

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

Guests: Jeff Keller, Oatey Ambassador

Run Time: 20 minutes, 26 seconds

Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

00:00:05 **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.

00:00:45 **Katherine Lehtinen**


All right, Doug, we have a returning ambassador who has been in the trades for over

00:00:51 **Doug Buchan**

17 years. 17 years. You know, I normally tell people I have boots older than what they've been in the trades with. This one I can't do that with. And I tell you, I got so excited. that I started prepping for this 11 months ago. Oh, yeah. And I normally like the Outback, you know, I'm going in there, I'm gonna get some good Texas roadhouse food, kind of make-believe stuff. Today, we got the real Texan in the house.

00:01:13 **Katherine Lehtinen**

I love it. Well, welcome Jeff Keller from Bulldog Contractors and as well, an Oatey Ambassador.



THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:01:19 **Jeff Keller**

Thank you, greatly appreciate the invite, this is awesome.

00:01:22 **Katherine Lehtinen**

You got it. Well, hey, let's start with talking about your background and how you got into the plumbing field and did you think about doing anything else?

00:01:29 **Jeff Keller**

You know, to be totally honest, uh, growing up, I'm a huge animal lover and I thought I was going to be a veterinarian.

00:01:37 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Ooh, that's a lot of school.

00:01:39 **Jeff Keller**

Yeah. So, you know, growing up, you just think, Oh, I want to be a vet. Never thought about how much schooling is going to be, how much it's going to cost, the time and this, that and other. And I was definitely not a bookworm by any means. So I learned real, real quick that being a vet was not going to happen whatsoever. Yeah, so I mean just like a lot of us growing up in the trade in a family business Looking for a school. I mean a summer job So I started started working with dad and I was like, I'm never gonna do this just need some summer money, you know Sure, here we are

00:02:12 **Katherine Lehtinen**

I really love it now. That's awesome. So how was the transition from working alongside your father? To running the family business kind of influenced your approach to plumbing and septic work. Yeah

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:02:26 **Jeff Keller**

I mean I really got kind of thrown to it. I have an older brother that was actually ahead of me working with my dad some years ago. And what's your brother's name? Phillip. Alright, hi Phillip. Yeah, so Phillip was working with my dad when I was coming out of high school. Of course, you know, he's the older sibling so he was first in line. Phillip decided him and dad couldn't get along, didn't work, so now Phillip's off doing his own thing. He's a veterinarian now. He wishes he was a vet. He's definitely not a vet. But yeah, so I started, you know, just coming out fresh out of high school, I never thought I would be where I am today, which most people say that, but I never imagined I would be, you know, following my father's footsteps, taking over the business and everything. And since my father is older, cause I'm from his second marriage, he's 76 this year. Oh, awesome. Yeah, so I mean, he's done his dues. So now -

00:03:21 **Katherine Lehtinen**

And you actually have him out on a job site doing a septic this

00:03:23 **Doug Buchan**

morning?

00:03:23 **Jeff Keller**

Oh yeah, he's amazing.

00:03:24 **Katherine Lehtinen**

That's unbelievable. Wow. Yep. See yeah, keeping the trades. I tell you what live a long life young. Yeah, that's it

00:03:31 **Jeff Keller**

That's it. He's holding down the fort while I'm up here having fun with y'all But yeah, he's he's he's brought me up through all that and I've just slowly transitioned and you know Worked my way up and taking care of

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

everything for him. So he's very proud of me He tells all the customers about I'm like dad like let's not tell everybody my entire story But that's just who he is and a lot of our small -town customers love that about him. I love it

00:03:55 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, let's talk then a little bit about your dad and kind of what's been one of the biggest Lessons that you would say you've learned from him. I know I caught you off guard I did not share this question ahead of time biggest lesson

00:04:08 **Jeff Keller**

It's probably obviously multiple things But it's gonna be the customer service and dealing with people sure because we're in the service industry because if you don't have that connection with your clientele, then you can't build the trust and build the family that you want to have to come back as you're returning customers.

