



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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Guests: Colin Luttrell, Nick Parlet

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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. All right, Doug. It is Ambassador Fest week.

Doug: Yes, absolutely. Three big episodes coming up.

Katherine: You got it.

Doug: I'm referring to these as the Oats.

Katherine: Oh.

Doug: Now, you might think antioxidant breakfast-

Katherine: [crosstalk] the band.

Doug: -skin care. When I was younger, they used to say, "Oh, he's filling his oats." Because I was energetic, I was old. No, my oats this week are all about the Oatey Ambassador Team series.

Katherine: Nice. Unbelievable. Super proud about that one.

Doug: There we go.

Katherine: That's a good one.

Doug: There we go.

Katherine: Awesome. We've got two of our newest ambassadors on board with us today. We've got Colin Latrell and Nick Parlett, both from New York. Welcome, guys.

Colin: Hi, everybody.

Nick: What's going on?

Katherine: All right, we're going to dive in and talk a little bit more with both Nick and Colin, to learn a little bit more about who they are, where they come from, and their journey into the trades. Both of you have found success in the plumbing industry and are passionate about, really promoting the trades through your social media. Can you share your journey of what got you into plumbing and then what inspired you to pursue this career? Nick, you want to kick it off for us?

Nick: I started off basically-- my father got me into the union because I'm a third generation in my union. Third generation plumber. I started off into construction trying to learn everything I can about doing new builds and everything. Wasn't really what I like to do. I didn't like doing the same thing just the same installs every day. I got an opportunity to get into a service van and learned how to fix things, and I just really liked that a lot. Just kept trying to find more programs I could learn more and more about service work and basically kept advancing and everything I could work on.

Katherine: That's pretty cool. That's awesome. Third generation. I don't hear that often, so that's pretty cool.

Nick: Yes. Thanks.

Katherine: All right, Colin.

Colin: My story is I bounced around a lot when I first got out of high school, I was a painter for about six months, and then I dove into plumbing immediately after, started the similar option. I was in construction for a while, and it took me about a year and a half to realize that just wasn't for me.

Katherine: Sure.

Colin: I dove right back into service and learned pretty much everything from there in the field. Bounced around, I ended up in the same union as Nick for a while, but yes, ended up just eventually on my own. It went full circle with it, pretty much.

Katherine: That's pretty cool.

Colin: Yes.

Katherine: That's great because you were able to go through a couple of things to determine what was the right path for you. It's a great way to explore what you're looking to do. Social media has become a powerful tool for connecting with others and promoting businesses. How have both of you utilized social media platforms to share your work and engage with the plumbing community? I'm sure it's really changed a little bit probably what you thought about going into the business was to what it is today.

Nick: Yes, absolutely. I make a lot of videos. I might not make things correctly.

Katherine: Sure.

Nick: I've actually learned a lot from some of my videos sections on stuff, which is also something I love about doing in social media and meeting people like crazy of going to Indie. Met a lot of people and have actually inspired me to do my own thing too, pretty soon-

Katherine: That's great.

Nick: -like Colin here too. Didn't even know that I lived in the same state. **Katherine:**

Look at that.

[laughter]

Nick: It is Small world, but never would have had that connection unless I started this whole social media making videos and stuff.

Katherine: Absolutely. What would you say, Colin? How have you really utilized the platform with your business, how has it helped you?

Colin: Honestly, I've been watching pretty much everybody you see on Instagram for years.

Katherine: Sure.

Colin: Being a part of it now is so real, which is really cool. Like Nick said, we got to meet really cool people and the educational value of it is awesome. Also for the customers, they watch the videos, they call and it brings in more traction, which is pretty cool.

Katherine: That is cool.

Colin: It holds you to a higher level.

Katherine: Sure.

Colin: Can't cut corners. Not that we would anyway, but you really can't cut corners, especially on the Internet.

Katherine: Oh, yes-- no, they'll let you know if you did. Right?

[laughter]

Colin: Absolutely.

