything under the sun, it's about providing a general skillset, an intermediate skillset, and this base of knowledge that they can use to get better, and better, and better over time.

Katherine: Yes. That's a great perspective to add.

Doug: Yes, absolutely. Most of our theme has been about educating the up, and comings, and things of that nature and by you building this library, and wanting to do things right and going through those extensive steps to show how to do it right, you're actually training all these people in that next generation to be better technicians.

Jeff: Yes. It's pretty cool. I think what's really nice is, you can couple that with other people on social media, I've several people that come to mind where if you watch them, the knowledge that you would learn in a course, then you learn from that person, and you really have to be selective about who you're following. If you do that, you can use social media in the course to build your skillset. Whether you're a general contractor, a tile setter, or a plumber, whoever a homeowner, you're going to continue to build those skills to the point whereby you're doing a better, and a better job. I think that's what's really cool.

Katherine: Yes, for sure. I'm curious about this, besides your teenagers who probably keep you up to speed on some of the ever-changing technology, how do

you stay on top of technology? On the other side, how do you stay on top of products? New products that come to market, products that could help educate, help give your viewership a little bit more insight into how to do a job.

Jeff: Yes. In terms of the technology [chuckles], you have to consume it. You have to be a consumer of the technology. You really have to experience it, whether that is being on YouTube and watching some videos or being on TikTok, or Instagram, and then actually doing, actually making the video, seeing how that goes, and then going from there. In terms of the products again, you have to follow some companies, or you have to see what are some of the things that influencers are using. I don't necessarily like the term influencer all that much, because that's a good and bad thing. I think you have a big responsibility if you want to take on that role.

Really consuming the content, not to the point whereby it's overwhelming your life, but really just keeping an open mind about what is out there in all aspects. That open mind has always been important to me, whether it's in regards to the products, or the technology, or whatever it is because that filters into the rest of your life too. Staying open-minded and just doing it, just testing things out, and seeing what works.

Katherine: Right.

Doug: Yes. The amount of people that follow you looking for, "Hey what's Jeff going to teach me today?" Is pretty tremendous. I was actually astounded by it, to be honest with you. What's the most rewarding thing about those people following you?

Jeff: Well, there are so many great people online. Definitely, I don't think I'm in that top tier at all. I'm just doing my thing, and I really appreciate you saying that. I think the most rewarding thing is when somebody says like, hey, I used that tip, and you help me complete my project or they send you pictures, and they show you what they were able to do with your help. I think that is very cool. That's really the most rewarding thing, knowing that what you do, like making those videos helps people get what they want to be done, and also they can take pride in those projects. That's great.

Katherine: Yes. For sure. What is your social media community like in your opinion? What's next for the trades in the digital landscape?

Jeff: Well is a great question. I think that for the trades, it's a hard one to answer. One thing if you want more people in the trades, you have to make it appealing like anything else, and probably just trying to do inspiring videos. Do something that somebody says after they watch it, wow, that's really cool. I want to do that. Always having that in the back of my mind, when I make a video, that's one of the four pillars that I try to base my videos on when I'm making them. Part of that is that satisfaction at the end, that somebody sees it and they're like, that was really awesome, I want to be able to do that.

That's something that really inspires me when I think about online media, and what other people can do when they're making their videos.

Katherine: Yes. Very cool. As you look back on growing up, did you ever think that this is where your career was going to take you, or is this totally different from where you thought? I have to tell you, my first grader had a career day today, and he was in tears because he didn't know what he wanted to be when he grew up. I said, but it's okay. Most adults don't know what they want to be when they grow up, so don't worry about it. Yes, I'm just curious, how did that evolve for you?

Jeff: [laughs] Well, I think many kids, your conception of what you want to be changes as you grow up. I wanted to be a basketball player.

[laughter]

Katherine: Okay.

Jeff: That's what I wanted to do until I stopped growing.

[laughter]

Jeff: Couldn't be a basketball player. No, definitely, home improvement wasn't really something that was on my radar until I was well into my adult life. I didn't even imagine doing anything like this. What is fascinating is the ability to combine something physical, whether you're building a project, or doing something, and then also having the ability to use your imagination to create a really cool video that people might like, or might gain inspiration from it. It's the two things of like, hey, I want to create something really cool, and imaginative, and I also want to inspire people. That's what I enjoy about doing what I do.

Katherine: Yes. It's pretty cool.

Doug: It is. I tell you what I got to note Katherine. Jeff, what's your favorite Oatey product? We got over 6,000 skewers.

[laughter]

Jeff: Yes. Well, hands down. I love the Flame Protector pad.

Doug: Okay.

Katherine: Oh, nice. That is a good one.

Doug: It is.

Jeff: Yes. It takes the scariness out of-

[laughter]

Jeff: -soldering inside walls, and floors, although a lot of people aren't even soldering. Well, I--

Katherine: No, that's why [unintelligible 00:19:46] a lot. We always have that press between the press or solder. It's still an art though.

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Jeff: Yes, totally. It all is an art, it's really cool. Yes, the Flame Protector pad and Liquilock are pretty--

Doug: Liquilock is awesome. It's good for [unintelligible 00:20:01] too, Jeff.

Jeff: Yes, exactly. What happened to my beer?

[laughter]

Katherine: As we wrap up today, I ask this to every guest and we'd love to get your viewpoint and take on it, but we talked about *The Fix* has really been about a community talking about all the different aspects of trades. It can be general contracting, it can be plumbing, it can be someone who supports the trades, like a sales rep. What would you say, as you look forward into what would be your hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the trades and where you would love to see them go?

Jeff: I think it'd be really terrific if it was generally accepted that the trades are an art because art is something that's in the trades, too, will always persist. Really understanding that it's an art what tradespeople do and respecting that. I think that that is something that is really important in giving younger people or older people, people who want to make a career change the idea that like, "Hey, look, you can be creative in the trades and you can help people while you're doing that, and you can have fun if you want to go ahead and post some videos on social media." Yes, it's an art.

Katherine: It's for sure. There's a great community out there that really respects your art too, especially in the social media channels.

Jeff: Yes, I think there's just a lot of really nice people who are kind and supportive. They exist and that's something that is really important for all of us to understand that there are really good people out there who want to support you in what it is you want to do.

Katherine: That's a great perspective. Well, Jeff, I thank you for your time today. It's been really great to have you on *The Fix*. Appreciate all your insight. We appreciate all your videos. I know that we've watched them and it's definitely helped us, so thank you for your time.

Doug: Thank you.

Jeff: Yes, thanks so much. I appreciate it.

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Katherine: Thanks for joining us on this episode of *The Fix*. Be sure to follow us on your favorite podcast platform so you don't miss our next conversation dropping every Wednesday. If you have feedback about the show or a topic you'd like to see covered, send us an email at thefix@oatey.com or give us a shout-out on social media. We would love to connect with you. Don't forget, you can get your daily fix by visiting oatey.com and we'll catch you next time.

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