00:04:23 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, that's some great advice. I love it.

00:04:26 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah, I absolutely love you know, the relationships with the customers. I remember back when I was in the field seems like decades ago at this point in time. But you know, you develop those. You develop those relationships, because you got to remember, those people are pulling into their homes, which is your most private space. And once you earn their trust, and they're, they're welcoming you in, doesn't get any better than that. Are we allowed to talk about his recent thing with his customer? Yeah, invoices? Yeah. God, I love this story. So why don't you tell the audience here about a recent interaction as far as payment with a customer?

00:05:04 **Katherine Lehtinen**

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

Yeah, why it's also important for contractors to be looking at this and doing the right thing.

00:05:10 **Jeff Keller**

Yep. Yeah. So every week I come in, and I sit down at the end of my billing week, which was early this week. And I was looking at all of my receipts, all of my invoices and going over everything just to make sure, dotting my I's, crossing my T's on everything. And I sat here and looked at this invoice and I was like, I know this invoice was supposed to be for like \$2,000. But it shows it already paid, the credit card went through, it hit the bank and everything, but it's like \$2,300 and some change. And I'm like sitting here, because I'm a numbers guy. So when I looked at it, I knew that wasn't right. And so I read through it, made sure I had the right customer, the right invoice, all the, everything, you know, matched up and I'm just sitting here racking my brain, racking my brain, like feeling horrible about it because I'm like, I ripped off my customer and she doesn't even know it. So I honestly called my mom because she does our bookkeeping and everything and I was just, you know,

00:06:00 **Jeff Keller**

bouncing it off of her. And I was like, double check to make sure the payment, double check, you know, I have the right invoice, make sure, you know, we didn't have like a technical glitch here because I've been using this software for a while And I've never had this issue Can't figure it out. Can't figure it out. She has no clue. I was like screw it I'm just gonna call her and totally just bow down and apologize and hopefully you'll forgive me And I'm gonna like send you your money back like yesterday And so I called her and she's like, no, that's right. And I was like, no, it's not right Like here's the invoice and here's the payment. She's like no that was your tip And I'm just like so it like just totally caught me off guard. I my jaw hit the floor I'm sitting in the airport we're eating breakfast and going through all this. And I was just like, almost speechless. And I was like, no, that's your tip. And I was like, wow. She's like, you did an amazing job. She said, you went far beyond

00:06:49 **Jeff Keller**

any expectations I ever could imagine. She said, you were thrown into this situation where I called another plumber and you came out and actually fixed it and got us going because she admitted that she called someone

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

else first, which is fine. I have no problem with it. Everybody's free reign, you know. But she's like, you actually came out and took care of it and got it done. And she was just thoroughly impressed. but a \$300 tip blew my hat off. I don't ever ask for anything. Whenever I ask for a tip, when someone tries to give me a tip, I give them their money back, and I say, you know what my tip is? I said, if you will leave me a Google review. I said, that is my tip. I do not want any money from you. You already paid me, but if you feel like you wanna give me something extra, this is what you can give me. And that's how I get most of my Google reviews.

00:07:31 **Katherine Lehtinen**

It's so smart. You also get snacks. I do see that. A lot of people love to give you baked goods and everything.

00:07:36 **Jeff Keller**

Dr. Pepper's drinks, they know me. My return clients know Dr. Pepper's my favorite drink. So, oh yeah, for sure.

00:07:44 **Katherine Lehtinen**

I love it.

00:07:45 **Jeff Keller**

It's awesome.

00:07:45 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, let's talk a little bit about being an OD ambassador. You know, what inspired you to be a part of the program and how has it impacted your perspective on the industry and the people that you've met and your time here so far?

