



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 3, Episode 3

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Guests: Mollie Elkman – Author, *The House That She Built* & President/Owner, Group Two

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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 tradespeople and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation. Doug, I am so excited for you to meet one of my new good friends.

Doug: Katherine, I'll be honest with you, the audience knows I normally come out shooting like a cannon. Okay? I'm going to try to contain my excitement, but I want to try to express it. Today's guest, I don't want to give everything away, but they actually inspired me to think of multiple things. Our three years now that we're going on, we've talked about inclusion and diversity. We always talk about the multiple opportunities in the trades. Not just plumbing, but different layers. How those different layers have to work together to have success.

It's just not all about me in this world. Then, I was thinking about my own kids and their growth path. Then I started thinking about, when was the most special time that I ever spent with my children? That was our alone time before bed. If I say things like, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *The Frog And The Toad*, and *The Cat in the Hat*, what do you think of?

Katherine: Yes, children's book.

Doug: Children's books. Some of the best known out there. Well, today, I think we are going to bring someone into maybe that zone, where this is going to be one of those situations where they're going to be in that top 100.

Katherine: I love it. Wouldn't you have loved to have that during this time?

Doug: I tell you, I really would have. As you go through today's interview, I think our audience will be able to actually visualize her message she's trying to deliver.

Katherine: Oh, you got it. Well, let's get right to it then. Welcome, Mollie Elkman. She is the president and owner of Group Two, a leading new home marketing partner and builder, and the author of *The House That She Built*. Welcome, Mollie.

Mollie Elkman: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

Katherine: Well, can you please give our listeners a little history of, who are you, and how did you get into this space?

Mollie: Yes. I'm a second generation business owner. My company, Group Two, does marketing for home builders around the country. At any given time, we're working with about a hundred home builders on everything that they do from a marketing standpoint. Signage, sales offices, websites, every single touchpoint. Growing up in the industry, I very rarely have gotten to work with women who own home-building companies.

This book was actually inspired by a true story. The general contractor is a very dear friend of mine who was a third generation builder. I got to do the marketing for this actual project, and then had this 'aha' moment of, this is a really important story and we need to tell this story.

Katherine: Right. Oh, my gosh, Mollie. Tell us a little bit about the women who were on this build. Did you get the opportunity to meet with them and talk with them and really get to understand their story?

Mollie: Yes. As I mentioned, I knew the general contractor. She is the one who pulled me in. This group of women in Utah just, they decided, they were newly formed professional women in building group, and they decided they were going to go in strong. Their very first project was going to be an all-women build with the intent of showing that women can do all the jobs that go into building a home. They wanted to use women-owned companies and women in the trades. They had pulled me in as a woman-owned marketing business in the industry.

Throughout the build, I'm watching and learning, and we're telling this story on social media. The whole intent of their build project was to highlight the women and their stories. It just was fascinating because every single person's story was so different. How they got into the trades was different, their education was different, their challenges, their opportunities, all of their paths were so different, but they all led them to that same job site, and all of their skills and interests were needed in order to complete that collective project of that home.

There was just something so powerful about learning their stories. What actually happened was, on multiple days, they brought out young girls and were teaching them as they were building.

Katherine: Oh, cool.

Mollie: That was really what sparked the book, is yes, we want to absolutely elevate all these tradeswomen, but we also want to empower young girls. That really was very moving, and that was what really clicked for me. That, "Wow, this can be something really special for all children, but especially girls."

Katherine: One of the things about this children's book is also you have activities that go along with it, and you're also working with a very big organization trying to bring to forward a patch. Can you tell us a little bit about that program?

Mollie: Yes. What's been amazing about this is the people who get it get it. That has been really exciting, the whole way. When it was first an idea, the companies that I presented it to, they were on board. This really is a long-term solution to the labor shortage. Very few of these initiatives target early elementary age. Very organically, a lot of these opportunities have opened up. The one that you're referring to, of course, is the Girl Scouts. This is a Girl Scout patch.

Katherine: Awesome.