Katherine: Someone will, that's for sure. As experienced plumbers, what are some of the common misconceptions or myths about the trade that you often encounter? How do you address them or what do you tell people? You want to start us off, Colin?

Colin: Yes, a lot of the misconceptions about the industry is the hours that are involved. It's pretty much what you make it.

Katherine: Sure.

Colin: You could work like me and Nick do, which is an extended amount of time per week. You could work 40 hours and still learn what you have to learn, still go home to your family, and it is what you make it. Another thing is also women's in the trades. There's more than enough room for women in the trades. I love seeing it. I think that's probably one of the biggest ones.

Katherine: Sure. Yes, that makes a lot of sense.

Nick: Definitely the pay. I never pursued it through high school. Kind of I wish I did. I wish I would have got a little jump start on everything.

Katherine: Sure.

Nick: No, it turns out I'm making more money doing this than a lot of the guys that I know that went to college.

Katherine: Sure.

Nick: They're still in a lot of debt and I don't have any debt. As far as school debt goes.

Katherine: Sure.

[laughter]

Doug: I love it. Colin, you had mentioned that you balance a lot of things. One of the toughest things I have being a contractor for years was the balance between life and business. Families, events, things of that nature. Now you guys are throwing in social media on top of all of that. How do you create that balance?

Colin: Truthfully, you just figure it out. That's a big thing. You got to have a good partner. If you have kids, if you have a wife or husband, whatever it may be, got to have a good solid partner. I couldn't do it without her. You just figure it out. When you get home from work and you have time to make a video, you make a video. Me and Nick were talking on the way down here. That it's just-- sometimes you get a full drive to do the content, to do the videos, to make the engagement with the people, but sometimes you don't. When it comes to you, it comes to you. When it doesn't, it doesn't. At least in my own perspective I don't force anything and when I have the time I make it, if I don't, there's another day for it.

Doug: Okay.

Katherine: That's a great perspective. You got to have that balance in it.

Colin: I tell you, these guys, they're just cool as cucumbers as they say, "I used to be like frantic man all the time."

Doug: Oh, don't get me wrong. You've never seen me day to day. I juggle the phone. You've been a business owner, the phone, everything. When you add social media to it, trust me, there's the anxiety behind it, but it just, you figure it out. Okay.

Katherine: That's a great balance.

Doug: What about you, Nick?

Nick: My name is Plumbing Skater Online. I started off making a lot of skateboarding videos and skateboarding videos like editing and filming and everything. It was like my second hobby. It was like a little relaxing to me when I got out of work and I could just make a little skateboarding edit of my buddies. One day I was just like, "Why don't I mix it in, let's do some plumbing edits." It turned out I really enjoyed it and it was actually like to me it was just easier to edit a plumbing video than it was to edit a skateboarding video. I know--

Katherine: Sure.

Nick: Might sound a little weird, but it's easier. Then I started learning just why not apply the same thing and start filming ton more videos? I like it. Yes, if you force it, the creativity, you actually come out with a bad product. At least that's what I found. Sometimes I got to step back. You'll see, I'll post a lot, but that stuff that I post isn't what I did last night or the day before. This is something I did a couple of weeks ago. I have, like, a bank of stuff because sometimes they get burned out, and you want to just take a break, but at least I have videos I can continue to post. When you force it, you just don't get the same creativity quality, I guess you could say. For sure.

Doug: Do you guys have an official date night every week.

Katherine: With the two of them?

Doug: No, not with them. With their spouses or significant others. I know they're close, but nobody's that close.

Katherine: All right

Nick: For posting, you're saying?

Doug: No, no, no for your significant others. Do you have a date night where [crosstalk] everything else aside?

Nick: You can't really do that with young kids.

[laughter]

A date night? Really when they go to bed is our date. Unfortunately, it does. When I make my videos, that cuts into my time with when I should probably be focusing a little bit more time on my wife. She knows my wife stays at home with the kids. This is a second job, I guess you could say to me, making videos as far as also doing the plumbing and then also making videos as well.