00:07:57 **Jeff Keller**

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

So, you know, being an ambassador, it is an amazing opportunity. Very blessed, very grateful for it. Learned a lot huge huge community because I've had friends all over the world that I've talked to you know over Instagram and stuff like that but actually bringing us all together as a family as a whole making that connection making those memories and actually being able to be a part of the OD family and OD ambassador crew and learning about everything that happens here I mean I've been using y'all's products since I was straight out of high school 17 years ago had no clue no clue whatsoever that I'd be sitting here today you know in the headquarters. Yeah, from everything that we've been using all these years. Sure. Yeah, it's still mind blowing, honestly.

00:08:41 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, it's awesome. We always love having everyone here. And it there is so many products that we have in our line. It's so hard for everyone to see it. And it's great when we can actually get people to really experience us as a business and our culture and all the associates here. I think actually, there's two to one here this year where we have so many associates that just want to get to learn and meet everyone. So it's really fun. So could you then describe for me a particular challenging project or a time you know almost 20 years in the trade and how you overcame it. So a big project, a hurdle you weren't ready for. You know

00:09:13 **Jeff Keller**

since we'd mainly do service work it's probably gonna be a drain cleaning story. So we came out to this lady's house and she's had I think two or three plumbers out there. The entire house is backed up, she's got company there and we're we're snaking away. We pull this toilet, pull that toilet, snake it here, get up on the roof. I mean, we pulled out every trick in the book we could, and we could not get this drain to flow. So, I mean, it totally ruined our entire day because we had everything scheduled, but saw a customer in need, brought out the crew, brought out the excavator, called emergency locates, got the vac truck out there. I mean, we're just like tearing up this lady's entire yard. You know, she thought I was going to be out here to, you know, snake the drain. Everyone thinks it's like a real quick deal, but, you know, it goes from like a really simple situation to, oh you're getting an entire new sewer line right now that's collapsed and you know you have a whole family house

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:10:04 **Jeff Keller**

full of people because she she had she actually had a funeral for one of her family members so everybody coming in from out of town so bad situation we were able to help her and you know get her family back up and running but something major like that that's gonna be probably one of the main ones that sticks in our heads when it turns in from a small simple call to a big big huge ordeal oh yeah for sure that's

00:10:25 **Doug Buchan**

awesome well I tell you what I want to change gears just a little bit all right Being in the field myself you run into some pretty embarrassing moments, right? Oh, absolutely first service call ever did I'll prime the pump for you I went to the job. I was 17 years old. The lady says to me. Are you old enough to know what you're doing? I'm disconnecting the J Ben I go absolutely I've done this a hundred times and I dumped the J been back in the sink and water was all through the cabinet Okay, absolutely. So I want to know from you. What's your most embarrassing moment in plumbing?

00:10:56 **Jeff Keller**

Hmm most embarrassing

00:11:03 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Do you really want to say this out loud?

00:11:06 **Jeff Keller**

I'm not. I'm not saying that one on on live. That one's not made for any years whatsoever.

00:11:14 **Doug Buchan**

That's why we need Oatey Raw.

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:11:16 **Jeff Keller**

We're going to need like an Oatey Night after hours or something for that one. Oatey Raw. Ah, the most embarrassing. I don't really pertain to anyone, anything besides that story that really sticks out. So I did have one the other day, a customer was totally, totally watching me and not cause he doesn't think that I know how to do my job. He just likes to sit back and watch cause he's a return customer. So we took out this water heater, set it out. We went to go put a new one in and the new one wouldn't fit. Oh geez. I called the supply house and said, you gave me the wrong size water heater. I was like, you gave me a 50 gallon and it was a 40 gallon. Took it out, went back to supply house, brought the other one back, went to put it in and it was an LG heater instead of an NG heater. It took me three or four trips to the supply house to get that heater in because I did not check when they loaded the heater. And that actually just happened like a few months ago, actually. I was so embarrassed.

00:12:11 **Jeff Keller**

I was like, I'm so sorry. When I went back the next time, I was so mad. I cut the box open, pulled the heater out and actually read on the heater what it was. Cause I was like, why is this heater taking me six hours to install?