Mollie: The whole idea is to cultivate conversations and curiosity. We really look at the book as a tool for everyone to use to start the conversation. It's really telling a story, but then also watching children's eyes light up as they look around the space they're in, whether it's their bedroom or their school, and something clicking that, "Oh, my goodness, real people made this." You can really see it on their face.

Understanding that the wall, there's something behind there, and that this is something really interesting and complex and cool. Yes, the Girl Scout patch is very exciting. Everything is STEM-focused. We highlight 18 different careers in the book, but the intent is for every child to be able to identify a skill that they already feel self-confident about, and really embracing the fact that it's really cool if you're into art and you're friend's into science because both are really important.

Katherine: Yes. I love that. What a great way to show that it's not just one or the other, and you need to have a designer as well as you have to have someone who's pouring the foundation for the home.

Mollie: That's right. They're absolutely responding to it, which is great. One of the things that it was very important in the book is not only do all the women look different, they have different body types, body language, skin color. They also all have very specific skills that are STEM-focused for their trades, but they are all equally important. Everyone is, throughout the book, is a very important part of that finished project, which is the new home.

Katherine: Yes, absolutely. Then you start to talk about, all right, this concept from this one build then led to these women who started to teach children in their community, and then your team taking it on and telling the story. Where does it go

from here? How does your team, and how does *The House That She Built* start to really make sure that we are engaging outside, and where can this go?

Mollie: I think the opportunities are truly limitless. There are a lot of different directions they can go in. The most important is getting this into schools and libraries. We publish the book through the National Association of Home Builders, BuilderBooks. This is their first children's title and their first consumer-facing title. There's been a lot of learning along the way, and we've already achieved so much, but getting it into those independent bookstores and schools is really the big thing. As everyone who's listening knows, it's the teachers and the educators that also need to be a part of this conversation. Reading the story out loud, what's amazing is watching adults respond to it.

Katherine: Sure.

Mollie: So many adults, we take our spaces for granted. You don't necessarily think about all the different people who have to work together in order to build something around you. I think getting it into schools, getting it into libraries, that's really important. Of course, we have the Girl Scout patch, we have programming, Boys & Girls Club programming. We also have free curriculum for teachers. That was really important. One of the things that is so exciting about the trades is just communicating that the barrier to entry, it's not a tough barrier to entry. Part of that, we want to apply to the book. We want this to be accessible.

This is not to make money, the proceeds from the book actually go back into programming. The whole idea is to change the conversations at that early elementary age. By the time someone's in middle school or high school, they're pumped-

Katherine: Sure.

Mollie: - about their future opportunities and careers, and that we are setting a tone for that long-term labor shortage fix.

Katherine: Yes, absolutely. I'm happy to say that Oatey is committed to purchasing 5,000 books to push into our local schools. We're looking forward to it. Right? You've got to start where you live and then work on growing it out even further. We're looking forward to continuing to support *The House That She Built*. It takes people, and I think it's an ambassador program that you have to execute that. Talk to us about this ambassador program, because this is one where I would say to my competitors out there, to the other brands out there, we all need to be a part of this, and we all need to figure out a way that we can help support and tell this story. Can you talk to us about this ambassador program?

Mollie: Yes. First of all, thank you for your commitment to purchasing the books and getting them out into the community. I think that's just so important. Having this, something tangible that kids can read and reread and parents can read, what I definitely recommend is having your team go out and tell the story because the magic of seeing these children light up when it clicks, it is the best feeling in the world.

You mentioned this being for everyone, and what's been fascinating and amazing is we really haven't had an issue with competing companies saying, "Well, we're going to support this, and our competitor, we're not going to be a part of it." The reason is because this is a solution to the labor shortage. We all need-

Katherine: Absolutely.

Mollie: - people to do the trades. This benefits everyone, and it really is much, much bigger even in our industry. The economy needs people to build and work with their hands and do all these jobs. Definitely, we want everyone who gets it to be a part of it. That's why we created the ambassador program. The ambassador program is literally just someone who gets it and supports this initiative. We have logos on our website that say *The House That She Built* ambassador, they're free. We have pages that you can download and bring into classrooms. We have just free resources and free ways for you to participate. Not everyone is able to buy 5,000 books and we understand that-

Katherine: Absolutely.