Doug: Okay.

Nick: She understands that too. Like Colin said, having a good partner who understands and supports you. My wife's a good editor, too. She makes good videos. Sometimes I make something, she watches it before I post it. Then she'll give me some ideas. A lot of times I switch it around to what she says and it ends up coming out way better.

Colin: [unintelligible 00:10:20]. All right. Similar. Two young kids, wife stays home. Awesome partner. Once a month, we try to get out.

Doug: Good for you.`

Colin: Yes. Kids are getting older and getting a little bit easier to watch.

Doug: Yes. I only asked that question because I remember my journey. I forgot all about the home and everything was about business. Like I said, "You guys now throw in a third factor to this." You can't let that skip you by because you can't get it back. Start sending flowers. [laughter]

Katherine: I'm going to switch gears for a little bit. Let's talk a little bit about the shortage of the skilled trades people. It's growing and even more of a concern. What are some of the strategies and initiatives you believe can help attract more young individuals to pursue careers in plumbing? Do you feel like gamification, better hours, different approach? We're trying to be creative in the ways that we talk about what would maybe work and could be different for everyone.

Colin: I think a big one is the approach on it. Make it look cool, what we do. Social media is huge nowadays. If you can make something look cool and attractive, you're going to get more attraction to it. The pay is obviously a benefit, too. As a business, it's hard finding somebody. I just went through this battle and I'm only trying to find one person. It's very tough, especially a one man band operation. It's extremely tough trying to get anybody. I think if you can make it cool. I got a lot of young kids that are still in high school that always reach out to me that want to come work for me for the summer. It's my brother-in-law, so he comes work for me every summer.

Katherine: That's all right. Yes.

Colin: Yes, make it look cool, make it look attractive to come to. Obviously, the pay is going to follow.

Katherine: Promote the pay. Yes. Very cool.

Nick: Yes, I have to agree with everything he's saying. [crosstalk] [laughter]

Katherine: Get on. Sorry.

Nick: I definitely think that social media helps people get an inside look without maybe having to dive right in. You can just check it out first on social media, see that it's cool, see if it's something that's interesting, a little more interesting than a desk job.

Katherine: Right.

Nick: You know, playing around the dirt and playing around with glue and primer. Why not little purple? [crosstalk] [laughter]

Doug: Now, when you guys are out there looking for employees, because that is a tough challenge. Even when the market is full, it's still tough challenge because you're interviewing someone, you're investing a lot to get them out there in that truck, and you don't know how it's really going to work out. One of the things I used to do was, if I had somebody interested, but they were on the fence, is I used to do a ride-along. If I took them to a low hazard job where I didn't have to worry about somebody getting injured or something, they could spend the day to see what type of stuff is done. What do you guys do to maybe give somebody an opportunity to explore without actually being there and committing?

Nick: My situation is a little different. I'm in the union, union plumbing. My company, it's hard to find a guy in our union that wants to snake drains, let's say. Because most of these guys are in construction, they want to be super clean. They want to come home super clean. They don't want to get anywhere near the dirty, poopy drain.

Colin: Sure.

Nick: Finding somebody in my union that actually wants to learn how to snake a drain is really hard. We do bring in apprentices once in a while, and they come and they help us out and everything. We don't get them very long in the union. As far as when I go home, I do a lot of side work as well. I'll bring my cousins or I'll bring my brother, and I always try to teach them. It's very easy to bring them along on a residential job than it is to bring somebody in my union to a commercial job, at least that's my situation.

Colin: Okay. Similar. I'm going to go right back to social media. Based on some of the stuff that I put out on social media, I can see what I do on a day-to-day basis. I've had countless people reach out at least, and see if they want to come for a "ride along" or investigate a little bit further. That's where I leave it. I'm just a one man band, so it's hard.

Nick: It's okay. [crosstalk]

Colin: No, I know. We're looking. I had a kid interested and it was one of those things that just didn't end up working out in the end. Eventually everything happens for a reason. [crosstalk] where I end up at the end of the day and is what it is.