00:12:24 **Katherine Lehtinen**

where it shouldn't well and how far is your local supply well yeah that was

00:12:29 **Jeff Keller**

other problem so the supply house messed that one up that had it well they didn't have the other heater so I had to go two towns over to get the quote -unquote right heater yeah which ended up being wrong again oh my god oh yeah but yeah I think that supply house is like 30 miles away yeah yeah oh yeah I wasted a whole day made no money on that job whatsoever that was pretty bad did the gentleman never get hot water. Oh yeah, he got hot water. It's all that matters. So let's talk about Jefferson,

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:12:56 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Texas. And you know, how do you see the role of tradespeople in supporting local communities and their economies? Because it's a small town. I mean, for you to get here, you have to travel to go to the airport. And that's, well, you actually skipped that one. So then you just went straight to Dallas about three hours away from there. So tell me about how you make an impact on your local

00:13:15 **Jeff Keller**

community? You know we've been there I guess my dad got there in 78 so we've been there for 45 years yeah quite a few years so yeah you know we've made a name there for sure but I mean we're always trying to help out in the community we also have quite a few places that we try to donate our time and materials you know to help other other people in need you know stuff like that we should always try to be helpful and keep a listening ear out because in small town, small community, a lot can go around real, real quick. It doesn't take much whatsoever in a good way and in a bad way. So yeah, we've just always just tried to do under others as

00:13:53 **Katherine Lehtinen**

we'd want to be treated as. I bet. It's a great way. So what advice would you give then to aspiring tradespeople looking to establish themselves in the industry and even potentially taking over family business or working with their dad? What would your advice be? Especially on the family

00:14:10 **Jeff Keller**

business part of it, I would definitely say you're going to have to have a very strong relationship and communication is key. You have to learn how to turn off the work and turn on the family. And that's very, very tough, especially for me, because when my dad and I sit down, it could be Christmas dinner and we're talking work. And it's hard to not do that because that's how we're wired. Him and I connect on work level. We don't have any other hobbies or anything, so that's all we're talking about. When you're so invested in the family business, it's very, very tough. Yeah, I bet. Yeah, that's probably one of the

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:14:46 **Doug Buchan**

hardest challenges. Yep. You know, right now in your career, you had said that you're a smaller size company. Okay. What do you see your future being like? I mean, you know, look at innovation out there and how equipment is changing and technology. Obviously, you folks communicate, you know, on social media all the time. Where do you see yourself, you know, in that next 17 years of your career? Where do you wanna be?

00:15:13 **Jeff Keller**

So my life goal right now is being retired by I'm 50. So whenever, was that 16, 14, in 14 years, I'm gonna be retired. My body can't handle this. I can't, I can't. Every morning I get up and walk across the room, I look like I'm 87 years old. My back, my legs, my knees. I mean, I'm just shot already. just in the very little bit of time I've been in. So yeah, I'm planning my early retirement for sure.

00:15:39 **Doug Buchan**

I hear you. I love that goal. It does take a toll. And believe it or not, I'm only 25. I knew it. I knew it. So yeah, no, that's awesome. Thanks for sharing.

00:15:48 **Katherine Lehtinen**

And by the way, we're always hiring and we are always looking for master plumbers and plumbers to come on our technical staff. We can get him and his dad. I know, I know.

00:15:57 **Jeff Keller**

Two for one special.

00:15:59 **Katherine Lehtinen**

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

I love it. Well, you talked a little bit about family and I know you've got some beautiful girls at home. So talk to me a little bit about how they've supported you through the trades and journey and how they've kind of connected. And do you think any one of them will go into the trades?

00:16:13 **Jeff Keller**

So funny story, actually, I think it was before I was actually working with my dad full time. My wife actually worked for my dad for a summer.

00:16:22 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Oh, look at that.