Mollie: - but everyone is able to post a picture on social media, and share a tag, or take one book and go read to a classroom and experience that magic of the kids' eyes lighting up. What we want to do is make it that everyone can participate in the way that is right for them as an individual, as a company, or even as a larger association or organization. It is a book, but it's really transitioned into a movement, and this is everyone's movement, and we want everyone to be a part of it, and proudly be a part of it.

Katherine: Yes, absolutely. It's great work. Doug, can you imagine having this, when your girls were little, to be able to talk through, and for them to also know what dad does, and that it was a path for them.

Doug: Exactly. As I'm sitting here listening to Mollie, I'm thinking back and it's like, who's the most influential person in your life? It's your parents. To be able to take this book at night and sit down and read through it, and use it as a guide. Then as Mollie says, "Hey, what's inside that wall? Let's flip the page and we'll look at the electrical, and the plumping, and the HVAC that I normally don't see and I don't know what it does." You could take a book like this and expand on it for a whole week of stories with just your kids within each page by itself.

You're getting it started of, and I think it's also going to help the parents because traditionally, back when I was a kid, girls were suppose to play with dolls, and boys were suppose to build blocks. Those days are gone, and we want those young ladies to have those opportunities to say, "Hey, I can do that." I don't know. I'm just almost overwhelmed by the book itself, because it's simplistic, but at the same time, it's delivering a huge message.

Katherine: Yes. We've talked about this on *The Fix*, of when we get to maybe the high school or post-high school age, and where people really didn't know that there could be an option for them. This, at least, and the more that we talk about it, and the more that we get into children's hands, is the opportunity for them to know, "Okay. Oh, yes, I remember I learned about that. Or I really like design, or I really like

plumbing, or putting things together, like a tailor making a beautiful pattern." All these different touchpoints, as we've been talking through them, I think are all going to be able to add up to really help with getting this message out around the trades.

Doug: Agreed. Agreed.

Katherine: Yes. Which is awesome. Mollie, we always talk about, what would your hopes and dreams be for the trades? Where do you envision that this book is going to take maybe a young girl to, or where we are going to see that we're not having this conversation around labor shortage, we're just talking about all the amazing things we can build.

Mollie: One of the most rewarding things for me is when adult women come up to me and tell me, "I was interested in welding, and my guidance counselor told me to go in a different direction. I wish that I had had something as a source of knowing that this is a path that I could have taken." For me, I would really like for those conversations to end. I want every girl to know, and every child to know, that there is not a path that is better in any way. Every path is different, and you can be successful in so many different ways.

I think that that conversation is so ingrained in just our country and how we think. Even when someone has a baby, someone will say to them, "Well, have you set up a college fund?"

Katherine: Sure.

Mollie: That's backwards. It should be a future fund. There are so many different things that we don't even realize how many times this message is being pushed. I think knowing that you can have a path that is specific to what you are interested in, and you can really master a skill and have an amazing, fulfilling career where you don't necessarily need to be good at everything when you have one thing that you truly love.

For me, when I was a child, I felt like I spent so much time trying to learn and be better at the things that didn't come naturally to me, and when I look back, I'm like, "Oh, my goodness. The two things that I really loved, art and English and storytelling, that's where I ended up." What if I had applied all the time that I was trying to overcompensate in other areas to those areas? I really want children to know that their path doesn't have to look like their parents' path. Their path doesn't have to look like their friend's path. A lot of that is just really empowering, and I want to continue to change that narrative.

Katherine: Yes, for sure. Well, Mollie, thank you for helping tell this story, continuing to lead the way. I know that Oatey is a really proud sponsor of this book, and we're looking forward to many years of partnership and how we continue to make this grow. Thank you for your time today. We so appreciate it and looking forward to more.

Mollie: Thank you so much. I can't even tell you. I'm just overwhelmed with gratitude, and I'm excited for your listeners to check it out, and I'm so happy to be here.

Katherine: Wonderful. Thanks, Mollie.

Doug: Have a great day.

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