Nick: Absolutely.

Katherine: Talking about the one man band and then also through the union, how would you both say your experiences are with keeping up with education and training as there's new technology that comes on board, new tools, new codes, what are the ways that you guys stay up to speed on what's coming into the industry?

Colin: Can I say social media again? [crosstalk] Social media is huge. I also like supply houses out by us. I check all the time for different certifications we can get.

Katherine: Sure.

Colin: Pretty much that. A lot of online stuff, social media.

Katherine: Yes, social media works and the supply house. I think that's a great one to point because a lot of the supply houses and even manufacturers will sponsor different events. They'll have a supply house for different trainings, et cetera. It's a great way.

Colin: Yes, they have classes, like certifications that they hold there.

Katherine: Yes, for sure. That's a good one.

Nick: Yes, definitely social media for sure. You're going to find out a lot of stuff there. My Union hall also provides a ton of classes. You just have to go down there and figure out what classes they have that they're putting on that week, I guess you could say. There's always some type of a training class or a rep coming in, talking about a product just to teach you a little bit better how to use their product. Yes, I can imagine for you it's mainly probably going to the supply houses, like you said.

Colin: Yes. **[unintelligible 00:16:22]**. I was just thinking about that when they **[unintelligible 00:16:23]**, I'm like-- I try to follow up in the emails and get a ton of junk mail, but--

Katherine: Yes, that's a great point. All right, so I want to switch gears once again, but I want to talk about the longevity of this industry. **[unintelligible 00:16:37]** love to get your thoughts on building this strong community is essential for that longevity. How do you envision the future of the plumbing industry? What role do you see yourselves, probably in social media, playing in shaping that future? There's so much more for this industry. What do you see as that longevity? How do you see it shaping out?

Colin: I think with online, with everything online, it's teaching at least myself, not that I cut corners before, just that you got to be thorough. You got to be quality. Quality beats hard work and quality beats talent and whatever your history is on any day. For the longevity of plumbing, I think it's just only going to get fine tooth. It's only going to get crisper, cleaner. You're going to see better quality coming out of people that you didn't even think had it in them.

Katherine: Sure. Yes, that's a great perspective.

Nick: Yes, I agree with that. Like I said before, I may be doing something the same way for 10 years, and I see it online and it's something else, a different way of doing like, what's his name? Trey, I plumb it there. Showed everybody the whole saw trick to get a lead joint out recently. That honestly changed my plumbing life because [laughter] it's a million times easier to do it that way. I feel like that is influencing the younger generation to teach them, **[unintelligible 00:18:03]** maybe a quicker way or an easier way to get something out.

As well as I do like-- What I do too is on Facebook, we were talking about this on the way down too, is there's a lot of people that message me on Facebook and they're asking for a job like crazy. The people that are out of the country, I don't really-- I guess I don't know what to say to you guys. It's hard to bring you here but there's a

lot of people that are in the country, in the US, that are asking for jobs. I always refer them to, I ask them first, where do you live? I find their local Union Hall and try to set them up with that number to at least get them in the right direction.

A couple of them have responded saying that they've actually gotten apprenticeship jobs, pre-apprenticeship jobs, which I feel like, I don't know, I feel like in some way this influencing is helping the plumbing generation, the younger generation.

Katherine: Listen, I always talk about it starts within your home, within your community, and then it grows from there. I think just doing that alone and taking the time to help that one person makes an impact and hopefully when they grow in their social media, that they then do the same for the next person who talks to them.

Nick: Absolutely.

Katherine: That's pretty cool. We are looking forward to a couple of really fun days. I hope you guys are well rested, well hydrated because it is on for the next couple of days.

Nick: It is on.

Katherine: Thank you both for coming in. We appreciate it and we appreciate our partnership and we're looking forward to continuing to build that with you guys over the many years in the plumbing industry. Thanks, guys.

? Speaker: Thank you.

[music]

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[00:20:24] [END OF AUDIO]