00:16:23 **Jeff Keller**

So she was technically out in the field before me full time. She's a couple years older than I, so she did spend a summer. So she has didn't say that she can edit that out. Don't worry, but she's the but she's the boss

00:16:38 **Jeff Keller**

Love you, baby But my wife understands a lot of what I do You know, she's been out there helping my father and she actually works with my brother some back in the day So she gets it. She understands sometimes it can be long hours. She totally understands, you know I'm not gonna be home exactly when I say I'm gonna be but also I've tried to scale that down a little bit and try to be more consistent coming home because I have a family to raise. I want to I want to have that time with my girls. Yeah and you don't you know we've

00:17:06 **Katherine Lehtinen**

talked about this for you don't get that time back. No never. You know even having the goal of 50 retiring if that goal has to go to 51 I'm sure you would do that just to be able to have some of that time with them and not take as many. For sure you

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:17:17 **Jeff Keller**

know life throws you curveballs but that's my you got to have something to

00:17:21 **Katherine Lehtinen**

shoot for. Yeah absolutely and I love it. All right so last question you know how do you envision the future of the plumbing industry you know and what steps do you believe are going to be crucial for ensuring the longevity?

And this show is really about how we empower the trades, what do we need to do to encourage the trades. And so we're always looking for nuggets of advice from those that are in the trades of like, what's this future going to look like? And what needs to happen for this longevity and growth?

00:17:47 **Jeff Keller**

Yeah, I mean, the the future of the plumbing industry is actually really scary, especially on the service side of it, because so many people are all about these phones. And they're not people. They're not people pleasers. They don't know how to do the interactions we do. And to be a service plumber, you really have to make that connection with the customer because if you come in and the customer's not reading you and doesn't like you, it doesn't matter. They don't want you in their house. They have to feel safe in their kingdom. You have to build that trust, that bond with them. It really worries me just because of the workforce we have right now. It's not getting any better whatsoever. People are not wanting to show up for work they're not want to do anything I've you know I've lost more helpers here in the past few years than ever yeah because we don't have a high turnover we don't I see the industry definitely trying to get a lot easier obviously we've seen peps and PVC really take off

00:18:42 **Jeff Keller**

not as much PVC in my time but peps in my time to really take off because we're having to make it easier for the right for the plumbers because we just we're a dying breed we are we're We're just not making any more of us.

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

We don't have the 25 -year -olds we have sitting over here in front of me. I mean, that's even the last. He's my favorite.

00:19:01 **Katherine Lehtinen**

I bet he is, I bet he is.

00:19:04 **Jeff Keller**

Yeah, but I just, we really have to make it fun. We really have to show the joy of it, show the passion of it and really, you know, burn that passion into our kids and in our community because we're just not getting the kind of reaction and we really need to get it.

00:19:23 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah.

00:19:24 **Jeff Keller**

You know, I've taken my girl, my oldest girl, Madison, she's gone out on a couple of service calls with me. She's understood, you know, changing out water heaters, fixing water leaks, and you know, and I pay her well, and she understands that. She's like, oh, I made some good money with dad today. It's like, hey, if you want to come work for me, sweetheart, we can, but she enjoys it.

00:19:40 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Yeah, but I mean, and you're also teaching her of, you know, customer service and interacting with people. And I, it's not lost on me that there has been, especially coming out of the pandemic, where we were all so isolated and then still people referring to phones and making sure that kids can still, you know, be in front of people and present and be comfortable with it. It's something we have to, as a society, make sure that they can still do, so.

THE FIX

A TRADES CONVERSATION

HOSTED BY **Oatey**

00:20:03 **Jeff Keller**

That's a huge, huge struggle right now across all platforms of everything. It's ridiculous.

00:20:08 **Katherine Lehtinen**

Well, Jeff, thank you so much for taking the time with us today. It's always a pleasure. We love having you as an ambassador and thank you so much for supporting ONI and the trades. We really appreciate it.

00:20:20 **Jeff Keller**

Well, thank y'all. I appreciate it and I love being a part of the family, it's amazing.